

FREEDOM

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IT'S WAR IN ROYAL MAIL

A battle between postal workers and managers over the future of the Royal Mail looks set to turn nasty following a litany of attacks on working conditions, staffing numbers and now wages.

As one of the most significant workplace battles of recent years comes to the boil, *Freedom* talks to Pat (the postman) about how class warfare is in the post:

"The strike is important because the CWU is one of the last of the big unions and, although undeniably reformist, is viewed as a threat by the business-friendly major political parties.

"The leadership might be Labour, but at grass roots level the CWU has a large hard core of militant trade unionists. Many of them have previously worked in other industries with a history of fighting the employer.

"Others began their working lives as Postal Cadets, seeing their conditions improve when the old UPW/UCW was a byword for militant action, and deteriorate as the leadership fell under the spell of Blair.

"If we lose, we are looking at massive job losses, even more unmanageable workloads, mail being delivered in mid-afternoon, closure of smaller delivery offices. Because Royal Mail and the Government have friends in the media, we have little support among the general public, but given time they will see closure of local post offices,

later delivery times and a massive increase in unwanted junk mail.

"That the CWU might sell us out is a concern. (CWU General Secretary) Billy Hayes' constant clinging to the Labour link is an embarrassment. No matter how many hospital wards or schools close, regardless that child poverty has increased, that they're engaged in an illegal war or that, thanks to his party and its treatment of asylum seekers, racism is on the rise, Billy remains a puppet. The CWU even closed its internet forum because of irate posties telling Billy and his chums exactly how life really is.

"It's possible that Gordon Brown will phone Billy and ask him to call the whole thing off. If that happens, it gives the Government a free hand to work us into an even earlier grave.

"This had been about more than the pay issue and workers have taken the opportunity to include the stringent absence procedure, the arbitrary conduct code, and harassment by junior managers, late start times, inadequate equipment and not being allowed holidays when required in their decision to vote Yes.

"If our office is any barometer of feeling, it will be solid. One or two scabs might turn in, but their effect will be minimal. Leighton has misjudged the mood just as he did in 2003 when we lost the pay ballot.

"We can win. There is plenty of



BLOCKADE! so was it worth it at this year's G8 summit? Freedom's full report on page 4.

militancy on the shop floor. We've been fighting the bosses since the day we left school and some managerial fart in a suit carrying sandwiches in his briefcase and sod all in his head holds no fears for us.

"For trade unionists, a victory over Royal Mail and therefore the Govern-

ment would be a boost. For many younger staff, this will be their first experience of industrial action. A victory would give them confidence and a clear view of what can be achieved by solidarity.

"The more support we have from our anarchist comrades and those on the left who see this as a genuine workers'

struggle and not just another recruiting campaign for their particular pressure group the easier the victory will be. The more CWU members realise their interests lie outside of any political party the better for us and the worse for Leighton, Crozier and that whole mob of asset strippers."

PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKES PLANNED

Trade unions across the public sector are gearing up for industrial action in the face of below inflation pay increases, privatisation and on-going job cuts.

Two million health workers, teachers and civil servants are being asked whether they are willing to take strike action following months of prevarication by the major unions, and are joined by Royal Mail workers.

Civil service union PCS boss Mark Serwotka has called on the unions who include Unison, GMB, Communication Workers Union and Unite to coordinate their proposed actions in order to maximise the impact on Gordon Brown as he takes over from Blair as prime minister. It is, of course, Brown as

chancellor who is responsible for squeezing public sector pay and cuts in services, cuts which in the NHS still threaten jobs despite the NHS under spending last year by over £500m.

Postal workers have voted to go on strike following a 2.5% pay offer, and health workers face an even lower increase following the government's decision to stage their pay rise, making it worth just 1.9%. So angry are health workers that the normally moderate RCN is supporting a ballot for industrial action – the first ever since the RCN was formed in 1916.

Unite are already organising a ballot of their NHS membership. PCS have staged two one day strikes in protest against compulsory redundancies closing down job centres, tax offices and the courts including the Old Bailey. Unions representing workers in local government and teaching are also considering strike action in the face of privatisation plans and poor pay. As ever public sector workers rather than fat cat bosses are paying the price for the government's mismanagement of the economy.

The last time public sector unions

threatened strike action was before the last general election when they managed to force Labour to back down from a plan to increase the retirement age. However even this, presented as a victory by the unions, was not far off what was expected by the government, merely deferring pension cuts over a longer time scale.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said "public services need a fresh start. A toxic cocktail of deferred pay, service cuts, privatisation and endless reorganisation has produced a crisis of commitment and morale."

If members vote yes, the union "will canvass for selective action and plan for rolling disruption across trusts." The ballot is planned to commence in mid August and conclude in mid September.

Sadly rather than planning all out industrial action union leaders are planning a series of one-day strikes and protests. Experience shows that the government can ride these out. Anarchists will be calling for all out action.

Richard Griffin

CRACKDOWN AND TORTURE

Following a coup in January, a human rights group in Bangladesh has estimated that up to 200,000 people have been detained by the new ruling military force.

The military has announced it will be rooting out corruption in the system, but sources within the country have said the real reason is a growing dissatisfaction with the way existing political parties were failing to deal with a growing social crisis within the state.

A civilian interim government has been hand-picked which includes former central bank governor Fakhruddin Ahmed, which the coup plotters have said have the backing of the middle classes.

Commentators on the World Socialist Website Wimal Perera and Sarath Kumara said: "The BNP and Awami League shared the same essential programme to implement the demands of the World Bank and IMF for economic restructuring, which has produced a deepening social divide. The current military-backed government is no different."

Allegedly, the coup plotters, who were backed by President Iajuddin

Ahmed and are led by General Moeen Ahmed, won support from overseas, appealing to the 'Tuesday club', a group of diplomats representing most of the major aid donors.

The group's core members are ambassadors from the US, Britain, Japan, Canada, the European Union and Australia.

Although this has been denied, shortly after the coup Australia increased its donations to the country by around 30%.

Alongside the arrest of scores of politicians, mostly from opposition parties, the police have come down heavily on dissidents within the labour movement.

Following the announcement of an indefinite strike in the Jute Mill sector in April (reported in *Freedom* issue 6808) around 250 workers were injured, 79 were arrested and another 2,500 were charged in clashes.

Allegations of torture have also surfaced, with international news sources claiming as many as at least 100 people have been tortured to death since January.

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Home and away

CCTV illegal

A useful tip from new industry-funded body Camerawatch has revealed that up to 90% of CCTV cameras could be illegal.

The advisory group said: "Research shows that up to 90% of CCTV installations fail to comply with the Information Commissioner's UK CCTV Code of Practice and many installations are operated illegally.

"The Data Protection Act is breached in several common ways. The most frequent is the failure to keep camera tapes secure. Under the Act, human images should be treated as confidential information in the same way as names, addresses and phone numbers.

"Viewing monitors are often wrongly sited in public areas, so other people can see who is being filmed, and a number of the 3,500 CCTV systems are not registered under the Data Protection Act, as is required."

Garden eviction

An eviction order looks set to oust a community garden collective from their Reading site by the end of this month.

A squatted garden built on disused council land by the Katesgrove Community Garden Collective in Reading was opened to the public on 19th May. The land had been previously used as a shooting gallery by junkies, but was turned into a beautiful garden, outside official jurisdiction, by local activists.

The council, however, put the wheels in motion for the eviction before it even opened, as the site is zoned for redevelopment.

The opening was a great success, attracting hundreds and the garden has opened every day since (ignoring the council's injunction).

For more information e-mail: katesgrovecommunitygarden@hotmail.com

Call for Scottish ABC

A supporter of the Anarchist Black Cross prisoner support network is investigating whether there is any interest in setting up a Scottish branch of the group. They said: "Maybe I am just speaking for myself, but we have overlooked for too long those of us who get caught up in this hell. As far as I can see there is a Leeds ABC and Brighton ABC. There are a helluva lot more prisons than that in the UK. It's perhaps time to expand the ABC network again."

A blog has been set up to discuss the formation of a network: abcscotland.wordpress.com.

Radical healthworkers

Following meetings at last year's Anarchist Bookfair and various other gatherings a website and email list has been set up for 'radical' healthcare workers.

The organisers aim for a group to act as a basis for organising and exchanging information among health workers who aren't happy with the ineffectual stance of the mainstream unions, or with the general leftist response which is to try to get more left-wing bureaucrats into positions of power within those unions.

It would be more oriented towards health workers themselves and catalysing self activity and collective direct action with our workmates. Anyone who would like to be in the email group can sign up via the website at radicalhealthcareworkers.wordpress.com.

