

# FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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## CRISIS IN PALESTINE

The crisis in Palestine is to a considerable degree the result of desperation and despair at the grassroots of Palestinian society after the denial of democracy by the EU and the US – who suspended direct aid to the Palestinian Authority after Hamas' election victory in January 2006. They were following the lead of the Israeli government, which cut off economic relations with the territories, and refused even to transfer Palestinian tax revenues worth \$60m a month to the Palestinian Authority. The total tax withheld is estimated to be around \$700m.

As *Freedom* goes to press, the Israeli government is finally showing signs of releasing these funds, not because of the humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian Authority areas, but in order to bolster the Fatah grouping in its near-civil war with Hamas. The US and the EU are following suit.

As several commentators have pointed out, Blair's "feral beasts" were actually very tame as far as he was concerned. If you look at the mainstream media's approach to, for example, Israel, and to Blair's policy on Israel, you find reporting not "driven by 'impact' ... scandal or controversy", not focused on "motive" or "interpretation" of the hidden meaning of what politicians say (the charges levelled by Blair), but severely constrained by self-censorship and service to power.

Take one small recent example of media bias, when a Qassam rocket fired from Gaza fell on the Israeli town of

Sderot on 22nd May, the British media rapidly reported the death of Shirel Friedman, a 32-year-old Israeli woman, but only noted in passing (and *en masse*) the deaths of Palestinians that same week.

Now Tony Blair named the *Independent* as the worst offender in the media. Let us look at the coverage in the *Independent on Sunday* (on 23rd May). We learn that "Ms Friedman died on the way to hospital from shrapnel wounds in her legs". There is an interview with Edna Sela, a friend, who gives some sense of Shirel Friedman's difficult life circumstances, and who provides this poignant quotation: "She was a very nice person, a beautiful person. She loved being outside. She was a bit naive. I met her just by the market with her mother yesterday and I told her, 'You should go home because they will start shooting Qassams at night'. But she said, 'God will not kill me'."

There are other reports from Sderot, noting that Ms Friedman's death "has added to a sense of fear and frustration among Sderot's 25,000 residents". Half the town had left, most schools had been closed, and there was an "angry demonstration outside the town hall". Three angry residents are quoted by name: Yaffa Malcha, 44, a hairdresser; Amnon Zakai, 46, a shopkeeper, and Arto Argonov, 37, who works in a factory.

All a perfectly proper response to a violent death. What is striking is the contrast with the response to the much



RELAUNCH: The People's Autonomous Destination (PAD) centre in Cardiff has acquired a new home at 118 Clifton Street, Adamsdown. The space will be open to all, and interested parties are invited to come along to organising meetings on Wednesdays at the PAD, or email thepad@riseup.net.

more numerous violent deaths of Palestinians.

This story carries these two sentences: "Palestinian medics say at least 34 Palestinians have been killed in the air strikes since Wednesday last week, the majority of which, but by no means all, were militants."

"Palestinian sources said at least seven people were wounded in yesterday's four airstrikes, in Israel's response to

about 150 rocket attacks in the past week." (<http://tinyurl.com/2f5nj2>)

None of the 34 Palestinians are named. None of them are remembered by friends. None of them has their life circumstances described. No report is made of the mood among their neighbours, or the condition of their communities.

This is not exceptional, but one small example of a much wider pattern of pro-

Israeli and anti-Palestinian reporting, which has helped to prevent Western pressure on the Israeli government and the EU/US governments to stop their economic torture of Palestine. Media distortion has helped to create the crisis in Palestine.

Milan Rai

Milan Rai is editor of *Peace News*. His last book was *7/7: The London Bombings, Islam and the Iraq War*.

## BLAIR CONFRONTS EU

The European Union, which already has significant clout on UK politics, could soon gain even more authority with a new 'constitution' treaty. The plan is for all 27 member states to incorporate the treaty – which has not yet been fully drafted – into their constitutions as an authoritative document. The UK is facing pressure as most other European countries are enthusiastic about the treaty but Blair has announced that he shall not accept the terms if it breaches one of four 'red lines', including interference with UK laws, foreign policy, or the police force. Blair is also against further use of qualified majority voting which could see EU control of our tax and benefit system.

Blair has also decided that there shall not be a referendum held to consider the public's opinion on the treaty, and instead the government shall be making the decision alone. Some say this is contradictory to Blair's previous stance in 2004 and 2005 with a promise to provide a referendum before the government made a decision on an 'EU Constitution', Blair probably no longer believes he should 'let the people decide'. However, Gordon Brown would like to keep the option of a referendum open.

Despite a firm decision by the UK government on what they would not like in the treaty, Margaret Beckett (foreign secretary) is anticipating the negotiations in Luxembourg to be tense as other EU member states will be pressing for solidarity but Beckett is determined to stand by the 'red lines'.

Poland appears to be the only other country along with the UK which is sceptical of the treaty, whilst others, particularly France and Germany are optimistic about the new treaty. France

was one of the countries that opposed the EU constitution in 2005 with a referendum but, despite this, the new leader Nicolas Sarkozy is showing support.

Along with the new treaty, there are plans for a new full-time EU president serving terms of two and a half years at a time, rather than the current system of each country providing a president in short terms on a rota, the UK is currently appearing to accept this proposal and the proposal to have an EU foreign secretary who will deal in foreign affairs between non-member states. Downing Street has insisted that Blair has no desire to become the first full-time EU president due to his imminent departure from number 10. Sarkozy instead is said to be actively seeking the presidency role.

The new treaty, despite supposedly being weaker than the EU constitution of two years ago, is still likely to reduce UK parliamentary sovereignty and further federalise an ever stronger European Union.

## FATAH CHANCE

On Monday 18th June 2007 Tony Blair said: "Please do not believe that the ordinary Arab does not want democracy or freedom in the way we do. What country has ever chosen not to be a democracy? It's nonsense. It is what oppressors do to justify their oppression. They say democracy and freedom are western values."

When Hamas – the Islamic Resistance Movement – won a landslide victory (76 of 132 seats on a 78% turnout) to take control of the Palestinian parliament in January 2006, the US banned its diplomats from having any contact with the Hamas-led cabinet, and Blair orchestrated a withholding of EU aid.

Hamas' electoral success came about in part due to its staunch opposition to the Oslo peace accords. As important as its refusal to recognise or negotiate with Israel, though, was its opposition to the corruption that engulfed Fatah as it accessed US and EU aid monies. For most Palestinians Hamas stands

not only for its declaration that jihad is the only effective means to Palestinian statehood but also for its organisation of kindergartens and schools, medical infirmaries, dental facilities and a blood bank.

It was the first Intifada which militarised and radicalised the young Islamic militants who formed Hamas.

The recent conflict with Fatah which saw Hamas seize control of Gaza was a reaction to the West's eighteen months of pressure on Hamas to include Fatah in any Palestinian cabinet, while Fatah continued to carry out armed actions against Hamas activists. The response of the West has been to decry Hamas for carrying out a coup (i.e. an elected government seeking to defend itself against armed attack from the defeated party) while immediately recognising the unelected 'emergency government' formed in the West Bank by Mahmoud Hamas.

John Shute

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# Home and away

## Dale Farm threat

As *Freedom* goes to press, 14 plot holders at Dale Farm are waiting for the results of an injunction which has been applied for to protect them from a threatened eviction attempt on 6th July.

Lawyers for Dale Farm are seeking a review of the council's recent decision to bulldoze the yards at the centre of this Crays Hill community. If successful, an injunction will restrain the use of force until a hearing.

The decision by Basildon to allocate £3m in public funds to removing 157 Gypsy households from the district is already the subject of a pending judicial review. Complicated by the involvement of the Commission for Racial Equality and Children's Legal Centre, the hearing may not take place until late this year.

Dale Farm is the largest traveller site in the UK.

## Lakenheath 8 trial

At a pre-trial review, the 'Lakenheath 8' case has been adjourned pending technicalities which need to be sorted out. Further information will be forthcoming on 7th August at Bury Magistrates court, with an autumn date likely for the main trial.

The 'Lakenheath 8' – Pete, Richie, Mell, Lesley G, Lesley A, Margaret, Irene and Emma – are facing charges of SOCPA 128 (Criminal Trespass) and criminal damage after entering USAF Lakenheath and locking themselves to the special munitions area gates to stop the movement of cluster bombs and other munitions. The activists would like as much support as possible, contact [lakenheath8@dsl.pipex.com](mailto:lakenheath8@dsl.pipex.com)

## GM victory

BASF have abandoned plans for a GM potato trial in Yorkshire this year, despite government consent. The decision follows an action in Hedon near Hull, where protesters planted organic spuds in what they thought was the field earmarked for the GM variety. The aim was to invalidate the experiment before it was even started and, while it turned out that they had picked the wrong field, they did successfully demonstrate that public opposition to GM crops is as strong and militant as ever.

## Cancer fury

Work-related cancers will claim thousands of lives each year for a further working generation as a result of the "shocking complacency" of the government's health and safety watchdog, a new report is warning. *Burying the Evidence* says the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has neither the resources nor the strategy to tackle the workplace carcinogen exposures killing at least 12,000 people each year.

The report, by Professors Andrew Watterson and Rory O'Neill of Stirling University's Occupational and Environmental Health Research Group, says HSE's action plan – unveiled at a London seminar on 25th and 26th June – omits a range of occupational cancers, grossly under-estimates the risks of others and excludes entirely some of the most high risk groups of workers.

## Refugee support

As part of *Refugee Week*, the Birmingham Anti-Racist Campaign (ARC) organised a candlelit vigil to remember asylum seekers who have taken their own lives and protest against the government's policies. Many people then stayed for the annual Refugee Sleep-out to highlight the problem of destitution that many asylum seekers suffer from.

