

FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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MAKING WAY FOR THE OLYMPICS

Sunday the 23rd September was a sad day in the history of gardening. It was the day the Manor Gardens Allotments were closed by the Olympic Delivery Authority.

It was also the day former allotment holders and many other people decided to march and demonstrate their concern over the way in which development and so called regeneration is soaking up much needed green space. Martin Slavin, an Olympic researcher, was on the march and comments that "so called regeneration projects like the Olympics are more about the careers of those involved in the Olympic industry, and the profits of developers and construction companies than they are about improving the lives of ordinary people".

The Manor Gardens Allotments, were a little piece of the countryside in London, and were given to the gardeners of East London by Mayor Villiers, an old fashioned philanthropist. As well as the allotments, the Olympic project has swallowed up a huge chunk of land in East London, most of it compulsorily purchased under the largest ever land acquisition programme in Britain. The transfer of the Olympic Park land is virtually a mirror image of what Mayor Villiers did all those years ago.

A thousand people, and businesses employing 15,000 workers, are already facing eviction and housing prices in the area are escalating. Those affected by the project will be mainly those on low incomes, residents of social housing,

as well as ethnic minorities such as Gypsies and Irish travellers.

The compulsory purchase of the Olympic Park land has been funded by public money, and as such it can be argued that it should stay in public ownership, post Olympics. Exactly what will happen to the land remains undecided, but both Ken Livingstone and Ruth Kelly have publicly stated that they plan to bankroll the Olympic project by selling off land within the park to developers when the Games are over. As the Olympic project runs further and further into financial difficulty, the pressure will be on to claw back as much money as possible. This will inevitably mean getting into bed with property developers who, along with the construction companies, will be the main beneficiaries of this project.

An added tragedy to this story is that much what will form Olympic Park was previously available for use, on a non-income dependent basis, as a cycle circuit, allotments, social housing, football pitches, and little nooks and crannies where all sorts of marginal business and artists had found a foothold. There was also a rave scene at Hackney Wick, with tired and dazed ravers leaving parties on Sunday mornings whilst the well dressed congregations of the many African Churches filed by. It was an area that had grown organically over more than a century and, though it has some rough edges, it had an authenticity rarely found in 21st century London. This has



Photograph by Mike Wells

been lost to what will more than likely be an Olympic legacy of expensive flats within gated communities; a sterile, privately owned area similar to Docklands.

It would be impossible to sell the Olympics to the nation for three weeks of sport, so those making their living out of this project have marketed it on the supposed benefits of a legacy which remains unplanned. The project has central government backing and New Labour controls all four of the boroughs

in which the Olympic Park is situated. With the Olympic Delivery Authority awarding planning permission to itself the Olympic project can be pushed through virtually unchecked.

Sunday's march from Hackney Town Hall to the new security gates of the Olympic construction site was a sign of the public's misgivings over this deeply flawed project. After the march there was a meeting where discussions were held relating to development and regeneration. One interesting point

covered in this discussion was the way these large projects evolve. First plans are made, then a so-called consultation takes place and then the work begins. However the meeting agreed that the consultations were generally a public relations exercise and that they made little difference to the outcome of projects, which are usually forced through despite any public misgivings. The Olympics appears to be a case in point.

Mike Wells

DUBLIN SOCIAL CENTRE

The Seomra Spraoi collective was formed around December 2004, with the aim of creating a space in Dublin to emulate the autonomous social centres of other European cities. Almost three years later, the collective have launched a new social centre off Capel Street in Dublin. It's being used for benefit gigs and political meetings, arts/crafts workshops, screen-printing, banner-making and bike workshops. Entertainment includes a weekly movie night, a contemporary storytelling night, and regular gigs and socials.

The centre has three computers and wireless broadband throughout the building, table tennis and pool tables,

a library and a 'zine archive, a free-shop, a kitchen and an office. All facilities are free and entertainments are generally by 'suggested donation'.

After spells in a small room in Abbey Street and a bigger room on Ormond Quay, Seomra Spraoi now occupies two floors of a building on Mary's Abbey, on the Luas line just off Capel Street. It has a big venue room, two further sizeable rooms and about five smaller rooms. It's big, it's bright and it's a bustling mix of political and non-political activity.