Around the world

ARGENTINA: A new report has been brought out on the worker-run factories in Argentina, five and a half years after national unrest over the national economic crisis.

The report focuses on two workers' co-ops in the region, finding a strong basis of solidarity in their functioning.

Places such as the Bauen Hotel in Buenos Aires took over from managers who had closed them down and now run as community enterprises.

"No one can say that we aren't revolutionary," one worker said, "when we charge some yuppie 2,000 pesos for a room ... enough to pay a worker's monthly salary."

An important aspect of the hotel is the space it provides for worker organisations, various social and political groups, and cultural activities. Solidarity permeates throughout Bauen and it has become a meeting place and organisational centre for different worker and community groups.

At the recuperated Chilavert printing press in the Buenos Aires neighbourhood of Pompeya. The Chilavert factory was occupied in 2002 after the previous owner fired employees, defaulted on back pay, and attempted to illegally sell off printing machines.

Like Bauen, solidarity and cooperation are fundamental to Chilavert as an entity. In addition to the numerous printing jobs they take on in order to survive in the market, they also print pamphlets, journals and books detailing political events and the movement's struggle. A striking example of how recuperated factories are transcending capitalist mentality is the cultural space at Chilavert used by community members and workers.

In the office space at the front of the

shop, volunteers from the public university are building a library to document the movement's history.

IRAQ: A new report from Baghdad has suggested that women are being barred and actively fired from work in a reversal of the policies of the Hussein dictatorship, by bosses trying to avoid attacks by fundamentalist militants.

"In about 14% of families in Iraq women are the main breadwinners, and often they care for a large number of children. The increase in unemployment among them just means more children without support," said Sarah Muthulak, a spokeswoman for the Baghdad-based Women's Rights Association (WRA).

"Discrimination against women today is unprecedented. They are being sacked because of their gender; that is unacceptable," she added.

For other women in Iraq the problem goes beyond unemployment. With spiralling sectarian violence, they are being forced to marry men from their own sect even if they were in love for years with a man from a different sect.

ISRAEL: The second week of June will mark forty years since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in the 1967 Six Day war. This is now the longest enduring military occupation in the world. The Kibush 40 Coalition declared a series of actions in early June on the anniversary of the occupation. They said: "While the Israeli government evades negotiations that would end the occupation and lead to a just peace, the lives of Palestinians continue to be crushed daily by closures and economic strangulation.

"With the occupation at forty it should be clear to all that its forceful

hegemony cannot be resisted by established political means alone. This is both morally insufficient and doomed to practical failure."

Kibush 40 are made up of: Anarchists Against the Wall, Coalition of Women for Peace, Gush Shalom, Hadash, Indymedia Israel, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Machsom Watch, Ta'ayush and Zochrot.

NIGERIA: Privatisation auctions have brought further strikes and threats of strikes. The two oil workers' unions in the country – ICEM affiliates PENGASSAN and NUPENG – are protesting the lack of transparency in the sales.

Branches of both unions at the Kaduna refinery threatened a shutdown of that facility if the BPE follows through on 51% sale of Nigeria's second largest refinery. The government's privatisation arm has accepted a US\$160 million bid by Bluestar Oil, which is a consortium of Nigerian industrial interests.

Bluestar had earlier won a bid on the larger Port Harcourt refinery with a US\$561 million offer. The lack of transparency in that process brought a two-day strike by the unions on 24-25 May, which halted all shipments of crude oil into the refinery.

The branch unions of PENGASSAN and NUPENG at Kaduna called Bluestar's bid "a deal ... sealed under the table, to a company that has no record of refinery operations, and for a price that can only be described as give-away."

SOUTH AFRICA: Demonstrations and attacks by police have followed a strike by around half a million public sector workers.

The education sector saw a particularly strong showing of solidarity with over

80% of teachers staying away. The government estimated around 22% of other workers in national and provincial government departments went on strike with an absentee rate of around three percent in national departments.

The congress of South African Trade Unions the extent of participation was much higher. Public servants resorted to industrial action after following a dispute over wages. Government offered workers a 6% increase while workers demanded 12%.

Essential workers were banned from participation in the strike. According to the interdict, obtained by Home Affairs Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula and her director-general, essential services include water provision, legal and health services.

Unions have vowed 'indefinite' action until demands are met.

VENEZUELA: Police used rubber bullets and tear gas against students protesting against the closure of the RCTV television channel. The main demonstration took place in Caracas last month, with further demonstrations in Valencia (100km southwest of Caracas) and San Cristobal (in the south-west of the country). The main demonstration was attended by 5,000 people. There have been no official reports of casualties for this demonstration although the government has confirmed that four people were taken to hospital in Valencia.

RCTV, founded in 1953, is the oldest independent channel in Venezuela. It supported the political opposition to Mr Chavez. When the president explained why he had refused to renew its license he cited its support for the failed coup attempt in 2002 and its 'subversive broadcasting'.

Prison news

'Green Scare' defendants sentenced

The first two of the American 'Green Scare' defendants, who refused to assist the authorities, Nathan Block and Joyanna Zacher, have each been sentenced to 7 years 8 months imprisonment. They are both being held at Lane County Jail, but are expected to be moved shortly, so please check the internet for updated addresses. In the meantime please send letters of support to them at:

- Nathan Block, #1663667, Lane County Jail, 101 W 5th Ave. Eugene, OR 97401, USA.
- Joyanna Zacher, #1662550, Lane County Jail, 101 W 5th Ave, Eugene, OR 97401, USA.

Chris Tierney

A few months ago this column reported on the recall to prison of Chris Tierney. Chris had been released on licence after serving 18 years of a life sentence, and his recall was something that happens all too frequently with both former lifers and fixed-sentence prisoners. What made Chris Tierney's case extraordinary was that he was already terminally ill at the time of his re-arrest, and was returned to prison for no more than swearing at a member of staff at the care home where he had been moved to.

Chris was in the care home because he was dying from a second brain tumour, paralysed down one side of his body and losing his sight. One of the symptoms of his condition was that he behaved erratically and was subject to mood swings. At the time of Mr Tierney's return to prison, Ella Pybus, a trustee of the charity Brain Tumour UK warned that he was likely to die in prison, saying: "It is cruel and inhuman for a man who has served his sentence to be returned to prison to face a lonely and degrading death because of behaviour caused by a condition he cannot control, one that cannot be treated and that will end his life prematurely." Despite appeals to the prison authorities, they refused to release him even when his death was imminent, and we regret to report that Chris Tierney has now died.

Belarus activist imprisoned

At the beginning of April Zhenya Shimanskiy, an anti-fascist and animal rights activist from Minsk was arrested for non-payment of a \$1400 fine imposed after he was found guilty of spray painting animal rights slogans. It is also alleged by the authorities that after the fine was imposed on him he bricked the windows of a MacDonalds

in Minsk. Zhenya faces trial this month for non-payment of the fine and for the alleged attack on the McDonalds.

His supporters say he faces several years imprisonment unless money is raised to pay his fine. Belarus prisons do not feed their prisoners so Zhenya is also in urgent need of money to buy food just to survive in prison. If you can help raise money for Zhenya please contact punker@375crew.org with 'Money for Shiman' in the subject line. Besides funds, letters of support are also urgently needed – apparently the Belarussian authorities have decided that Zhenya is a dangerous extremist and visits are not allowed even from close relatives. Zhenya only understands Belarussian and Russian, so in case you do not speak either of these languages,