# Around the world

**Nigeria:** The main trade unions have in Nigeria called off their four-day-old general strike over a rise in fuel prices after reaching an agreement with the government, both sides have said.

"The general strike is suspended with effect from midnight," a joint statement issued by unions and the government said on Saturday.

Union leaders met government negotiators after receiving a letter from Umaru Yar'Adua, Nigeria's president, pledging to freeze petrol prices at the pump for a year.

"In this kind of engagement, there is no question of winners or losers," Baba Gana Kingibe, the chief government negotiator, said.

"It is a question of compatriots coming together to discuss national issues and charting a course that is in the best interest of the nation," he said.

The general strike had halted most economic activity in Africa's most populous nation, but vital crude oil exports were not affected.

The price of petrol will remain frozen at 70 naira (\$0.55) per litre for a year, up from the previous price of 65 naira per litre.

The increase is half the amount proposed by Yar'Adua's predecessor Olusegun Obasanjo on the day he handed over power on 28th May.

Leaders of the two main umbrella unions confirmed Yar'Adua had intervened, setting the moratorium on petrol prices.

"It was president Yar'Adua's personal intervention that halted the strike ... after listening to all the parties and examining the issues of contention," Olusegun Adeniyi, presidential spokesman, said.

The strike had forced the closure of schools, government offices, banks and filling stations.

Fuel price had soared to three or four times the normal price on the black market during the strike.

Virtually all domestic flights were grounded, with few international flights leaving the country.

**Iran:** Iran played a "big role" in Hamas's seizure of Gaza, according to Tawfiq al-Tirawi, the Palestinian intelligence chief.

Speaking recently, al-Tirawi said that Iran had provided training and weapons for Hamas, enabling them to effectively push Fatah into the West Bank earlier this month and take control of Gaza.

"According to our information, Iran has played a big role in what happened in Gaza," al-Tirawi told a news conference.

"Dozens of members of Hamas have been trained in Iran, and Hamas smuggled in weapons through tunnels not to fight Israel but against the Palestinian Authority."

He said that the 'plan' had been "carried out in coordination with Iran, and Iran has been informed of every step".

Fawzi Barhoum, spokesman for the Hamas movement, responded to the accusations by saying that al-Tirawi was engaging in "media fabrications, lies, attacks on Hamas and attacks on the Palestinian national project".

He said that Hamas had evidence that al-Tirawi and others had "worked with the Israeli occupation authorities to destroy Hamas".

Ahmed Abul Gheit, Egypt's foreign minister, last week accused Iran of having encouraged Hamas to seize the Gaza Strip, but al-Tirawi's comments were the first time that a senior Palestinian official has blamed Iran.

Mohammad Ali Hosseini, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman, said it

was "surprising some Arab countries ignore the Western countries, the United States and the Zionist regime".

He said Iran "had the most responsible approach" towards the Palestinians.

Iran has said in the past that it does support Palestinian groups resistant to Israel, but does not arm or train their fighters.

Hosseini said Iran supports Hamas "politically and spiritually" and that the "humanitarian aid would be provided through channels that it benefits all Palestinian people".

Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, had previously accused "foreign elements from the region" of orchestrating Hamas's takeover of Gaza.

Abbas earlier sacked Brigadier Suleiman Khodr, the military commander at the time that Fatah was pushed from the Gaza strip, demoting him to the rank of a simple soldier.

**Germany:** Recent WTO trade talks in Potsdam have collapsed. US and EU intransigence has finally killed the Doha round. Yet it has long been clear that these talks would never deliver a pro-development outcome. It is better to acknowledge failure now than to press ahead towards what was going to be a negative outcome for the world's poorest countries.

EU and US intransigence on agricultural trade had been matched only by their aggression when it came to their offensive interests. It said EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson had joined with his US counterpart Susan Schwab in demanding far-reaching cuts to the industrial tariffs of developing countries, even when it was clear that this would lead to widespread bankruptcies and redundancies. Similarly, developing

countries had come under intense pressure to give up key protections for their most vulnerable agricultural communities.

**Afghanistan:** The Afghan president, Hamid Karzai has condemned civilian casualties caused by "indiscriminate and unprecise" Nato and US-led operations, which also have resulted in dozens of Taliban deaths in the last 24 hours.

Karzai said on Saturday that at least 90 civilians had been killed in just over a week, including 52 people in the southern Uruzgan province.

"Attacks causing civilian casualties, as I have said before, is not acceptable for us. It is no longer tolerated," he said in Kabul.

The Nato force said Karzai's figure was similar to its own, but that it was not clear if they had been killed by the security forces or Taliban fighters.

Karzai said that he had repeatedly asked foreign forces "to avoid unnecessary and unuseful [sic] operations. But unfortunately, despite our efforts, this has not been applied and our people have been killed and wounded."

In a related development, a Pakistani official said on Saturday that nine civilians had been killed in the North Waziristan tribal district by a rocket fired by 'coalition forces' in Afghanistan.

Major-General Waheed Arshad, Pakistan military spokesman, said: "Afghan and coalition forces were conducting an operation against militants and a few rockets came in our area."

"One of the rockets hit a house in which nine people were killed."

"We have protested against the incident and asked explanation from Afghan and coalition forces."

# Prison news

## Deaths in custody

With the prison population in England and Wales currently standing at a record high of over 90,000 and police cells around the country equally crammed to overflowing, there are now two prison deaths per week on average. The increase has been blamed on the lack of 'first night care' for the newly incarcerated, since many now spend the first night of their sentences (and sometimes the second and third) in decrepit and overcrowded police cells, without even the semblance of 'risk assessment'. Not that the level of care is really any greater for those prisoners for whom a 'first night' jail place is found.

On the 13th June a demonstration was held outside Styal women's prison to protest at the death of Helen Mary Cole ten days previously. She was the fifth woman to die of apparently self-inflicted injuries in women's jails so far this year, a figure that already exceeds the number of women's deaths for the whole of last year. Mrs Cole died less than 48 hours after arriving at HMP Styal. She was on remand, located in

the 'first night centre', and was not on 'suicide watch'. The demonstration was the 24th to be held outside women's prisons in England since protests began in 2004.

## Belfast ABC

After several years absence, an ABC group has been re-established in Belfast. Check out their website at [myspace.com/belfastabc](http://myspace.com/belfastabc)

## Solidarity with John Bowden

Friday 25th May marked the first International Day of Solidarity in support of John Bowden and in defence of the Anarchist Black Cross. John is a long-term prison resister, who has spent over a quarter of a century fighting for prisoners' rights, and is now being kept in jail because of his politics rather than because of his original conviction.

John's supporters demonstrated outside the Scottish Parliament on the 25th May, demanding a full and swift investigation and an apology for the lies that have been told. Supporters came from various parts of Scotland and England to attend the demonstration,

and from as far as the Basque country. Hundreds of leaflets were distributed in support of John, with placards and a large banner demanding an end to the harassment he is enduring and to the vilification of the ABC.

Following this demonstration a large stack of postcards were delivered to the headquarters of the Scottish Prison Service, and these flooded in by post from all over the world, as did faxes, telephone calls, and e-mails. Glenochil prison had to set up a special system to divert incoming calls in support of John Bowden, and the SPS closed their headquarters early at 4pm. Around the world, from Japan to the USA, John's supporters picketed British consulates and embassies, organised phone and fax blockades, and held info meetings and mass card signings.

On Friday 8th June a demonstration was held outside the headquarters of the Parole Board in London, with supporters attending from as far away as Cardiff.

The next International Day of Solidarity with John Bowden will be Friday 13th July, with John's supporters

calling for people around the world to make this an inauspicious day for the Scottish Prison Service.

Here are some ways you can help the campaign:

- Send a postcard reading 'Hands Off John Bowden!' to: Scottish Prison Service HQ, Communications Branch, Room 338, Calton House, 5 Redheughs Rigg, Edinburgh, EH12 9HW, e-mail [gaolinfo@sps.gov.uk](mailto:gaolinfo@sps.gov.uk), phone 01259 760471 or fax them at 01259 762003.
- Write to Glenochil prison: Audrey Parks, Governor, HMP Glenochil, King O'Muir Road, Tullibody, Clackmannanshire, FK10 3AD, phone: 01259 760471, fax: 01259 762003.
- Send John a card or letter of support: John Bowden, 6729, HMP Glenochil, King O'Muir Road, Tullibody, Clackmannanshire, FK10 3AD.
- Become involved in the support campaign for John by e-mailing [handsoffjohn@reborn.com](mailto:handsoffjohn@reborn.com)

For more information about John Bowden and the solidarity campaign, see [myspace.com/friendsofjohnbowden](http://myspace.com/friendsofjohnbowden)  
compiled by Mark Barnsley



# News

## The Mental Health Bill

### Will the proposed changes to the Mental Health Act result in 'psychiatric ASBOs' asks Dave E

The Queen's Speech announced the introduction of a Bill to provide a better framework for treating people with mental disorders. The government are intent on reviving the previously axed and heavily criticised Mental Health Bill. It's the return of the thorny questions of diagnosis, compulsion and some rather dubious 'treatments'.

The current Mental Health Act (1983) enables specified professionals to treat people without their consent. The government now wants to make changes to extend and simplify this process.

The Bill seems to be motivated and promoted by a prejudice that connects mental illness with violence and the need to protect the public. In fact 95% of all killings have no connection to people with mental illnesses. They are mostly the result of drugs and alcohol, but plans have not been proposed to affect the liberty of Friday night boozers. Instead a marginalised and stigmatised section of the population is being targeted.

Currently compulsory treatment can only occur in hospital. The government wants to extend this into the community. So called 'psychiatric ASBOs' will be enforced, the conditions of which may include residency, appointments, medication and 'conduct'. These conditions would not be subject to independent review.