Since taking up residence at Mary's Abbey at the start of July, the project has moved into an exciting new phase. Lots of new faces have appeared; open weekly meetings of the collective consistently boast between 20 and 25 people; six working groups also meet regularly to make it all happen. Volunteers work a 'welcomers' rota, so that there is someone in the Seomra who can welcome you, show you around, tell you about the place and point you to the kettle.

The project's openness, accountability and democracy is an achievement – something the collective strove for from day one. Derek, who has spent time in social centres in Britain, Germany and Spain, reckons Seomra Spraoi need no longer look to the continent for inspiration. "I remember the first Seomra leaflet said the centre would be 'a model of participatory democracy', which sounds lofty, but compared to centres I've been at in Europe, Seomra Spraoi has far more people actually involved in the running of the place, and in the decision-making."

"I'm also struck here by the involvement of plenty of non-activist types. It's not a cultural ghetto, which places abroad often are. Rather than being just a hang-out for an activist community, it seems to me a place that's creating a new type of community."

There is an ongoing discussion about how expressly political Seomra

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MARCH ON MLABA

Across South Africa, shack dwellers are rejecting forced removals and asserting their right to the city in a series of popular mass protests unparalleled in post-apartheid South Africa. There have been thousands of protests in the last few years. This week has seen mass action all over the country.

On Tuesday 25th September 5,000 shack dwellers from the Joe Slovo settlement in Cape Town went to the High Court to register their intention to oppose housing minister Lindiwe Sisulu's planned forced removals. Members of Abahlali baseMjondolo were there in support. Yesterday in Johannesburg people from the Protea South, Kliptown, Thembelihle, and Thembisa settlements marched on Sisulu's offices in Pretoria. Thousands of shack dwellers are due to march on Mayor Mlaba in Durban on 29th September.

Abahlali, the largest organisation of militant shackdwellers in the country says: "It is rumoured that Mlaba will

send Ward 25 Councillor Yakoob Baig to collect the memorandum. Yakoob Baig was buried on 14th September 2005. Thousands of people have participated in the discussions that have flowed into the development of our carefully worked out memorandum. We do not intend to give it to a ghost. We are finished with Baig, just as we are finished with Bachu and Dimba and all the rest of the councillors. They have never spoken for us and we took a decision, two years ago, to speak for ourselves.

"While Abahlali are marching through Clare Estate and Sydenham, the policy-making elites will be meeting with the business elites in the ICC for their 'Housing Summit'. While they plan how to make money in the name of the housing crisis we will be marching. On the Esplanade an urgent application will be heard in the High Court. It has been brought by Abahlali to interdict the notorious gangster landlord Ricky Govender

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Home and away

Total protest

Around 30 activists blockaded a Total petrol station in Yorkshire to protest against the company's heavy involvement with the military junta in Burma which is responsible for the deaths of several protesters in just the last few days.

Total is in a joint venture with the Burmese dictatorship in the Yadana gas project, which earns the regime hundreds of millions of dollars every year. Aung Sun Suu Kyi, the democratically elected leader of the Burmese government under house arrest, says: "Total has become the main supporter of the military regime".

A mix of students and locals stood, sat or drummed across both entrances to the forecourt for an hour and a half. Holding a banner reading 'Totalitarian Oil-Fuelling Oppression in Burma', they leafleted and spoke to passers-by and motorists. A few drivers were not so supportive, including one truck driver who carried on driving into the protesters in the entrance way even as they banged frantically on the windscreen. Even a local cop (who had previously tried to shove protesters off the road) decided to tell the driver to back off. However, most drivers were supportive and chose not to try and cross the blockade. Although many people were aware of the situation on Burma, they had not heard of Total's involvement.

NI classroom assistants on strike

Pickets are being held outside special schools and some other schools in Northern Ireland as a strike by classroom assistants gets under way. The dispute involves up to 7,000 classroom assistants and has been dragging on for over ten years. It centres on salaries and pay grades. Most special schools are expected to be closed by the strike and many other schools are likely to have to send pupils home at lunchtime.