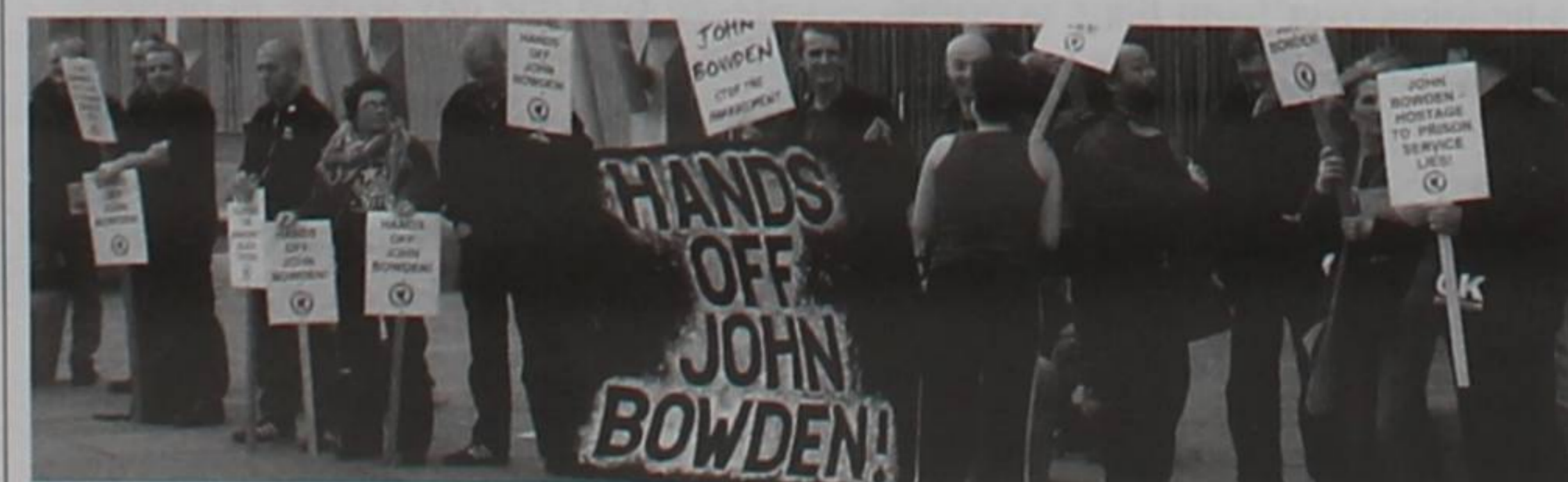
send photos, drawings, postcards, etc.

- Evgeniy Dmitrievich Shimanskiy, Volodarskogo str. 2, room 32, 220050 Minsk Belarus.

SHAC campaigners imprisoned

Three of the founder members of Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) have been remanded in custody accused of 'conspiracy to blackmail'. Please send letters and cards of support to:

- Gregg Avery, TA7450, HMP Winchester, Romsey Road, Winchester, SO22 5DF.
- Natasha Avery, VM4846, HMP Bronzefield, Woodthorpe Road, Ashford, Middx. TW15 3JZ.
- Heather Nicholson, VM4859, HMP Bronzefield, Woodthorpe Road, Ashford, Middx. TW15 3JZ.



HANDS OFF: A solidarity picket is set up for John Bowden, currently being held on the grounds of his contacts with the Anarchist Black Cross prisoner support group. More next issue.

News

All's fare in train robbery

Rob Ray looks into the strange case of the pointless price train travel price hikes

Two major train companies have announced large price rises this month, with Arriva deciding to raise their off-peak fares by over 30% and South West Trains 20%.

The hikes have sparked outrage in consumer groups and unions, and follow annual price rises which were substantially above the average for each company, at 5.7% and 5.3% (over a percentage point above inflation and above the industry average of 4.5%) earlier in the year.

The exceptional rises have caused controversy because despite the high level of the hikes, regulator Office of Rail Regulation (ORR), led by Chris Bolt (a leading pro-privatisation specialist who was instrumental in steering through the privatisation of water utilities) have refused to investigate it.

Neither Arriva nor South West Trains – part of the Stagecoach Group, have seen significant problems on any of their train lines prior to the rises.

Arriva saw a slight reduction in profits at the end of last year following the ending of a major franchise in the North, and additional bid costs to the government, but nevertheless paid out a dividend 5% higher than for 2005, and boosted executive David Martin's pay packet by over £150,000, just under a 50% increase, along with a £246,800 bonus.

Stagecoach meanwhile had reported an outstanding year, with revenue up 5.7% and profits rising from £50m to £58.9m, and dividends up by 12% per share. Again remuneration for the directors was up.

The discrepancy between companies in apparently healthy circumstances and in a period where fuel prices have not been unpredictable.

Both the TSSA and RMT rail unions demanded that an investigation be launched when the companies scrapped their cheapest fares, saying it amounted to abuse of the monopoly positions in the market.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: "Talk about the climate challenge and the importance of reducing carbon emissions will remain just talk if the government allows never-ending fares hikes that can only result in ever more polluting road traffic."

"A fundamental shift in policy is needed that will use fares policy to encourage people out of cars and onto trains, and alongside that we need to recognise the need for substantial public investment in new rail capacity."

"Only last year the Commons Transport Select Committee condemned the shambolic state of rail-pricing structures and exposed the private sector's inability to operate the railways as a public service."

Consumer groups have expressed strong concerns that avoiding an investigation of such high rises, on the back of several consecutive years of hikes, will simply tempt other monopoly contractors to follow suit.

Between 1998 and 2006 train fares have risen by an average of 46.2%, while staff cuts, poor maintenance of rolling stock by many companies, the threat of closing rural lines and poorer timekeeping than under British Rail has continued.

On many main lines this is the fourth



LONG HAUL: Over the last decade, prices for on the rail have risen far more quickly than for other forms of travel, particularly at South West trains.

successive year in which tickets have risen by more than inflation. Train companies say the extra money is to pay for service improvements.

But allegations have surfaced that overcrowding on the network, combined with an unwillingness to invest have

led companies to hike prices, in order to cut down on rising passenger numbers and improve profits.

The cost of bus and train travel has outstripped the price of motoring since Labour came to power, according to the latest official figures.

According to the Office for National Statistics, bus fares have risen by 52.9% over the past decade.

According to the AA, the cost of running a small family car has risen from 41.52 pence a mile in 1997 to 56.15 pence in 2005 – a 26% rise.

Agency rip-off

A new report from Amicus has found that the abuse and misuse of agency and temporary workers is now systematic and endemic across the UK labour market.

In a follow up to reports published earlier this year, the union has found agency workers are being paid poorly and exploited through long working hours and barbaric living conditions, and are helping to undermine wages.

Super-exploitation of agency workers has become a feature of the corporate landscape, found the report, with some companies offering as little as 60% of normal wages to temps and a general rise in temp use and abuse in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors.

In IT company Unisys, it was found that up to five workers would share one bed. Unite (the superunion Amicus is merging with the TGWU to create) intervened when it had been reported that workers were being bussed to and from work each day and that some individuals had been sleeping in the staff canteen.

The new survey follows an earlier report by the Trades Union Council in February which found that:

- Almost half of agency staff would rather have a permanent job;
- A quarter of agency staff are in assignments of more than a year (and not just filling a temporary need);
- Agency staff in post for more than a year do not gain the enhanced employment rights other workers would enjoy after twelve months in a job as they normally do not have the legal rights of an employee;
- Agency workers have no security of tenure and can be made unemployed at any time;
- Agency staff are paid 80p for every pound paid to permanent staff doing a similar level of job according to a TUC analysis of official statistics.

In their report, the TUC said: "At present employers are free to discriminate against agency workers in terms of pay and/or working conditions. This is perfectly legal. They are therefore free to hire agency workers on much lower hourly rates than they would pay directly

employed workers – provided this is at least the minimum wage – and on worse terms and conditions."

This is institutionalised discrimination and given the numbers of women, migrant and young workers who work through employment agencies, has a disproportionate effect on the most vulnerable workers, who are already likely to experience discrimination.

Amicus has called on the government to adhere to a commitment made three years ago – the 2004 Warwick agreement – to give agency workers the same pay, sick leave and overtime rights as full time workers. However despite a private members bill this year, the subject has been ignored by the party.



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Civil war spat

After months of complaints, an ex-Freedom northern editor has still not received a full explanation for his suspension as secretary of Tameside TUC, following an argument over its commemoration of the Spanish Civil War anniversary last year.

Brian Bamford was suspended by the TUC's Joint Consultative Council last January, after a bitter row blew up between him and Mike Luft from Oldham TUC.

In March 2006 Bamford and Luft clashed over the production of a booklet celebrating the contribution of Manchester to the international brigades in the Spanish Civil War, with Bamford insisting that the anarchists should have full recognition.

Insults were exchanged, with Luft describing Bamford as 'mentally ill' and Bamford retorting that Luft was a 'holocaust denier' for Luft's failure to pay homage to the victims of Franco.

Oldham TUC at the insistence of Mike Luft subsequently laid a complaint against Bamford.

Alec McFadden, himself like Luft a

former member of the Communist Party, recommended Bamford be suspended and left Luft scot-free. No witnesses for Bamford were allowed to submit evidence at the investigation last December.

Bamford issued a leaflet to Trade Union Councils' Conference in Newcastle this May asking why. The TUC JCC replied next day saying a response had been sent and that they had duty to act 'to seek harmonious relations between Trade Union Councils'.

Brian Bamford and Tameside TUC are still waiting to see a copy of the reply from the TUC JCC and signed by NUJ chief Jeremy Dear.

Following the incident, Bamford, a member of the Northern Anarchist Network, brought out a commemorative magazine, 2007: 70th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War, in which pieces on the background and contribution of those who died both in Spain and Manchester are recorded, including diary entries and rosters of the dead.