This proposal to restrict the movement and activities of patients in the community has been condemned by mental health workers. Rethink's campaign manager, Jane Harris, said that curfews and banning visits to pubs were completely unworkable. Tony

Zigmond, of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, saw the enforcement or monitoring of the conditions being the main problem. He said, "It's a monitoring exercise that doctors and nurses should not be doing."

But the main problem is the lack of independent review.

The 1983 Act states that compulsory treatment must help a patient's condition, or prevent it getting worse – this is the treatability clause. The Government wishes to change this to allow treatment that is 'appropriate' and 'available', i.e. remove treatability as a criterion. The judgement of what is 'appropriate' is a subjective one rather than objective, and could include measures to control rather than cure. People with untreatable personality disorders could therefore be compulsorily detained whether they've committed a criminal act or not.

Health services exist to help people with their health, not to control them. Tony Calland, chairman of the British Medical Association's medical ethics committee said, "Mental health legislation cannot be used to detain people whom the authorities simply want locked away."

At the moment, two doctors and a social worker are required to make the decision to treat someone without their consent. This is by definition a position of considerable power and responsibility, where the control over another's life is taken. The government's intention is to empower a wider range of healthcare professionals to take these decisions. There is considerable concern that there are insufficient numbers of suitably trained and



qualified people for this change to be made.

Treatment without consent can now only be given if a person has a 'mental disorder'. Again the government wants to expand the definition of mental disorder. This, if used widely, could

conceivably include immoral conduct, promiscuity, anti-social or eccentric behaviour and different political or cultural beliefs. Once detained and forcibly treated, that person must wait six months until they have a right to have their case reviewed by a Tribunal.

Sources of information:

- Rethink: [rethink.org/how\\_we\\_can\\_help\\_campaigning\\_for\\_change/mental\\_health\\_bill/index.html](http://rethink.org/how_we_can_help_campaigning_for_change/mental_health_bill/index.html)
- Department of Health: [dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/MentalHealth/fs/en](http://dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/MentalHealth/fs/en)

## Legalities of Iraq

Legal issues around the Iraq war seem to be coming to the fore again, with a recent victory for two mothers arguing the government abused their sons' human rights by sending them to war, a ruling that Iraqi prisoners are protected by the Human Rights Act, and news that a senior admiral took legal advice shortly after the war began, convinced he was breaking international law.

Law lords have agreed to hear an appeal by the mothers of 19-year-old victims Gordon Gentle and David Clarke, who say the illegality of the war actions of the government sent their sons to Iraq in violation of international right to life legislation.

The move, if successful, would circumvent the government's policy of not investigating the run up to the Iraq War and the evidence presented for it more thoroughly.

Two leading QCs who are prosecuting the case say Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights makes it part of the state's duty to safeguard life, thus making its decision to go to

war relevant – if the state went to war on insufficient grounds, it would be violating its own laws.

Originally a case brought by mothers Rose Gentle and Beverley Clarke failed when it was ruled that policy issues could not be conducted in courts as they were part of the political, not judicial sphere.

It is expected the case will be heard at the end of this year or in early 2008, though it is still unclear whether the government's decision to go to war will itself go under the microscope.

The legalities of the Iraq war are one of its most controversial aspects, with government lawyers saying it was, and an array of international figures, including the influential Burns Weston, Director of the University of Iowa Center for Human Rights, the US administration's own Richard Perle, the UN (through Kofi Annan) and the International Commission of International Law Jurists, saying it wasn't.

These wrote letters to both Bush and Blair advising them not only that the war was illegal, but that their actions

as commanders-in-chief would constitute war crimes.

Earlier this month, this club of people admitting they thought the war was illegal was joined by Admiral Sir Alan West, who retired as First Sea Lord last year. Insiders said the ex-admiral went to private lawyers to get advice over whether he would be prosecuted for war crimes should he order an advance. Reputedly, his opposite number, General Mike Jackson, felt similarly uneasy.

Finally, in related news, the House of Lords has ruled that an independent inquiry must now be held into the death of Baha Mousa, an Iraqi receptionist who died in 2003 after being imprisoned and beaten by British troops.



## Common Ground

Over the last nine months Reading squatters of the former Women's Advice Centre, members of Reading Grassroots Action, local residents and others have transformed the rear gardens of derelict council houses from what was a drug addicts' hideaway into a pleasant urban garden. They were clear about their intentions from the start: to create a community garden open to all from disused council land. There has been much support for the project, with locals regularly visiting and lending a hand. There was an eclectic group of people involved, ranging from young anarchists to local elderly ladies.

The council predictably tried to obstruct the project throughout, but due to the spirit of the squatters and their neighbours, the council failed to stop the self-managed squatted community project from being a success. On 20th June the garden was due to be evicted: the council wanted the land for the development of yet more luxury flats. Some people barricaded the squatted garden and house whilst others waited

outside for the bailiffs forming a picket and gave interviews to the local press. The council offered those involved with the project other plots of land as alternatives, but it was feared that these would also be destroyed to facilitate the gentrification of Reading. On the local television news those involved defiantly told the council they did want to accept these offers of land. Due to the presence of many supporters and some journalists, the council bailiffs were forced to leave empty-handed on the morning of 20th June.

There was an all-day garden party to celebrate, with a BBQ and acoustic punk rock. There were some positive local media reports, with the story of the garden being favourably portrayed for those involved whilst making the council look like they are unwilling to support community initiatives that appeal to many. For now, the story is a positive one, because links have been forged in the local area, which will mean similar projects will no doubt flower in Reading in the near future even after the Silver Street garden is no longer.



# Notes from America

## Academic freedom in the US is coming under increasing pressure, finds Louis Further

Academic freedom – for example, the right of university lecturers to voice their opinions and of faculties to make their own appointments – is coming under increasing pressure in the United States.

The rabid right, led by Rupert Murdoch-owned Fox News, has long had a campaign against leading anarchist Ward Churchill to strip him of his professorship at the University of Colorado after his comments to the effect that, if America carries out terrorist attacks on others throughout the world it must expect that they will fight back, as happened on 9/11.

In June the dean and the University Board on Promotion and Tenure at Chicago's DePaul University denied tenure (a status that confers academic and financial security on holders) to Norman Finkelstein.

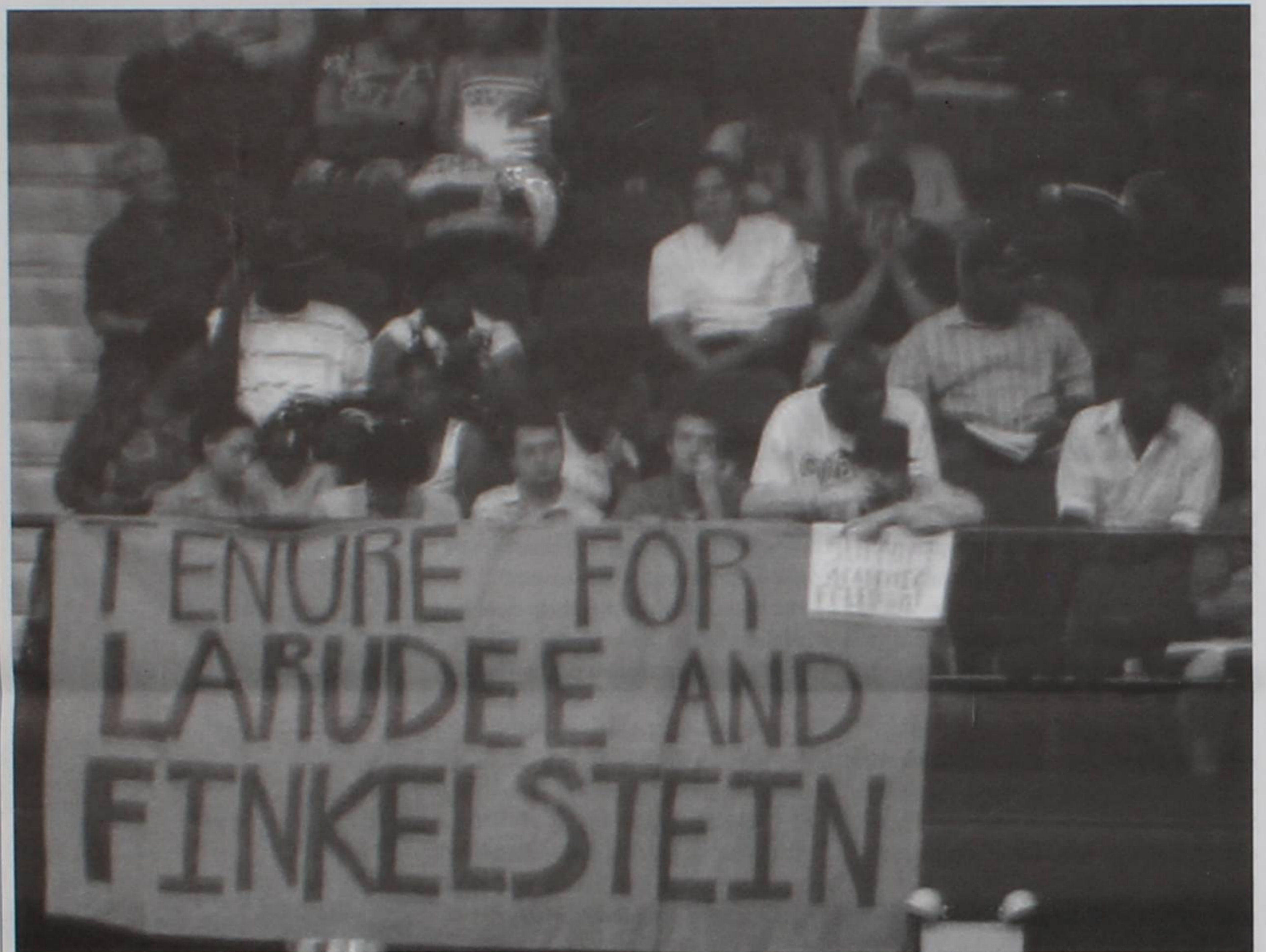
Finkelstein is a prominent critic of the Israeli government and a highly respected teacher, writer and intellectual with several standard works on the Middle East to his credit. Other members of the teaching community at DePaul, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and indeed Finkelstein's own political science department recommended tenure. One reason for the university's action was almost certainly the rather crass intervention of Israeli apologist and ideological 'opponent' of Finkelstein, Alan Dershowitz; he took the unprecedented and highly unprofessional step of writing to DePaul staff in an attempt to undermine and

challenge the personal and academic credibility of Finkelstein. DePaul students, however, are substantially supportive of Finkelstein; not long after the announcement, they held a 24-hour sit in at the DePaul president's office.