RR/Mack-the-Knife

News

G8 balls of fire

There has been a mixed response from both protestors and states to G8 Germany, Freedom does the roundup

Reports of this year's meeting of the eight most powerful countries at the G8 summit have been mixed.

Protestors are claiming an excellent turnout of people to protest, the state claim a high level of violence, the Black Bloc calling their contribution the largest in recent memory, and the media have expressed confusion as to the disparate intentions and tactics of the protestors, while condemning anti-capitalists.

Reuters have suggested around 30,000 protestors turned out for the main event, a week-long series of demonstrations and an attempted blockade of all routes into and out of Heiligendamm. Photos from the scene shows thousands of people marching in various different areas, so the total may not be too far off the mark.

Activity in the woodlands around the site itself centred around the building of wooden dams, with police driving armoured cars up and down the roads to clear a path for delegates. Some success is claimed here by activists, who have said top delegates had to be helicoptered or boated in at great expense, while lesser diplomats were turned away entirely.

Mainstream media sources are suggesting that the next event should be in a secluded area of Africa to avoid soaring costs. The expense for summits is vast, this year's event costing £80 million with 17,800 police on duty throughout the event.

The 'no-demonstration zone' was

breached despite such measures, but protestors never got near the inner sanctum where talks were actually taking place, with police, water cannons and fencing entirely blocking the way.

Protests in the cities were mostly non-violent, but in some areas there has been substantial fighting and a large number of injuries and arrests. In Rostock in particular, a confrontation developed between police and Black Blocers which saw heavily armed cops violently disperse the blockades.

In some areas, cars have been burned out, widespread vandalism of shop fronts has occurred, and rocks thrown.

Activists have praised a high level of organisation throughout the week after months of preparations from German and international activists.

Three camps, one in Rostock, one in Reddelich and another in Wichmannsdorf were the main congregation areas. Each camp was self-organised with campers taking on the collective responsibility for food, cleaning, security and other daily takes.

Each night in large nightly meetings held in huge circus tents. Campers gathered to report on the day and to get volunteers for the many tasks. This is also where decisions are made about important questions regarding safety and security. Each camp was divided into barrios. The barrios were self-organised by groups, countries, regions, and political background.

Overall, during the week of resistance in Germany, over 1,000 people were



ON THE MARCH: Police prepare to repel thousands of protestors on the roads into Heiligendamm

detained, and German police have mentioned a figure of over 440 cops injured (though the German police count very minor injuries, such as strained wrists from hitting people).

It is debatable what impact this year's demonstrations have had. Mild disruption was caused for the lower echelons of the Summit, and the costs

to defend it are spiralling (Gleneagles cost the Scottish Executive £72 million).

But the whole event was comfortably in the control of police, the mainstream press easily avoided having to ask any awkward questions about why the protestors were there, and yet again, some of the movement's most active members have been banged up.

On a wider scale, the protests have done little to 'take the blinkers off the masses' as was a common theme of reasoning for continuing to pile in huge anti-capitalist resources to the effort – there has been little outcry against police brutality from the general public, nor commentary supporting the protestors.

US notes

Bush's speeches at the end of last month apparently called for greater action on climate change. Bush both touted the development of apparently clean energy technologies to replace fossil fuels and recommended the elimination of "tariffs and other barriers to clean energy technologies" so that "clean energy" can spread.

Bush set his plans in the context of the 'free-market': "Bringing progress and prosperity to struggling nations requires opening new opportunities for trade ... but it's important for members of Congress and the people of this country to understand free trade is the best way to lift people out of poverty."

Nothing of any benefit to anyone but the North American corporate elite. Nothing effective in avoiding the likely disaster to everyone if climate change continues at the current rate.

And that rate according to yet another study – this one published by the US National Academy of Sciences

– is three times greater than even the most pessimistic of predictions published hitherto.

Carbon dioxide emissions are now rising at 300% their rate of the 1990s; the Arctic icecap is melting three times as quickly as just ten years ago; sea levels (as a direct result) are rising twice as fast.

This represents an increase of about 3% per year during the 2000 decade (compared with 1.1% per year from 1990 - 1999). The last major authoritative study, that of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), was bad enough with sustainable and credible predictions of massive failed harvests, vastly inadequate water supplies, melting ice, species extinction. What the National Academy of Sciences is showing suggests that even the direst reports published so far are likely to be understating the threat facing the world.

This study emphasised how over 70% of the growth in emissions comes from developing countries –

particularly China. Although each member of the Chinese populations on average still contributes only about a sixth of the carbon dioxide emitted by each American. In fact statistically the individuals in developed countries (less than 15% of total world population) contribute more than 66% of all greenhouse gases.

Yet another source, Koni Steffen of the University of Colorado-Boulder, drew attention to a new United Nations report drawing on the work of scientists in Greenland: "Warmer temperatures in spring, warmer temperatures in fall made the melting period in Greenland much longer. Therefore we see more and more melt water flowing off the ice sheet in to the ocean and decreasing the reflection of the sun, which has a feedback. We call it a positive feedback mechanism and we have seen that over the last fifteen years there is a steady increase of melt from the ice sheet."

Louis Further

NGO wags finger

The latest Amnesty International annual report has attacked western democracies for an increasingly tough stance on immigration which has left thousands of refugees to die in repressive regimes.

The report stated: "The hypocrisy of the politics of fear is such that governments denounce certain regimes but refuse to protect those escaping from them. The harsh policies of the North Korean government have been condemned by western governments but these same governments are far less vocal about the fate of some 100,000 North Koreans reportedly hiding in China, hundreds of whom are deported forcibly to North Korea every week by the Chinese authorities."

"Migrant workers fuel the engine of the global economy – yet they are turned away with brutal force, exploited, discriminated against, and left unprotected by governments across the world, from the Gulf states and South Korea to the Dominican Republic."

"Six thousand Africans drowned or were missing at sea in 2006 in their

desperate bid to reach Europe. Another 31,000 – six times higher than the number in 2005 – reached the Canary islands. Just as the Berlin Wall could not stop those who wanted to escape Communist oppression, tough policing of the borders of Europe is failing to block those seeking to escape abject poverty."

The NGO admonished the actions of big business, holding major international conglomerates and their wealthy backers directly responsible for ultra-exploitation, impoverishment and criminalisation of the poor around the world, pointing specifically to the ongoing oil-related crisis in Nigeria as a case in point.

A warning note was also sounded over increasingly restrictive policies surrounding anti-terror legislation, noting that the policies of the west were having a direct impact on the reasoning used by repressive regimes in crackdowns on dissidents.

Amnesty called on the UN and civil society to put pressure on regimes to "act responsibly".

Feature

Victory *or* death?

Robert Walsh looks into the history of the suicide fighters and finds it's not quite as old as you'd think

Suicide bomber, jihad suicide, kamikaze – these are all words that are now ingrained on the brain of anyone who hasn't been living in a cave for the last few years. But is the suicide cadre a new thing? Is it a new threat that hasn't been encountered before, the way the Western mainstream media likes to report it as being? No, it isn't.

During the First World War, on the heights overlooking the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915, Colonel Mustafa Kemal (later to become famous as Kemal Atatürk) gave his final order to a regiment of Turkish infantry. He said to his men: "I am not ordering you to attack. I am ordering you to die."

This order came as a result of the Allied Forces having nearly broken through from Gallipoli to the Dardanelles, which might have led to the fall of Istanbul and the strategically vital Bosphorus Straits. Had the breakthrough been achieved, then Turkey could (and almost certainly would) have been knocked out of the war. In short, the deaths of a regiment of young men served a purpose, at least in the eyes of those who gave the order to do so.

Whether or not relatives of dead soldiers feel the same way, whatever their nation or cause, is entirely another matter.

The Turkish regiment obeyed the order to the letter. They advanced very bravely, and they died very quickly.

Of course, it's nothing new for political and military leaders to routinely give orders that will result in hundreds or even thousands of casualties (both military and civilian). It's considered a part of the job. It's even a relatively common practice within military circles, when desperate, to give orders that seem near suicidal at best, and blatantly suicidal at worst.

Such missions even have nicknames among soldiers. During World War Two, and increasingly so as the end drew near, German infantrymen would often be heard to describe their orders as 'Ascension Day' missions, implying that those taking part would soon be dead.

What is relatively uncommon is the employment of dedicated suicide cadre, specially trained to deliberately sacrifice their own lives in order to achieve their objectives. It is also a major and very common misconception that the suicide cadre is something new that hasn't been seen before, or that suicide soldiers began with the Japanese during World War Two.

They didn't, they have been around for centuries.

The earliest use of suicide soldiers that I could find was that of the Houscarls of Saxon times. The Houscarls were tribal mercenaries, available for hire as

elite infantry and bodyguards. They would fight to the last man, even if their employer had already been killed, and would use suicide charges aimed at killing opposing leaders and destroying an enemy's chain of command.

The Ancient Order Of Assassins, led by the so-called 'Old Man of the Mountain' existed at around the same time as the Houscarls. The Assassins garrisoned a fortress known as Alamut or 'Eagles Nest'. Their leader, Hassan Ibn Al Sabbah, sought to become leader of the Muslim world through a carefully orchestrated campaign of political murder. Potential martyrs were put under the influence of hashish and taken to a secret part of the fortress. There they were offered fine food and drink, and harems attended to their less spiritual needs. After immense indulgence they were again drugged unconscious and returned to their quarters to be told that they had seen a glimpse of Paradise, to which all good followers would go upon death.

The vast majority then sacrificed their lives. Far from being a new form of warfare in the Islamic world, jihad suicide has in fact been around for a millennium or longer.

Then there are the Japanese. The use of Kamikaze aircraft is well documented. Aircraft would take off from their bases, loaded with bombs and often with enough fuel only to reach their targets. Upon finding enemy ships, and especially enemy aircraft carriers, they would dive straight into them unless shot down first. The suicide submarines known as 'Kaiten' (or 'Heaven Shakers') and the employment of the 'Banzai charge' against enemy infantry were also common, as was charging at enemy tanks with explosives strapped to one's body.

This was nothing new to the Japanese. Descendants of the Samurai, and followers of the warrior code known as 'Bushido', they lived with the belief that to die in the service of the Emperor was glorious, and that to live with defeat was the ultimate shame. The existence of ritual suicide to restore one's honour, the grisly practice known as 'Seppuku' or (incorrectly) 'Hara Kiri', was commonplace. The only people to whom this was new were the advancing Allied troops, and few of them really understood the motivation behind the act.

It also made good military sense to the Japanese leaders. If they could trade one plane and one life for the destruction of an enemy aircraft carrier or battleship, then that was a trade worth making.

The psychological impact on opposing troops was an added bonus.

Suicide cadre were also employed by the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong.

It was a common sight to see a North Vietnamese sapper charge into an



Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) at the Turkish trenches of Gallipoli in 1915.

American bunker with explosives strapped to his or her chest. During the Tet Offensive, the US Embassy in Saigon was overrun by specially trained suicide squads.

In modern times, the Tamil Tigers have been employing specially trained suicide cadre, known as 'Black Tigers', since 1987, when a 'Captain Miller' drove a truck bomb into a Sri Lankan Army base. Notable victims of the 'Black Tigers' include Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranasinghe Premadasa. More than 240 'Black Tigers' have been killed in various land and sea actions, causing many casualties, both civilian and military.

The use of suicide cadre by Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah and latterly Al Qaida has shocked the world, and been the cause of many an innocent civilian casualty.

But the reaction of the Western media seems to have been that suicide attacks are a new threat for a new age from a new enemy. This is simply not the case. The names and places may have changed, but the suicide cadre has almost always been around in one form or another. And they aren't likely to disappear soon.

The use of the suicide cadre makes sense, especially for groups who simply cannot match the material advantages

of their adversaries. The expenditure of one or more lives for global press coverage and sometimes the destruction or assassination of a particular target is important to groups whose manpower is limited. If they can achieve their aim with a minimal loss of manpower then that makes perfect sense.

Moral imperatives (such as the deliberate targeting of civilians) aside, and viewed on purely logical grounds, the use of suicide troops is the next step in military terms.

One of the great weapons against terrorist and revolutionary groups in particular is whittling down their numbers and spreading fear among survivors. With dedicated suicide cadre, whose sole job is to die for their cause, that weapon is taken away instantly. There is a potential for maximum return with minimal expenditure of resources, which will always appeal to groups whose manpower and resources are usually limited.

The psychology behind the use of suicide cadre has varied according to the cause concerned. The 'Black Tigers' have attacked specific and often important targets in Sri Lanka and beyond, as did the Japanese suicide units in World War Two. As a means of causing terror and spreading fear, it can be safely said that suicide cadre are effective.

As a means of gaining publicity, it's also been a highly effective means to an end. The creation of martyrs, whose death can be employed as a means of encouraging new recruits, and as an example for others to follow, has also been effective.

This also isn't confined to Islamic suicide cadre, nor is it a new feature of warfare. Governments have been encouraging young soldiers to live up to the example set by their dead peers, and in a blatantly cynical manner, for centuries. In a similar fashion to terrorist groups fetishising the fallen martyrs of their causes, there's nothing unusual about governments holding up the example of the 'fallen hero' or 'unknown soldier' as an example for others to follow in their footsteps.

In short, the suicide cadre has always been a part of war, in one form or another. And it is at best highly unlikely, while recruits are available and suicide cadre still serve a purpose, that there will be an end to their use. They just happen to be more visible now than they were before.

Adolf Hitler was fond of encouraging his followers to choose 'Victory or Death!' For the suicide cadre in general, and the Islamic variant in particular, it is not a case of victory *or* death. To them, victory *is* death.

Commentary

FREEDOM

Volume 68 Number 12

Anarchism

Anarchists work towards a society of mutual aid and voluntary co-operation. We reject government, and all forms of exploitation and domination.

Freedom Press is an independent anarchist publisher, founded in 1886. Besides this newspaper, which comes out every two weeks, we produce books on all aspects of anarchist theory and practice – see our website for a full list.

In our building in East London we run Britain's biggest anarchist bookshop and host the Autonomy Club meeting room and the Freedom Hacklab open-access IT space.

Our aim is to explain anarchism more widely and to show that people can work together and use direct action to practically improve our lives and build a better world.

Freedom's editors wish to present a broad range of anarchist thought, and as such the views expressed in the paper are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the editorial collective.

Angel Alley

As is often the case with a G8 issue, things have been blessedly quiet at the press in the last two weeks. A little bit of painting and decorating has been done here or there, a bit of spring cleaning, and generally a sleepy atmosphere.

Some early planning is going with the downstairs storeroom in line for an overhaul hopefully some time in the summer.

One thing we need to do is install a new shelving system, which would free up room for new titles as we've run out of space to store any more books – though ideally, selling the books we already have would be a preferable means of doing this, so please do come down and have a browse.

Logistically this is going to be a problem, as we'll need to move everything out and store it while the shelving is installed, so it will need many hands on deck. Watch this space for details.

In general, if we stay in the building (and frankly it might be better to move) it needs an overhaul, and a lot of people to come in and volunteer to give the place the look and feel it deserves.

As always, volunteers to help do this, or any other job, to the address below.

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Next issue

The next issue will be dated 30th June 2007 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 21st June. Send articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post addressed to The Editors, Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

John Bowden

I've just got the current issue of *Freedom* and was a bit surprised to see the two items on the Bowden affair made no mention of what he did to get sentenced to 25 years minimum.

This is now public knowledge over the internet, having come out (despite Leeds ABC providing misleading information about it). The Dundee newspaper referred to by Bowden in his letter describes his crime as follows: "Bowden (52) was sentenced to life at the Old Bailey in 1982 for dismembering a London park keeper alive with a saw before severing his head with a carving knife and keeping it in a fridge." I know he's now seems to be getting a raw deal, but I think you owe it to your readers to let them know why he's in prison, especially as you have invited them to write to him.

John

Editor's note: The reason is largely that of the two pieces, one is on the Mark Barnsley column, which is attached to the ABC, and one is from Bowden himself. In neither case did they think his past crimes were relevant to his or the ABC's current situation, hence not mentioning it. Rob Ray

Climate Action

I note in your listings that The Camp For Climate Action will again target Drax Power Station in the campaign against coal.

I doubt that any of the protesters have thought this whole issue through. What is their address to the remaining miners in Britain hanging onto their jobs, and the beleaguered coal communities still buried under poverty and deprivation following round on round of pit closures? Pit closures generated not by any concern for the environment but the need to put down the miners as the most rebellious and politically conscious section of the working class.

The choice of energy in Britain is entirely based upon the balance of class forces. The energy debate in Britain in reality comes down to two options, a clean coal technology (which Drax hasn't got) or mass expansion of nuclear power. All the demonstrations against coal generators do is build support for the nuclear lobby.