Evan Lorendo, a student at the university, commented: "We've all had these professors and they're great people, they're great members of society. They try so hard for social justice. The way DePaul has totally overlooked them for tenure is absolutely terrible. There's been outside influence, especially in Professor Finkelstein's case ... We're fighting for their tenure and their right to teach and academic freedom."

In another controversial move, DePaul has also announced its intention to deny tenure to professor Mehrene Larudee; she was to become chair of her department and had its unanimous support as well as that of the college personnel committee and dean. It seems likely that this happened because she supported Finkelstein and is not atypical of what can happen to those who speak up on behalf of radical figures.

These are not so much isolated incidents as events in a chain of attempts to silence, demote or marginalise those whose jobs oblige them to represent the world as it is to students instead of perpetuating the distortions of the state and its propaganda. A mature, adult and tolerant society would be more likely to welcome dissident opinion and expect positive outcomes from



such dialogue. That's not how things work in the United States though: if the media doesn't apply pressure and ridicule on those who dare to express 'alternative' academic thought, the institution (often under threat from the Federal government) will. There

have been numerous examples recently of scientists silenced, dismissed or sidelined for bringing the extent of climate change to public attention. The US Fish and Wildlife Service recently sent memos to government scientists (again, whose job it is to use science in

the public interest) forbidding them to discuss polar bears (now a seriously endangered species) and climate change at international meetings – unless cleared to do so as a result of "understand[ing] the Administration's position on these issues".

## SA public sector strike

COSATU (Coalition of South African Trade Unions), who have 1.8 million members, have been striking for three weeks against the government's sub-inflation wage offer. The government is offering a 6% wage increase, as inflation stands at 7% this is effectively a pay cut for many workers.

Earlier this year the Independent (state) Commission for the Remuneration of Public Office Bearers recommended that President Thabo Mbeki get a 57.3% pay rise; from R1.1m to R1.8m pa and that MPs receive R650k pa. The average wage of public sector workers in South Africa is R3k.

COSATU is demanding a 10% increase (revised down from 12%), increases in medical aid and housing provision, as well as improvements in public service provision. Despite having spent four months in talks, government sincerity has been called into question as their lead negotiator has no mandate from the ANC cabinet members charged with managing the dispute.

The government response to the industrial action has been to offer a

7.25% increase (possibly now up to 7.5%) as well as dismissing striking workers and using the police and army to violently break up pickets and demonstrations, and as scabs. COSATU also reports intimidation against union leaders, as well as attacks and arrests of members. Curiously the police are currently headed by South African Communist Party national chairperson Charles Nqakula.

The South African constitution is regarded as on the most progressive in the world, however the 'rights' it contains are inevitably dropped as soon as they come into conflict with the interests of the state and capital.

Unfortunately, the institutionalised South African left has found itself efficiently co-opted by the ANC's anti-Apartheid credentials and even after ten years of neo-liberal policy is unable to make a consistent break. COSATU and the SACP are members of the Tripartite Alliance of which the ANC is the senior partner – an arrangement which raises questions about their potential for resistance to government

policy. In the decade after the ANC consolidated the neo-liberal agenda with GEAR, although the economy saw average growth of 5% and the number of families with more than US\$30m each rose 400%, the income of the bottom 40% of the population fell by nearly half.

Despite this, COSATU still maintains a faith in a 'two stage revolution', as can be seen by their support for Jacob Zuma, deputy president, accused of corruption around an arms deal. Zuma seemed to present a possible alternative to Mbeki, and would allow COSATU to maintain the illusion that the ANC could still present a way forward.

The failure of the institutional left has however engendered a wave of militant community-based social movements among the poorest sectors of South African society (shackdwellers, informal traders, the unemployed – 'the poor'), which in some cases appear to offer more potential for a radical democratic politics.

See [zabalaza.net](http://zabalaza.net) and [abahlali.org](http://abahlali.org)

## Bangladeshi's arrested

The totalitarian military government of Bangladesh has been investigated on evidence showing mass arrests of 200,000 citizens, horrific torture of innocent people and over 100 murders in recent months. Intense political turmoil and class struggle has been present in Bangladesh for many years now, however the recent evidence of inhumane leadership has been slow to come to light after the government's attempts to silence media attention.

Last year many workers went on strikes across the country in protest to the harsh government and businesses which were breaching their basic human rights. Such action is largely unheard of now since the police force and army became more active in January this year. Claims of dead peoples' names on the electoral register have heightened claims of a corrupt government at work.

One of many cases of torture brought to light by ABC involved a man who endured a four-hour beating, after which he was unable to move. He describes being in 'tremendous

pain' and believing he would die, he survived but his brother was not so lucky. This case was just like many others in Bangladesh of seemingly innocent people suffering terrible torture.

General Moen Ahmed, Army Chief, denies allegations of murder and torture in Bangladesh and the Foreign Minister (who was approved by the army) – Iftikhar Chowdhury claims that 'in human rights Bangladesh is better than many, many, many, countries.' Current President, Fakhruddin Ahmed is planning to fight corruption and violence before the next elections in 2008.

Despite such treatment of Bangladeshi's the Australian government is planning to increase foreign aid to Bangladesh by 33%. General Ahmed sums up his regime by saying, "If anybody makes a mistake he will be taken to task". Since 11th January this year, Bangladesh remains in an official 'state of emergency'.



## Feature

# Thinking with freedom

John Griffin looks into the relationships between authority, humanity's tendency to conform and mental illness

**S**omewhere, amongst all that megalomania we call 'the pyramids', there must be some hieroglyphic graffiti which translates as 'WE MUST BE MAD!' But my suspicion is that such feelings have not been confined to the ancient Egyptians. More recently during the nuclear standoff between the US and USSR, 'MAD', the acronym for Mutually Assured Destruction, was still in common use.

That supposedly sane statesmen had made the ending of human civilisation a key part of their strategy lends force to the notion that the world must be run by lunatics, or more to the point for we anarchists, authoritarian lunatics.

Pushing this line of thinking a little further, we might wonder if authority, the supposed bringer of 'order', is itself a symptom of mental illness.

### Freud and Fromm

The first to attempt an analysis of mass socially induced neurosis was Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and his work which became influential is known as psycho-analysis. Appalled by the carnage of the First World War, Freud concluded that humans must have destructive tendencies which are instinctual; these he said are balanced by positive instincts which have a sexual basis.

Both sets of drives he thought must be repressed through social pressures for 'civilisation' to be possible, but the social 'peace' which resulted came with the cost of psychological disorders.

Freud was no revolutionary, but his work attracted the attention of radicals, notably Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) and Erich Fromm (1900-1980) who variously developed psychoanalysis within Marxian and Libertarian perspectives. There was a polemic between Fromm and Reich as to how far Freud's insights could be used to explain capitalist exploitation, and this essay continues to debate the uneasy mashing of sociological and psychological viewpoints.

Reich placed heavy emphasis on sexual repression exerted through the patriarchal family being at the root of working class submissiveness.

And sexual repression is clearly going to be damaging, but the much freer attitude to sex nowadays has not brought the demise of capitalism noticeably nearer, and mental illness we still have in plenty.

Equating mental illness with authoritarianism suggests that liberty is symptomatic of wellbeing, and Fromm calls this "normative humanism" (see *The Sane Society*, 1956). The failure of many to attain freedom, spontaneity, a genuine expression of self, and instead live like automatons, he defines as

"the pathology of normalcy".

He thinks that distractions like television, sports, etc., ensure that the repressed continue to function without becoming sufficiently ill to warrant attention from a clinician.

Marcuse thought Fromm "too sociological" but in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973) there are individual pathologies of Hitler, Himmler and Stalin, along with detailed studies of sadistic and masochistic tendencies within rather than of society – an important distinction to make.

When deranged dictators have control of totalitarian societies, their views become normative, thus embedding pathologies into the socialisation process.

I am of course broadly in sympathy with Fromm, but I am unable to accept his concept of normative humanism, when humanism, currently a minority viewpoint, is clearly not normative, however much we wish it to be!

Furthermore, in the later book Fromm says: "It is the fully sane person who feels isolated in the insane society – and he may suffer so much from the incapacity to communicate that it is he who may become psychotic."

Fromm is getting close here to saying that we are indeed all mad, but his comments on marginalisation are important. London comrades have debated this at length and called its depressing effects 'the anarchist burden' – I don't like the term, but you know what we mean!

Fortunately, having a well thought out, deeply held system of belief does help to integrate the character structure, and makes the individual more able to resist the most extreme social pressures. It's a point made by the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim in *Surviving the Holocaust* (1986).

### Pressures to conform

Whenever the question of 'madness' arises, the underlying problem is always that of trying to pin down exactly what we mean by it. We have the same problem getting to grips with 'normality'; both concepts have been interpreted differently throughout history through reading, the media and in discussion. This is socialisation: the process by which generally accepted patterns of belief and behaviour become internalised by most individuals. However vague its workings may seem, mainstream society exerts some truly awesome powers to ensure conformity.