Windmills despite utterly destroying unspoilt and desolate wilderness, cannot replace coal generation. Were our protesters demanding the coal generators adopt clean burn technology, or that coal burnt in Britain had to be from

countries with civilised standards of health and safety and union recognition, you would link the struggle for the environment with the struggle of the miners and the rest of the class world wide. However you cannot isolate the struggle for the environment from the class struggle. Wading in simplistically against coal is wading in against the last of the miners and one of the most class conscious and environmentally aware unions in Britain.

You will also find, objectively speaking, that the banners of green anarchism are now in the camp of the nuclear power supporters with all that means on a global scale. It is too complex to explain in a brief letter, but every tonne of coal mined under the safest conditions in the world, by the strongest union miners, fighting for clean coal technology here in Britain that is displaced at home, is taken up by slaughter house conditions in China where thousands upon thousands of miners die every year and coal is burnt without any constraints whatever.

Coal production world wide is expanding, unchecked and uncontrolled burning of coal world wide is expanding. Do you think closing down the best coal mines, and abandoning the struggle for a clean coal burning technology will restrain the death pits of China and elsewhere, or be grist to their mill?

Finally I might suggest that the protesters at Drax carry some nice pictures of Thatcher and John Major and Tony Blair, they after all have closed far more coal mines and coal fired power stations than Greenpeace or green anarchism ever could. So they stamped on the workers, so what, it's 'the environment' in abstract you obviously care about not the workers who live in it. What's that saying about the road to hell paved with good intentions?

David Douglass

Same game new rules

In the wake last month's conclusion of the Keogh/O'Connor official secrets trial (*Freedom*, 19th May) and its resulting curtailment of the freedom of the press in particular, and freedom of expression in general, it seems that the game ain't changed but the rules have just switched considerably.

It should no longer surprise us in this day and age (certainly, not since the days of Nixon and Watergate, at least) if we are pitted against groups against to us because of their institutional and occupational adversity to the revelation

of facts detrimental to themselves or their own agenda.

We are fighting a terrible foe for the worthiest cause and it is time that we woke up and began to think outside of the box.

That this government attack on the media itself came about via an allegedly proposed military attack by a western government upon an agency of the media, and the ominous implications this has given two previous violent events (in Kabul in November of 2001 and Baghdad in April of 2003) should give us all pause for concern.

They say the truth is always the first casualty in war. In declaring the truth to be an active combatant – a legitimate military target to be taken out at will – the US and British governments have potentially declared combatants of us all.

Our leaders have always insisted that this is solely the prerogative of the terrorist. When two powerful states, supposedly the supreme and defining models of democracy on this planet, arbitrarily declare both the truth and their own citizenry to be potential enemies of their power, redrafting the rules of the social contract at whim and will, it is perhaps time to consider a little renegotiation and redrafting of our own, or else throw away such broken contracts entirely.

In a sense we are entering an era of much greater transparency in our dealings with governments and elites. As absurd as this assertion may at first appear on the face of it, it nevertheless bears examining in depth.

On the one hand, the hegemonic elites of the world (led by the chief example of the most powerful of them) are increasingly showing the true colours of their nature and its peculiar pathology. In the heady mixture of their conceitedly arrogant assurance in the security of their position and paranoiac fear of its inherently perennial insecurities, they play their games of power ever more openly.

This, by the way, has a knock-on effect throughout western culture (and throughout society generally) right the way down the chain. It is a self-perpetuating, and forever self-fulfilling positive-feedback loop. In essence, they have become more honestly crooked in their conduct and thereby, more openly secretive in their dealings.

In all of this they continue to maintain a non-sequitur stance, arguing their position in cause of the very principles of lawfulness, decency, freedom and openness which they themselves most openly flout. This may serve to help us to clarify and focus our thinking concerning the matter and task before us. On the other hand, we already enjoy great aid in our task, and far more is yet to come. If knowledge is power, then our task in 'the power game' naturally represents and embodies those inclinations which run counter to those of monopoly and hegemony.

If information naturally desires freedom, we even now have to hand the tools to make it so.

It is worth reflecting on where we have come from in only the last ten or fifteen years or so. The internet, even in its present incarnation, is only the germinal seedling of the truly global entity into which it will surely blossom, both for better and for worse.

The most positive effect of the digital revolution so far has been its intensely liberating influence on the means of production and distribution of information and media of increasingly

diverse content, and of individual opinion and comment, in particular.

The blogosphere in itself, is radically transforming the entire media milieu and with it the fundamental structure of the whole news cycle, which has itself adjusted to the transformation to a fully 24-hour cycle only comparatively recently.

The number of potential routes by which the traffic of information may enter and flow through the network has grown exponentially and with it the permeability of facts across barriers of secrecy, some hitherto impenetrable. In this newly liberated and democratised media paradigm, the only control we need ever exercise is our own discrimination, to always keep in mind the truth: that the truth is always partisan.

On the face of it official secrecy in the context of national security and copyright protection in the context of infringement and piracy, although superficially similar in terms of their legal enforcement, nevertheless appear unrelated issues in terms of their apparent native areas of social concern (political and economic).

They nevertheless share a deep and fundamental connection. Both deal explicitly and intimately with the possession and supply of information as a controlled substance: a commodity. For any who would seek to gain a monopoly on the control of intellectual property must first gain monopolistic control of intellectual property rights, necessarily legislating in favour of privatised hoarding, with private withholding by the individual, and against collectivised sharing with open and public disclosure.

This kind of cultural ethos is of course the complete antithesis of both the Open-Source/Copy-Left and closely-related Peer-to-Peer file-sharing movements. Microsoft's supremacy through the global hegemony of the accursed Windows operating system is finally (at long last) beginning to be challenged by the grassroots promise of Linux.

Even Dell is now available in two flavours: Cornflower Vista or Cafe-Creme Ubuntu. As any good hacker will proudly inform you virtually every single web-server runs Unix and always has. Meanwhile P2P and BitTorrent prepare to demolish the dinosaur oligopolies of music and film. Make no mistake, that will be just a foretaste. The potential of file-sharing in concert with blogging and social-networking sites to create a free and open economy in the commerce of the currency of information is boundless and ultimately beyond all power to direct or control. Thanks to the tireless ingenuity and raw innovation of its core devotees, it is also unstoppable.

Martin Acton

Quiz answers

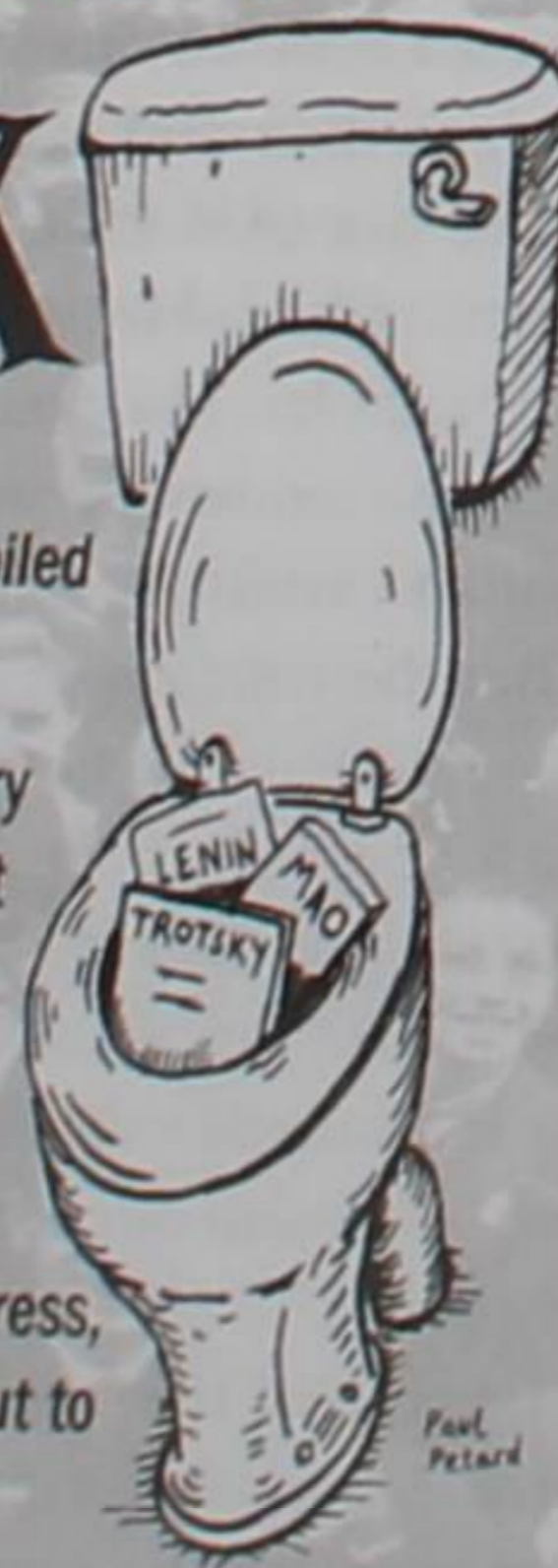
1. *Revista Blanca*, edited by Federico Urales and Teresa Mañé, parents of Federica Montseny.
2. The islands still have Soviet era names, so you will find Bolshevik Island, October Revolution Island, Komsomolets Island and Pioneer Island. They were named by the first Russians to explore the archipelago, Georgy Ushakov and Nikolai Urvantsev.
3. Whether tomatoes were a fruit or a vegetable. Even though botanically they are a berry, the judges ruled that they were eaten as a vegetable and were thus subject to the vegetable tax.
4. Mark Twain.

The Anarchist Quiz Book

Who said "I shit on all the revolutionary vanguards of this planet"? Find out in the new Anarchist Quiz Book from Freedom Press, compiled by Martin Howard and illustrated by Paul Petard.

Some say that it should not be the highest priority of a revolutionary movement to ask itself obscure questions, but it's good fun and if it encourages an enquiring mind to find out more, than all the better. So agitate, educate and organise, all in this very handy question and answer format!

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REVIEW

Bogus history, liberal wish-fulfilment, bourgeois triumphalism – no wonder *The Lives of Others* won an Oscar, reckons Tom Jennings

The German film *The Lives of Others* has been touted as a corrective to a wave of fond media memories of the GDR communist dictatorship, which collapsed in 1989 along with the Berlin Wall. So, rather than this 'Ostalgic' (as in 2003's internationally successful comedy *Goodbye, Lenin!*) downplaying the ubiquitous, miserable repression prevalent in the East, writer-director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's debut goes to considerable lengths to realistically portray the paranoia, privation and social poison and petrification surrounding citizens thanks largely to the notoriously vicious and omnipotent secret police, the Stasi – who Simon Wiesenthal famously described as worse than the Nazis in their implacable domestic menace.

Meticulous design, staging and scripting and static, desaturated cinematography scrupulously convey the drably cramped mid-1980s ambience within whose confines corrupt Party bosses and evangelistic apparatchiks spy on, mess with and casually wreck the lives of anyone unfortunate enough to attract their malevolent attention – with the excellent cast capped by a magnificent central performance from Ulrich Mühe as Stasi Captain Gerd Wiesler.

A diligent, highly-efficient and treasured investigator, interrogator and enforcer, Wiesler's archetypally arid authoritarian character (complete with empty personal life) gradually decomposes after being assigned to dig dirt on comfortably loyal playwright Georg Dreyman (Sebastian Koch), whose actress girlfriend Christa-Maria (Martina Gedeck, as little more than a *femme fatale* plot device) is suborned into betraying him by Wiesler's lascivious lizard of a boss – Dreyman himself only acting against the regime by whistleblowing in a West Berlin newspaper when a friend commits suicide after years of harassment.

Wiesler's growing conscience, helped by close proximity hidden in the attic to Dreyman *et al's* spontaneity, passion

and freethinking (not to mention lust for Christa-Maria) leads him to conceal evidence, and when discovered he is stripped of his position and sent to steam open mail. In the epilogue after reunification, Dreyman discovers the extent of the surveillance he suffered and realises Wiesler's sacrifice. The latter, now working as a postman, later stumbles across Dreyman's new book which is dedicated to him.

Rehabilitating Big Brother

This affecting and convincing tale of psychological transformation has attracted huge audiences and acclaim, being judged the best foreign language film at the 2006 Academy Awards. However, widespread unease about the film's political and historical accuracy is pooh-poohed by von Donnersmarck as a few simpletons engaged in irrelevant and/or baseless nit-picking – citing the 'authorities' consulted in making it while conveniently ignoring all those who objected.

Ironically, such peremptory dismissals bear an uncanny resemblance to the smear tactics usually accompanying intelligence agencies' more sinister and unsavoury practices – but then there's no rule against arrogant pricks making good art, and *The Lives of Others* is undoubtedly an impressive, powerful effort.

But it is a bit rich coming from an aristocratic West German whose feel-good agenda coincidentally resonates with an increasingly assertive Stasi apologism. It also pre-empts meaningful comparisons with both the contemporaneous West German 'Berufsverbot' (covert government blacklisting where many thousands were deemed politically unfit for employment) and the abuse of today's surveillance technology in the entrenchment of power which is already apparent even before the hard-, soft- and liveware is fully onstream.

The focus on lone heroic resistance by the servants of power once humanistic sympathy for creative expression is awakened implies that only individual integrity, overcoming all odds, can be the source of social salvation. Obviously, agents of evil seeing the light is to be



welcomed, but here it specifically diverts emphasis from the inexorable oppression of a bureaucratic system of control which allows little, if any, space for autonomy among functionaries. The logic of the Stasi structure was to fragment operational tasks – much like any modern corporate fascism – so that internal monitoring prevented exactly the kind of rogue activity which enables our hero to find a moral centre.

Thus there is no record of any Stasi man ever behaving like this (and those caught 'betraying' the organisation faced execution, not demotion). Many informers filed innocuously convincing fictions, but the circular criteria by which citizens were defined as 'suspect' – obsessively elaborated by administrators as the scale of intrusion accelerated along with the proportion of the population actively collaborating – tended to render each item of irrelevant data further evidence justifying ruthless persecution. This would be a central concern in any exploration of the close relevance of Stalinist repression to

today's more sophisticated surveillance societies – but here we merely have stereotypically bad apples up the hierarchy who cause the problems.

Meanwhile former Stasi employees now organise openly and aggressively to rescue personal and collective reputations, vilifying and intimidating as liars and 'ordinary criminals' those victims, dissidents and opponents who attempt genuine debate about the present ramifications of this period of recent history. This campaign has considerable political clout yet never acknowledges culpability among those 'just following orders' – let alone the appalling suffering caused over four decades and despite overwhelming proof from archives now in the public domain.

The film surely offers a chilling indictment of East Germany's real-life Orwell-meets-Kafka nightmare, but its final expression of gratitude to one sad nasty Stasi bastard for his decency following an unlikely redemption is as nauseating as it is disingenuous.* It trivialises von Donnersmarck's

pretensions towards universal human values almost as much as the narcissistic vanity of his pampered celebrities, whose sublime visions are supposed to inspire us poor grunts to aspire to transcend our pathetic stations in life.

The Lives of Others thus learns nothing from a century of political history and makes no contribution to struggles against tyranny. On the contrary, such age-old high-handed cultural conservatism habitually and happily colludes with the marginalisation of those with the temerity to question the entire edifice of official claims to 'civilisation' – consequently leaving the mechanisms and conceptual frameworks of totalitarianism completely intact for future generations of control freaks to exploit.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

* Explained with great clarity by Anna Funder in 'Eyes Without a Face', *Sight & Sound*, May 2007. See also my essay review of a far more subtle and interesting surveillance thriller, the Glasgow-set *Red Road*, in 'Closed Circuit Tunnel Vision', *Variation* 29.

TELEVISION

Shameless Series four, Channel 4

The occupational hazard in long-running drama series of cast members bailing out has helped spoil the fourth series of Paul Abbott's *Shameless* chronicling the (mis)fortunes of the Manchester estate Gallaghers. Since the trauma of eldest daughter Fiona eloping at the end of series one, the scriptwriters have consistently failed to develop, deepen and enhance the story by depicting characters succumbing to depressingly



realistic reasons for departure, and the repercussions for those remaining.

Instead we're served up ridiculously over-the-top soapy melodrama – witness neighbours Kev and Veronica banged up in Romania for orphan abduction. Such shenanigans shatter the suspension of disbelief and undermine the aim to counterpose the strength, complexity and resilience of the contemporary 'underclass' against the patronising poverty-traps laid by liberal handwringing, middle-class moral managerialism and New Labour police-state discipline and punishment.

In effect, the show's ambition and refreshing originality are sacrificed on the short-term altar of trash TV for middle-class cool-Britannia youth. Pivotal events and actions in one episode are

forgotten by the next, whereupon fashionably topical revelations parachute in to simulate narrative drive.

Personality becomes so flattened that believably nuanced and sustained webs of relationships dissolve in short-term infantile whims – a kitchen-sink *Dallas/Dynasty*. So portraying the children's prodigal mother as a vacuous narcissist with no redeeming features might be interesting with genuine depth or complexity in or surrounding her. Neither are the Maguires moving in next door more than grotesque caricatures of local gangsters, disallowing any exploration of venality affecting community dynamics; even the local Keystone coppers are characters in their own right (who gives a shit?).