We humans are great imitators. Usually it works to our benefit: we all learn to speak a language through imitating our parents, and the majority opinion is usually a safeguard against taking up extreme positions.

We also have the power of independent thought and action, but authoritarian cultures try to ensure that it is exercised

within prescribed limits. Unlike Freud, I don't think the horrors of the First World War came about because of an instinct for death and destruction, rather it occurred through a trusting obedience to the politicians and generals, along with the 'herd mentality' that we can be so frighteningly prone to.

The tendency to accept dominant social attitudes as received from the media, or merely following others, lies at the root of most if not all acts of mass barbarism.

People have free will, but it's often not enough. Only when it's too late for common sense to prevail, comes that sheepishness which finds people wondering how they could ever be so stupid.

German guilt and shame for causing two world wars, plus the Holocaust, within 31 years is a case in point. Imagine all those family photographs of smiling young men kept hidden away because their clothes are decorated with eagles and swastikas – the latter symbol is illegal in Germany even now.

I think all living things strive towards life, and that the destructive side of human behaviour is explicable within the context of individual clinical mental illness and authoritarianism, within the overarching process of socialisation. 'Sanity' is only likely to prevail when a lot more people find the strength to exercise personal responsibility for what happens.

To make the case that authoritarianism itself is a form of mental illness that requires us to demonstrate the presence of sadism and masochism on a mass scale. Logic then casts we anarchists in the role of analyst/therapists, each with an astronomical case load! Ludicrous, and yet there is clearly some connection, since all hierarchies involve some level of domination and submission...

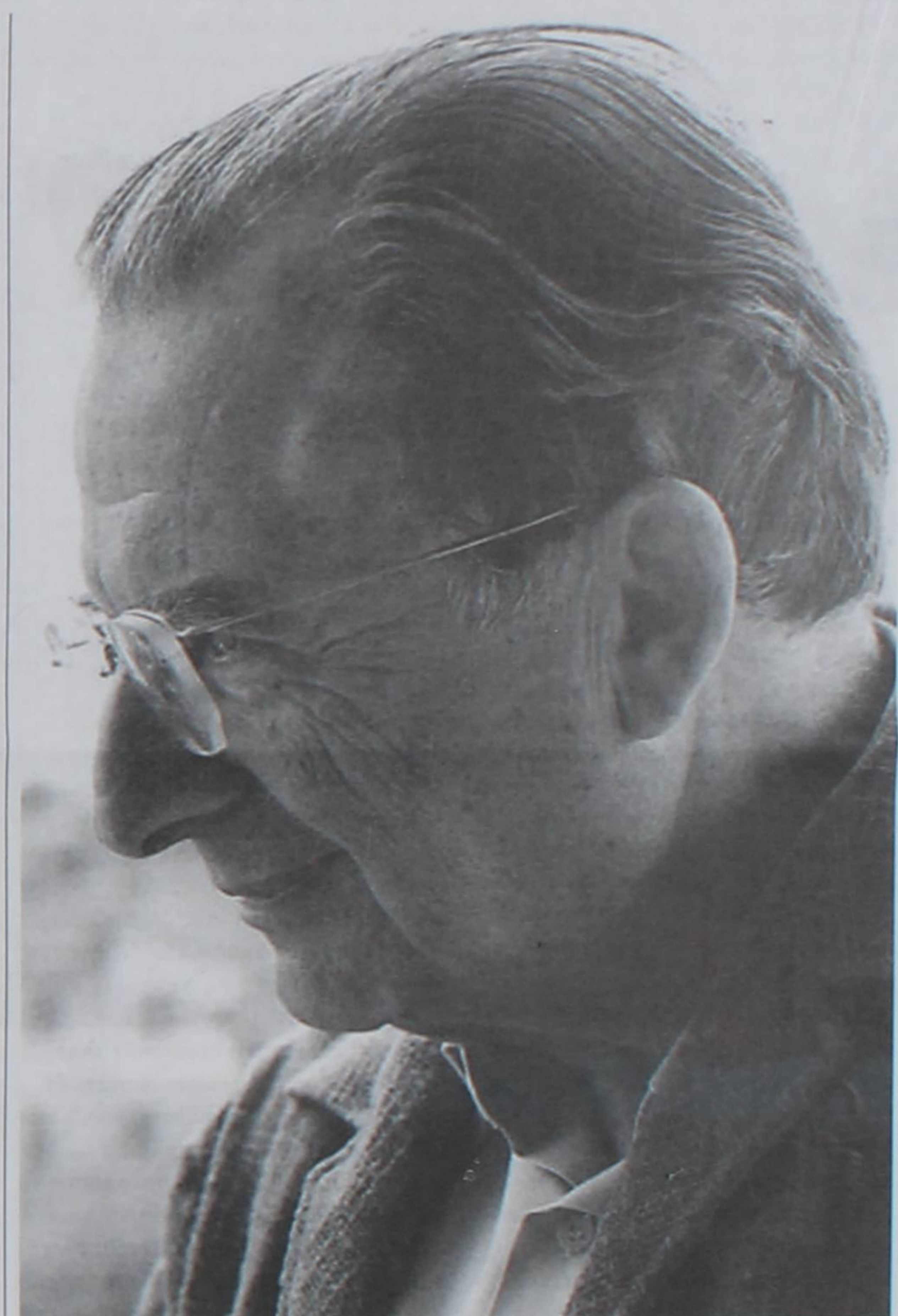
What we can say, is that authoritarian institutions, especially those run by the state, do provide plenty of openings for those with pathological tendencies: the armed forces, prisons, the police, hospitals and retirement 'homes' all continue to provide their horror stories, despite and indeed because of the ethos of security which usually goes with them.

### As I see it

Starting out on a quite different tack, I think it important to emphasise the dramatic changes to individual lifestyles which have followed the industrial revolution. That may seem a long time ago, but it is but an eye blink when compared to the hunter-gatherer period, the longest in our history.

In the developed countries, it is becoming rare to see people working to produce food, or using hand tools.

There is massive alienation here, have we in some Darwinian way adopted



PSYCHOANALYSIS: Erich Fromm, the noted proponent of the Frankfurt School of political theory, in 1974.

these changes? How many of our internal requirements for mental health are rooted in the practices or our pre-industrial past?

It is ironic that co-operative, sociable, pro-life characteristics which lead us to conform are driving us towards unhealthy, anti-social and even dangerous lifestyles: most prefer not to appear as 'troublemakers', we prefer to follow the consensus position, the most expedient.

In order to get along in mainstream society, most people routinely accept grotesque inequality, they accept being largely ignored in decision making, and are excluded from contributing towards the social product through unemployment, all of which threatens the individual's sense of worth, takes away control of his/her life and undermines the state of wellbeing which comes from being part of an active community.

Just around the corner from the resulting insecurity, separation and alienation lies the clinical conditions of anxiety, depression, paranoia and schizophrenia, all of which are affecting a substantial and growing minority as

global competition becomes sharper. In response, the state and the capitalists are content to sell us ever more drugs and therapy, and again most people are acquiescent.

It is easy for anarchists to portray this mess as 'madness' but inappropriate to contend that authoritarianism is a form of mental illness, when the vast majority who accept it and participate in it, whether through fear or custom, are clearly not psychotic.

Libertarians anticipation social change should be pleased and relieved that most people ride out the most appalling pressures on their lives, retaining their health and sociability most of the time.

A far more sociable libertarian society, which assured people control over their lives would surely reduce the incidence of mental illness, but is unlikely to eliminate it altogether.

The process of socialisation would of course continue to operate, but would then serve to foster individual freedom and social responsibility. It may sound odd to say that libertarians would conform to being free, but that is what it amounts to.



# Commentary

## FREEDOM

Volume 68 Number 13

### 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

Thanks to all writers on this issue. Readers, to keep *Freedom* alive and kicking we need to know about your campaigns, organising and political action in both the UK and abroad, so get writing to us now! You can send articles and reports to us by email at [copy@freedompress.org.uk](mailto:copy@freedompress.org.uk) or address them to The Editors, Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

The bookshop has apparently been a bit on the quiet side recently – perhaps everyone has gone to Glastonbury? But the time has not been wasted, as some of our new and energetic volunteers have been very busy this week giving a bit of a (much needed) spring clean to the entire building. The shop, stairs and hacklab have all been receiving attention to restore them to their former glory. The more courageous among them have even tackled the toilet!

The bookshop is also to start serving tea/coffee and homecooked vegetarian food. Watch this space for more details.

Matt

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### Next issue

The next issue will be dated 14th July 2007 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 5th July. Send articles to us by email to [copy@freedompress.org.uk](mailto:copy@freedompress.org.uk) or by post addressed to The Editors, Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

### Climate camp is more complex

Dave Douglass is dead right about one thing (*Freedom*, 16th June). We cannot isolate the struggle for the environment from the class struggle. Nobody involved with the Camp for Climate Action cares about the environment 'in the abstract' rather than the workers who live in it, as a look at our literature would make clear.

Climate change guarantees that it's the poorest and least powerful people who get shat on first and the worst, which is already happening. That's why it is a class issue, and why we call ourselves a movement for climate justice.

This year's Camp for Climate Action will not be targeting Drax or coal. It will be at Heathrow, targeting aviation.

My own view is that there should be a small deep-mined coal industry on this island, but certainly not for burning the stuff to produce energy. That's madness, and I'm not convinced there really is any such thing as clean-burn technology for coal or any other extracted mineral fuels (including gas). The worthwhile use of coal is to replace oil for the local production of plastics.