Worst of all, young Debbie grasses up

the lodger out of selfish spite, imperilling the household despite hitherto holding it together. That her nearest and dearest hardly notice this betrayal, let alone care, epitomises a plot comprehensively lost.

Fortunately many strengths persist through the blunders, as the Gallagher offspring fitfully flower in barren soil. As the pathetic anti-Don Juan at the centre of this joyfully perverted romance (as young Carl muses, sometimes "families fuck you up, but in a good way!"), Frank's fatalism about the better management of capitalism offering his ilk any hope attracts Abbott's most concentrated attention in booze-fuelled soliloquies – including appealing for improved conditions for the abandoned poor: "Make poverty history – cheaper drugs now!"

The critique of pretension and old-fashioned defensive conservatism underlying his disillusionment later coalesce in a rant about council estate kids going to college, losing their accents and conviviality and "using long words". Tellingly, while empathising with his position, his children refuse to be constrained either by it or respectable alternatives, and the unruly melange of sex and drugs and karaoke culminates in a rousing chorus of 'Never forget where you're coming from...' It's just a shame that *Shameless* parrots so many trivial pursuits in remaining an exception to both the real-world and media rule.

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Shameless Season 4 will be released on DVD in October.

A Sideways Look Imagine if...

It seems that at last even the Tories have realised that there's not much future in pushing grammar schools anymore. It's enjoyable to watch Cameron and his over-privileged old Etonians squirm as the more conventional middle class grassroots of his party rebel over his lack of commitment to their iconic schools. It should come as no surprise that the majority of our political class comes from elite educational institutions; there are fourteen Old Etonians on the Conservative front bench, with three in the Shadow Cabinet – not a likely an option for many with fees at £23,000 a year! Most of them also list elite universities, Labour are little better.

Both sides claim that they are looking to increase social mobility. Tory spokesman David Willetts argued that selection entrenched social advantage, rather than spreading it. His opponents in the counties bordering London, most of which retain partial or full selection, point to figures that show a marginally higher proportion of children entitled to free school meals go to university from areas like Kent than they do from areas without formal selection. And that Cameron's favoured option – the expansion of city academies – turns out to be even less representative of the local population than the grammar schools which select on alleged academic ability.

The academies are also the policy of choice for Labour, which is pushing on with them despite mixed results and a controversial role for dodgy creationist car dealers in setting their curriculum. The government has said that it wants admissions to be fair, but allows these schools to select the parents. Some religious academies were found by a recent study to have only a tenth of the number of disadvantaged pupils that you would expect from the local population. Some schools were only half as representative of social class as they would have been if they'd picked pupils by distance from the school.

It seems that all parties these days advocate selection, of one form or another. What they all seem to forget is that if you have grammar schools, you also need secondary moderns. If you have academies, they require Alastair Campbell's bog-standard comprehensives nearby. Obviously, the assumption of all the party members is that none of their kids will end up in either, or if they do that they will go private.

Like most public services schools are set up for the middle classes. The arguments over academies or grammar schools accept that the best the working classes can hope for is a few crumbs off the table, either by academic selection, lottery or their parents religious devotion, however temporary that may prove. Why should it bet that some schools, and by implication their pupils, are written off?

Svartfrosk

Tony Blair grinned as he waved to the crowd at the end of his African tour. Over the past five days he had travelled the length and breadth of the continent, looking over his successes.

And what successes they were. Following the G8, \$40bn in interest payments on African debt had been suspended (in return for continued privatisation of utilities at knockdown prices), his work in Sierra Leone training the state army had helped the state tighten its grip on power (admittedly, the civil war they were stopping was based on poverty levels which would remain indefinitely, or worsen), he had helped Gadafi come in from the cold (okay that wasn't really him per se, but he'd accepted the deal) and British debt aid, tied to political influence, had risen by over 13%.

Meanwhile, European and American subsidies to their own farmers were undercutting Africa, losing them more in trade than they got in aid in one fell stroke. A one-way tariff system was sucking capital out of the continent. All the privatisation they'd encouraged had the unfortunate effect of fostering rampant governmental corruption, corporate malpractice and price gouging, increasing levels of poverty and capital flight. For every \$1 given in aid by donors, the West effectively took \$2 back.

So ... they'd written off interest payments while leaving debt intact, used the write-off to force through privatisation and tariff removal practices known to damage African economies and societies while being a driving engine of corruption, and at home continued to do the reverse of what they preached by practicing protectionism.

Of course, there had been failures as well. He just wished he'd been more forceful in those early years – imagine the possibilities!

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The quiz

1. What influential Spanish cultural anarchist journal was published between 1923 and 1936?
2. What might you find in the Severnaya Zemlya group of islands in the Russian arctic?
3. What did the US Supreme Court decision Nix v. Hedden rule on in 1893?
4. Who said "Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself"?

Answers on page 6

WILDCAT Take no notice, comrade. These anarchists are all the same, give 'em a bit of authority...



He's just compensating for his inferiority. He says you tell lies, that's because he's a compulsive liar himself.



He says you make false claims to be an expert on anarchist history, that's because he'd like to be an expert, only his memory isn't good enough.



He accuses you of working for Mi5 ...



Hey! What if he's being paid by Mi5 to sabotage the anarchist movement?



Slander!! I'm doing it for free!!!



Listings

16th June Northern Anarchist Network Conference, speakers include Pauline Farrell on care in the community, John Simkin on ID cards and Averill Hobson on climate change, at Central Methodist Church, Hargreave Street, Burnley, from 11.30am.

19th June Animal Rights Coalition (ARC) national meeting at Evesham Town Hall, Evesham, Worcs, doors open from 10am for vegan breakfast, info stalls, films, etc., meeting starts at 12 noon to about 5pm, more info at veggies.org.uk/event.php?ref=1034 or veggies.org.uk/arc.php

23rd to 28th June Peace camp in Parliament Square to celebrate Blair's departure – please note that this is an 'unauthorised' demonstration within 1km of Parliament and that under the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act it is a criminal offence to participate in such a demonstration (max fine £1000), meet at Parliament Square from 12noon, for info email gabriel@voices.netuxo.co.uk or see voicesuk.org. (A nonviolent direct action workshop and legal briefing will take place from 7pm to 9.30pm, on 22nd June at D3, Diorama Arts, 3-7 Euston Centre, London NW1 3JG)

24th June Anarchist Federation (London), Social Change Not Climate Change: Ecology, Environment and Anarchism, at Marchmont Community Centre, Marchmont Street, London WC1, at 7pm, email info@afed.org.uk or see afed.org.uk

30th June World Development Movement annual conference: activism past, present and future with speakers including Ngugi wa Thiong'o and George Monbiot, plus sessions on apartheid, slavery, climate justice, privatisation struggles, music and protest, women's rights, corporate globalisation, from 1pm to 6pm at

University of Leeds, for more call 020 7820 4900, email register@wdm.org.uk or visit www.wdm.org.uk

6th to 8th July Antiworld Outdoor Festival Experience at a secret location near London, see antiworld070707.com

13th to 15th July Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival, with Tony Benn, Billy Bragg, Chumbawamba, Mark Thomas, the Badgaddies and many more, at Tolpuddle, Dorset, free (charge for parking and camping) call 0117 947 0521, email southwest@tuc.org.uk or see tuc.org.uk/tolpuddle

18th to 22nd July Earth First Summer Gathering, five days of low-impact eco-living, playing, planning and plotting in East Anglia to avert the destruction of our precious planet, email efgathering@aktivix.org or see earthfirstgathering.org.uk

20th to 29th July A-Camp 2007, an anarchist summer camp in Austria, for details see a-camp.info

10th to 13th August AR2007

International Animal Rights Gathering 2007 will be held at Appelscha in the northern Netherlands, near to a forest with camping, on the day before (9th), there will be an Animal Rights march through Amsterdam, focusing on fur and vivisection targets, see ar2007.info

14th to 21st August Camp for Climate Action – after the success of last year's at the Drax Power Station, this summer the camp will take place at a location near Heathrow Airport to highlight airport expansion and the role of the aviation industry in carbon emissions and climate change, for more info see climatecamp.org.uk

19th to 24th August No Borders Camp in the Gatwick area, a space to share information, skills, knowledge and experiences, and to plan actions together against border controls, for more email g-anbc2007@riseup.net or visit <http://noborders.org.uk>

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 Camberwell Squat Centre: email blackfrog@alphabetthreat.co.uk
 contact the Ritzy strikers: ritzystaff@yahoo.co.uk

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