Not for supermarket bags and crap like that, but for those items for which plastics really are the best material and involve less energy use and damage than metals or other materials. That includes a lot of components for the production of genuinely clean energy on the small scale we need.

If "the banners of green anarchism are now in the camp of the nuclear power supporters", I haven't seen any, and if I did I would doubt their anarchist credentials even more than their green ones. The only banners in that camp are of some liberal reformist types apparently quite happy with the strong security state nuclear power requires and the unsolved waste problem. Dave may not know this, but one of the most successful actions at last year's Climate Camp was a surprise 90-mile hop from Drax to Hartlepool, where the nuclear power station was blockaded for a day, completely wrong-footing the reputed 4,000 cops assembled from all over the country in an attempt to stop us doing anything effective.

The elephant in the room whenever it is asserted that the only options are coal or nuclear (or gas, for that matter) is the outmoded, inefficient and politically dubious notion of centrally generating electricity and the creaky, knackered national grid. Even if it wasn't creaky and knackered, it would still be pissing away 30% of the energy used in transmission losses and waste heat.

I share Dave's hatred of wind farms despoiling our wild places. They're a misbegotten product of the same old centralist ideas, beloved of authoritarians. They may produce a bit less waste heat, but the transmission losses are massively greater due to the usually remote sites on which they are erected. Everyone who runs a sensible, small wind genny, producing 1 to 5 kw, is jealous of every metre of cable run because of transmission loss, but the same problem on a megawatt scale

apparently doesn't concern the state centralists. It's a bit like Richard Branson taking delivery of a state of the art high speed train, finding the seats very comfy, so deciding to hitch up several hundred horses to haul it to Glasgow. Just not appropriate use of the technology.

The only hope is for those of us in parts of the world where energy is consumed as if there was no tomorrow to drastically reduce our energy use. It needs to get down to 10-20% of current levels, and the burden has to fall mainly on the principal power profligates – the rich, the middle class and big business. That means a lot more than the individualist, rosewater-for-leprosy, light-bulb-changing advocated by governments. It requires what scientists are increasingly calling systemic change. We may call it revolution.

Once we have thrown off the rusting tyranny of the national grid, power generation at local, community and even household level can meet our sensible needs. This is where wind, solar, geo-thermal, and local biomass systems come into their own, preferably in combinations. In some places, small-scale hydro (e.g. Pelton wheels) and tidal power are also available.

This isn't some hippy pipe dream, but what people living off-grid are doing now. Neither is it being done solely by middle-class trendies with money to throw at expensive gismos, then worry about how long it will take for 'payback'. It's being done by people with next to nothing from scrap, recycled items, and technical ingenuity.

One community I know has little money but abundant power. The only cash put into their various systems is from buying beer in bulk, then selling it to themselves for a few pence a can over cost price. It's in urban areas that local generation hasn't taken off yet, and the solutions are harder to organise. It's time to start re-imagining the sort of urban local grids and local generation with which electricity supply began.

Tower blocks, canals, rivers and main roads all have huge potential and the helix technology enabling power to be extracted from light or turbulent wind-flows urgently needs development. Capturing waste heat is particularly relevant in urban areas, as are geo-thermal systems.

Dave Douglass would be most welcome at this year's Climate Camp, where there will be plenty of opportunity to debate his ideas. He will find there a wealth of scientific and technical expertise, as well as political thought and action, but no inclination at all to "wade in against the last of the miners".

Jim Paton

### Giving away guns

There has been a lot of talk in the last few months that the US has run out of ideas, but pundits around the world were wrong-footed when it emerged the US had decided to arm Sunni insurgents.

While army grunts reputedly dismissed it as a PR exercise to try and readjust the priorities of Sunni militants, and a poor turnout from Sunnis suggests extreme suspicion of US methods (the administration has said one of the ways they will be

making sure ammo doesn't get into the wrong hands is via biometrics\*), the US insists it will bring a new dimension to Bush's politically pivotal 'surge' in Iraq.

The surge itself is not going very well. While commanders are still saying it's 'too early to tell' whether the make-or-break injection of 30,000 US troops into Iraq as a pacifying force has worked, it is plain fact that more soldiers died in May than at almost any time since the invasion, and Sunnis have been as responsible as Al Qaida fighters of Shia militias.

Just days before the announcement, it was Sunnis who bombed a highway bridge out of Baghdad, killing three US soldiers as part of an attempt to strangle transport links.

While the US may be right about Sunnis being fed up of Al Qaida fruitloops detonating themselves in crowds of civilians, this doesn't mean they are going to listen to the wolf's whisper and make a pact with the West to kick out what is fundamentally the second string threat.

This whole thing has the smell of defeatism about it. Arming Sunnis suggests the US is preparing itself for the certainty of failure regarding its main stated objective – a compliant western market democracy standing guard against the muslim world – while falling back to the secondary position as kingmaker to the least bad option for US interests in the region.

If this is the case, and the near future holds either civil war followed by a carving up of zones of influence, or the emergence of yet another dictatorial religious setup, then even under the loose victory terms the US apply, 650,000 people will have died and countless billions of dollars will have been expropriated from the general public for a worse situation than the populace started out with.

Under anarchist terms, this imperialist adventure has been a disaster from start to finish, and there's no fun in 'we told you so' when it comes at such a terrible cost.

Rob Ray

\*Which presumably would require accurate battlefield forensics to function properly, now there would be a challenge. The cynical might say it's more likely to be a means of collecting information and targets in exchange for bullets.

### BAE

The ongoing shenanigans at BAE have to be among the most deeply embarrassing series of events to have struck the British government in recent years. Not only did they fail to stop their own corruption investigation from finding out about a slush fund to bribe Saudi officials, their subsequent ham-fisted closure of it – a direct order from Number 10 – has all but confirmed that whatever the full story is, it's enough to bring down powerful people and perhaps even the company itself.

Blair, in typical and well-tested style, has attempted to place a gloss of making a moral choice for the sake of the nation by his banning of further investigation – just another case of faux morality shoring up the towering edifice of such which our arms industry rests on. He claims he is protecting jobs, not to mention the continued existence of our arms industry.

Now as much as I'd like it to be

true, that BAE has build on such weak foundations that single investigations must be stopped to keep it going, I don't think this is the case.

The British arms industry is one of the largest in the world, with a turnover of 21.5bn euros a year. It employs 100,000 people while holding the patents on a wide range of weapons technologies. It has simply vast expertise and resources.

This is an industry as entrenched as any in the world, utilising a very specific industrial skillset in a sector which doesn't really do startups.

As such, even if the company is bankrupted (an absurd proposition – the industrial reputation of BAE is not based on whether it bribes people, but on whether the things it makes can kill efficiently, no-one is going to stop buying from them simply because it's known they pay the buyers money on the side) jobs won't suddenly disappear overnight, they will be incorporated into whichever other multinational has the cash to take over, or even taken back in by the state.

The manufacture of weapons won't stop if BAE get caught, but heads will roll at the top, diplomats will have a few very big headaches to sort out, and it may unsettle the markets a touch. That's it.

It's a nice little bonus for the anti-war lobby, it will rid us of a few experienced bigwigs who know how to play dirty, but it won't end arms production in the UK and it won't force us to find alternative applications for the communities which depend on arms manufacture to live.

Peter Winckless

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### Quiz answers

1. That Marco Polo introduced pasta to Italy from China.
2. A spoof religion set up to protest against the Kansas State Board of Education's decision to require the teaching of 'Intelligent Design' (backdoor creationism) alongside scientific evolution in schools.
3. Bobby Henderson, the creator of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, as part of his argument against the creationists, used a correlation between the number of pirates declining since the eighteenth century with the rise in global temperatures to show that correlation does not equal causation.
4. Emidio Recchioni, who founded the store in 1900 after losing his job in Italy. He continued to contribute to Italian anarchist papers until his death in Paris in 1934. His son, Vernon Richards, went on to edit *Freedom*, among other things.



# REVIEW

## Richard Griffin looks at 'This Was England', an exhibition of skinhead culture, and the film 'This Is England'.

To coincide with the release of Shane Meadows' acclaimed film about skinheads, *This Is England*, the PYMCA gallery and British Film Institute (BFI) in London recently staged an exhibition of skinhead photographs by Gavin Watson. Watson, like Meadows, was himself a skinhead in the late 1970s and early '80s and took literally thousands of pictures of his mates who he describes as "all mongrel dogs from a pretty grim estate in High Wycombe". Like Meadows' film, the photographs – some of which can be viewed at [myspace.com/gavinwatsonskins](http://myspace.com/gavinwatsonskins) – attempt to portray in a sympathetic light a youth sub culture that has become synonymous with racism. As document and as images they work. Watson certainly has an eye for a good shot and successfully manages to capture the 'feel' of being a skin evoking, along the way, memories of Thatcher's Britain.

It is questionable though whether seeking to reclaim the skinhead movement, as both the film and exhibition attempt to, is a credible project and I think Watson fails. There are far too many pictures of union jacks, 'NF' graffiti, bulldog tattoos, seig heiling skins (at a gig, in a pub and at the seaside). Although not exclusively, it is overwhelmingly white faces that stare at you, although to be fair I don't think High Wycombe was a particularly multi-racial society then. The pictures don't do much to challenge perceptions of a movement drenched in far right politics and machismo. There is at least one image of a skin dressed in a full Nazi uniform.

Politics are not the whole story of the skinhead movement, of course. As Watson points out in the notes to 'This Was England' and Meadows addresses in his film many skins got into the movement through a love of music, particularly ska bands like Madness and The Specials. Being a skin was a statement of identity not just with music but also with class and football (both closely related in those days).

Other skins like me were ex-punks

who hated punk becoming commercialised new wave. For a short while bands like the Angelic Upstarts, Sham and Cockney Rejects seemed to offer the exciting prospect of a return to raw punk basics. Sadly what they actually did was spawn 'Oi', a musical dead end. The future of punk in fact laid in America with bands like Black Flag rather than the god awful 4-Skins and their ilk.

Interestingly the connection between the decline of punk and revival of skinheads has not been explored in the many pieces written in response to Meadows' film. For a while punks and skins were part of the same gang. Significantly skinheads for both Meadows and Watson represent a time when people stood by each other; when communities mattered, a time before Thatcher could claim that there was no such thing as society.

Again and again though looking at Watson's pictures of (mainly) lads in Crombies, 18-hole docs and braces the question of the politics of the movement itself confront you. Meadows argues that rising unemployment, frustration and disillusionment in the 1980s created a fertile ground for the far right. "Skinheads always had a pride in being working class and English so were an easy target for the NF who said their identities were under threat" he told *The Guardian*. Watson in turn argues that skins were 'white trash'.

At the start the movement was not explicitly right wing. I remember both far left and far right competing to get skins into membership. I was a member of probably the oddest SWP front ever – Skins Against The Nazis and many skins would go along to Rock Against Racism gigs loving Misty In Roots as much as Stiff Little Fingers. In the end though the right won hands down, to such an extent that it is now hard to think of skinheads as anything other than fash boneheads. The victory of the NF and British Movement led some skins to leave a movement which had narrowed not only its views but also its tastes – no more dancing to dub as well as The Ruts, it was now just Oi.



The taking over of a skinhead gang by the NF is a central theme of Meadows' film.

It is hard to know how to 'look' at the exhibition and film – document, art, nostalgia, politics or propaganda? A bit of each I suspect. Both are indeed great art and capture a time when the working classes were taking a hammering. For me though the politics always remain uncomfortable and unresolved. Interestingly after seeing Watson's photos I realised that while I happily talk about when I was a punk I rarely talk about being a skinhead.

The revived movement in the 1980s was I think from the start conservative, inward and backward looking. This wasn't all bad. Skins had a fierce pride in their class and they stood by and looked after their mates. They had a strong sense of solidarity. They weren't though alone in this and a tribal mentality can have a darker side. There is no escaping the fact that the skinhead movement was macho and white. It was a subculture that was isolated and isolating. Unlike punk or other youth cultures the mainstream would never accommodate skins, which was part of the appeal. Perhaps

inevitably skins had a bunker mentality. Finding scapegoats in those that looked different was far too easy and in retrospect it is not surprising that skins today are the back bone of the white power movement.

Watson and Meadows want to explain this away as the effect of outsiders and counter to the true spirit of the skinhead movement. To their credit neither dodge the difficult issues but ultimately the truth is I think that the movement was always likely to take a right turn and didn't need a lot of encouragement to embrace the NF and BM.

## MAGAZINES

### Class War Issue 92, £1

With the apparent rapprochement of notorious troublemaker Ian Bone and the organisation he helped found, along with a Bash The Rich march in the offing to kick Cameron out, there is no doubt that *Class War* are strutting with a bit more confidence at the moment.

The group's latest newspaper for summer 2007 has also had a makeover, and is all the better for it. While it remains black and white for the most part, the paper's editors have taken advantage of cheapening colour print costs to put on a show for the back, front and centre pages. While the design remains recognisably *Class War*, it does

read better and generally looks better than it has in a long time.

The first few pages too, with heavy pistakes of the great and the good, are on form and provide an entertaining read. More importantly, some of the antifascist and prisoners coverage is excellent.

Because of its infrequency however, *Class War* does however suffer heavily from falling behind fast-moving events. The centre pages, with a special 'cut out and stick projectile vomit bag', for the royal wedding between Prince William and Kate Middleton, are almost entirely wasted as the pair broke up earlier this year.

While this is partially made up for

online, it would be good to see the paper come out more frequently so it can have a fresher take on the news.

### Northern Voices Winter/Spring 2007, £1 (special edition)

This eclectic, sometimes eccentric magazine edited by Brian Bamford is in its seventh issue and continues to challenge designers everywhere to work out just what the hell it is trying to do.

Large parts of *Northern Voices* are an entertaining read, both as solid pieces of reportage, such a piece on how special branch investigated communists in the North both before and during their heyday, and as downright bizarre such

as in the case of its Stalybridge fog tragedy piece.

It also does a creditable effort at trying to reach outside the base of its writers, who seem to be drawn largely from the Northern Anarchist Network and friends, appealing to a broad canvas ideal of northern working class community and history with a mixture of features such as the top Northern comedians, reviews of local restaurants and working class history.

However the magazine suffers a great deal from presentation issues, with frequent font style (and, infuriatingly, size) changes, heavy boxes and badly placed pictures and dividers which make it frustratingly difficult to read

at times. Despite its 50-page A5 size, it also doesn't have quite enough room to fit in everything the editors want it to. The reviews section in particular needs to be radically rethought.

Another major criticism of the magazine, as a largely anarchist effort, is that it doesn't actually seem to carry any anarchist content. While it is understandable that anarchist activity in the North is not the most influential of beasts, excluding the creed altogether seems a funny way to run an agit-prop publication.

And please, stop bolding place names...

Go to [northernvoices@hotmail.com](mailto:northernvoices@hotmail.com) or 07733 290955 for more information.



## A Sideways Look Imagine if...

It seems that private equity is the new caricatured capitalist villain. The top-hatted, cigar-chomping version of the nineteenth century capitalist has found its twenty-first century equivalent. While capitalists during most of the last century tried to dress themselves up as something different to modern-day robber barons, the private equity crew appear to have no such qualms.

Of course, the GMB and other unions are quite right to point out that these private equity firms treat their employees like crap and concentrate solely on making huge wads of profit for their shareholders and themselves. But am I alone in thinking their complaint is merely one of degree? Treat us badly, yes, but not that badly!

The private equity people are vultures; their actions at a number of high profile companies like the AA show that. However, they're not the first people to sack workers purely for profit or raid pension funds. It is somewhat naïve to imagine that the ownership structure of a company has a big impact on the way it behaves in the market. That's kind of the point of markets – any company that behaves less ruthlessly will go to the wall to be replaced by its more ruthless competitor. Capitalism is, at present, engaged in a frantic race to the bottom where any job is competing with dispossessed Chinese peasants willing to work for a dollar a day.

For those who cling to the idea that a public company or the state would be a significantly better employer don't need to look very far. The Royal Mail are currently offering a below-inflation pay rise and looking for huge job and service cuts. During the '80s, the state-owned National Coal Board viciously attacked its employees in a successful government-sponsored attack on the National Union of Mineworkers.

I find it outrageous that the scum who run the private equity outfits have a lower rate of taxation than the people who clean their offices. It's so bad that one of them, Nicholas Ferguson, has even admitted as much. Gordon Brown may change it so that they don't get such wonderful tax breaks in future, but he won't of course change the rule that allows them to pretend they live in Monaco to avoid paying any tax at all. It's no surprise that the private equity millionaires were generally shameless about their stratospheric rewards and ruthless behaviour – they know that in today's society, no one really cares. Their muted performance in front of the Treasury Select Committee shows they know that popular opinion is now against them. But they also know that they've nothing to fear from the government.

The best way to defend our living standards from employers – whatever stripe they are – is to organise at work and take collective action. In a climate where class divisions are becoming more entrenched, we can only hope that our fellow workers realise this, and soon.

Svartfrosk

Denis Oswald, chairman of the International Olympic Commission and popularly known as Dennie, grinned broadly as he came to the end of the rigorous examination of every aspect of the preparations for the Olympic Games in London.

His craggy face couldn't hide the delight he felt at what he had seen. It was even better than Beijing.

"Two years after London got the Games we are impressed by the level of detail in the preparation and we were informed on all the aspects. It's very impressive five years before the Games," he told the news conference.

He held forth about the excellent preparation, the wonders of the new logo. Tactfully, though he still thought it a marked difference to the usual pre-Olympic fare, he didn't mention the absence of military squads going into city slums to evict people and demolish homes to make room for stadiums as an improvement. After all, the Chinese had a different culture, as he had pointed out to journalists, so it couldn't really be comparable.

In fact, his report didn't mention clearances at all. This was fairly normal for an Olympic report. They hadn't mentioned the violent clash between state and community in Barcelona or Greece either, and wouldn't mention the displacement of Londoners, or destruction of 'protected' areas such as Hackney Marshes.

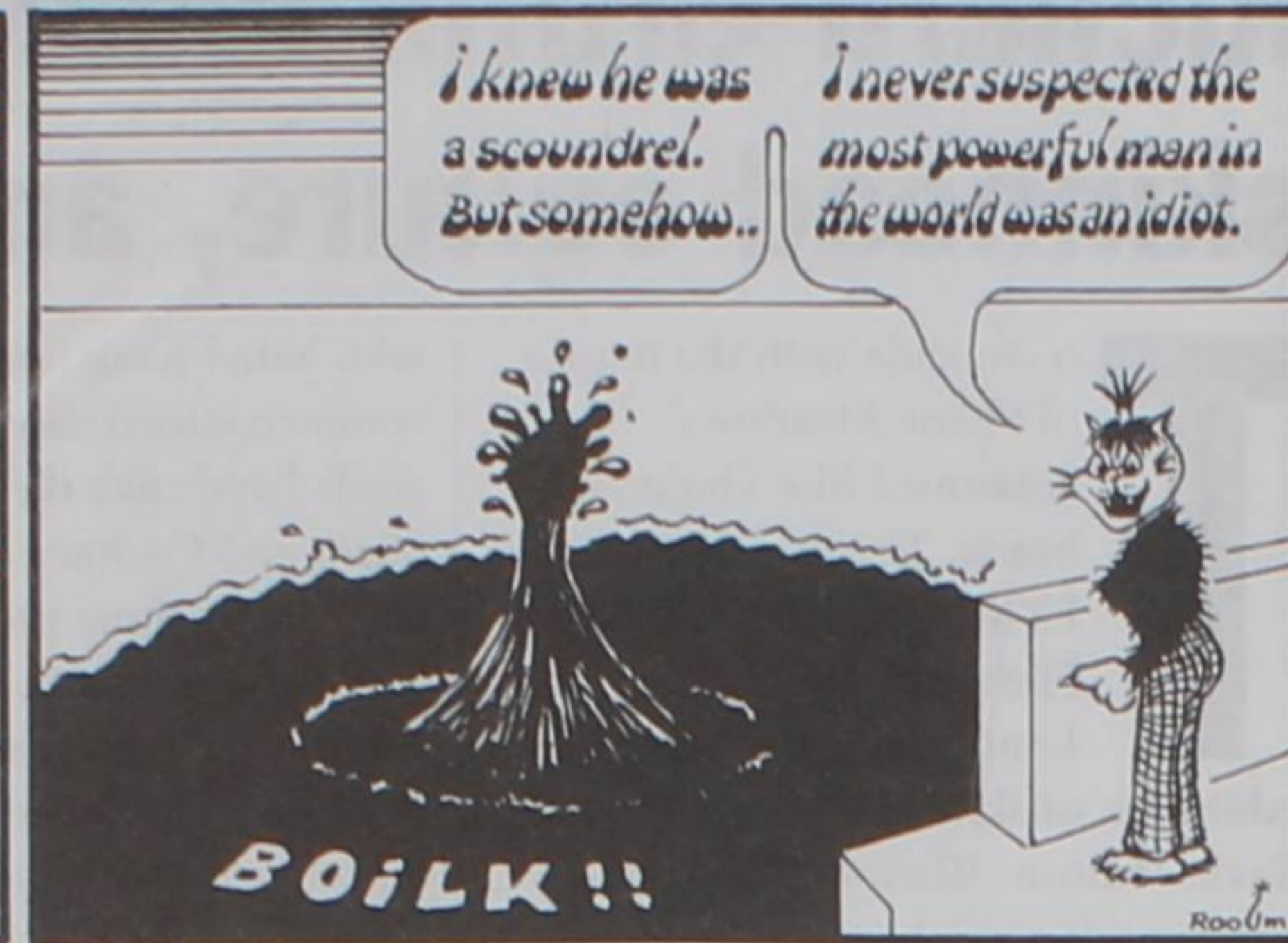
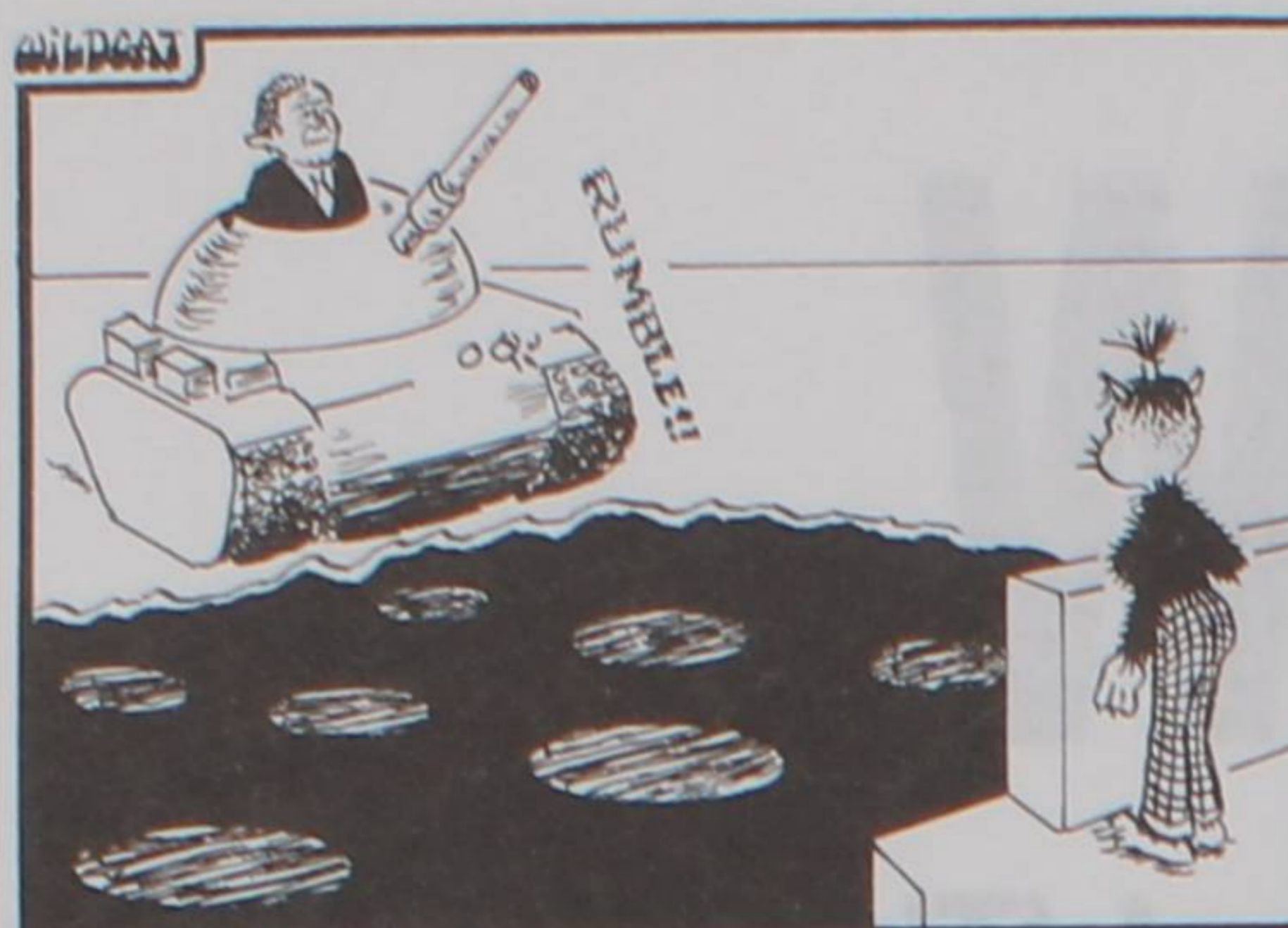
Sometimes he wondered about that, but then, as an ex-rower himself, he believed in the use of sport as a means to show a real commonality across national boundaries. Sometimes, a blind eye to state brutality had to be shown, or how could the world celebrate how civilised it had become in the name of sport?

He grinned again and waved at the crowd.

## Bookworm notes

Will Jack still have a PlayStation after the revolution? This is a debate which has been raging across the libcom internet forums in recent weeks. Responses ranged from, "If I can't play computer games, it ain't my revolution" to "He'll be too tired from working in the fields all day to play computer games".

Beneath this light-hearted discussion is a set of questions and debates addressed by Murray Bookchin in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (AK Press, £10). Bookchin argues that scarcity is a powerful force – both materially and ideologically – that has produced social inequalities in all forms of social organisation, up to and including our own. The difference, argues Bookchin, is that scarcity in advanced capitalism



is an artifice, and that we could all enjoy not only the necessities of life, but a share in life's little luxuries.

More interestingly, in terms of whether Jack gets his PlayStation or not, Bookchin also argues that scarcity creates a mindset where our desires are conditioned in and through the desire for material goods. This aspect of the book makes interesting reading, looked at alongside Marx's account of the rise of the commodity form. I suppose Bookchin's answer to the question at the top of this column might be, "He could have one if he wanted. It's just that he probably won't." Clearly he never met Jack. Speaking of scarcity, if you're a bit short on cash, it's worth keeping an eye out for this book in remaindered bookshops. I picked up my copy in central London a couple of weeks back, for £3.95.

Bookworm

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## The quiz

1. For what myth was the National Macaroni Manufacturers Association responsible?
2. What is the Flying Spaghetti Monster?
3. Who argued that global warming is caused by the decline in the number of pirates?
4. Which anarchist ran a wine and pasta store in London called 'King Bomba'?

Answers on page 6

## Listings

**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](mailto:register@wdm.org.uk) or visit [www.wdm.org.uk](http://www.wdm.org.uk)

**4th July** Independence from America demo (by Campaign for the Accountability of American Bases, UK) at Main Gate, Menwith Hill, near Harrogate, North Yorkshire, from 12 noon to 5pm, for more call Lindsy Percy (Coordinator, CAAB UK) on 01423 884076 or 0794 9897904, email [percy@starbeck.eclipse.co.uk](mailto:percy@starbeck.eclipse.co.uk) or visit [caab.org.uk](http://caab.org.uk)

**5th July** Lost in the Supermarket: Work, Consume, Die – public meeting on consumerism and its alternatives convened by the Anarchist Federation (London) at 7pm, Marchmont Community Centre, Marchmont Street, London WC1 (Russell Square tube), free

**6th to 8th July** Antiworld Outdoor Festival Experience at a secret location near London, see [antiworld070707.com](http://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](mailto:southwest@tuc.org.uk) or see [tuc.org.uk/tolpuddle](http://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](mailto:efgathering@aktivix.org) or see [earthfirstgathering.org.uk](http://earthfirstgathering.org.uk)

**20th July** The inaugural Black Cat Press lecture, Terry Liddle on Slavery Ancient and Modern, 7pm in the SPES Library, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Holborn tube), see [eventsandissues.bravehost.com](http://eventsandissues.bravehost.com)

**20th to 29th July** A-Camp 2007, an anarchist summer camp in Austria, for details see [a-camp.info](http://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](http://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](http://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](mailto:g-anbc2007@riseup.net) or visit <http://noborders.org.uk>

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