John Corey, General Secretary of NIPSA, the main union involved, said the dispute would show the anger of the assistants, who are all women, at the shameful way they had been treated and that they were determined to win fair pay. He said the employers had known for months about the possibility of a strike and then they had come in with too little, too late. Talks were held at Stormont between representatives of four unions and the five education boards who are the employers. These ended with both sides appearing optimistic about a possible settlement that would avert a planned follow-on strike.

The Stormont Education Minister, Caitriona Ruane, said yesterday she was convinced the dispute could be resolved through dialogue.

This will be one of the first tests on the industrial front for the new Northern Executive.

New social centre in Liverpool

At 7pm on Saturday 15th September, the door was unlocked at Next To Nowhere in Bold Street, and Liverpool's new social centre was 'officially' opened, although there weren't any mayors or anything like that. However, there was a whole week of great events, starting with a party and ending with a film night.

Next to Nowhere is a radical social centre built and run by activists from the Merseyside area. Located on Bold Street beneath News From Nowhere bookshop, there is a vegan cafe, a free to use computer suite and gig and meeting spaces. Eventually, they will be open to the general public, but at the moment are only open for specific meetings and events.

Around the world

DENMARK: In Denmark we are calling in solidarity with the evicted Ungdomshuset Social Centre, for a mass squat occupation involving thousands of people. This will take place on the 6th October – being referred to as G-Day – G13 Ungdomshuset <http://aktiong13.dk/>.

UNITED STATES: After lengthy negotiations, 73,000 workers struck at the end of September, shutting down 80 General Motors plants in 30 states, the company's first national strike in 30 years. GM (General Motors) refused to accept the union's demand to protect workers' jobs and benefits by transferring responsibility for retirees' health to an 'independent trust', freezing cost-of-living increases and instituting a new level of benefits for new hires. The United Auto Workers union has nearly \$900 million in its strike fund, enough to cover a two-month walkout. Although at press time, it appeared as though the strike has been settled, the grievances are long running and deep and the accord may be temporary.

UNITED STATES: In the middle of September, one of the Bush junta's top inspectors was accused of repeatedly frustrating inquiries into fraud by contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan. Aside from the scrambling to protect Blackwater (on which *Freedom* has previously reported), inspector general Howard Krongard is thought to have censored reports and closed investigations by refusing to send investigators to Iraq and Afghanistan to look into \$US3 billion contracts. It also appears he personally intervened to clear labour abuse charges against the lead contractor building the US Embassy in Baghdad.

In a similar vein, Marine Officer Captain Lucas McConnell, one of eight Marines facing charges in connection with the November 2005 killings of 24

civilians in the town of Haditha, was cleared of failing to properly investigate the massacre.

GALWAY, IRELAND: Ten students who are SIPTU members working in the Eye Cinema at Wellpark in Galway have been suspended after voting for industrial action. The SIPTU shop steward has been sacked.

The students had been attempting to address a number of issues in relation to their working conditions. These issues include: a failure by the cinema to pay the staff any increments for working on Sundays or after midnight, which is an entitlement under law, and also in some cases, a failure to pay several staff members holiday pay, once again an entitlement under law. To support the students please email your complaints to Edward Holdings, who own and run the cinema: info@edwardholdings.com

GERMANY: An occupied German bicycle factory is to resume production. The Bike Systems GmbH factory in the Thuringian Nordhausen, south of the Harz mountains, has been occupied by its 135 workers since 10th July 2007. Earlier this month they decided to resume the production of bicycles under self-management. In order to do this, 1,800 binding orders on bicycles must be received before 2nd October. The colleagues are working together with the anarcho-syndicalist union FAU (Freie Arbeiterinnen- und Arbeiter-Union – Free Workers-Union). They have formed a campaign (see <http://www.strike-bike.de>).

For more than two months the staff working in three shifts have kept the factory occupied. They want to prevent the definite dismantling and sale of the factory. The file for bankruptcy from 10th August is against long odds. The factory is exploited and run down, and the hall was emptied except for the

coating line. The staff currently receive unemployment compensation but hope for a new concept and a new investor.

GUATAMALA: The ITUC has condemned the brutal murder of Marco Tulio Ramirez Portela, Secretary of Culture and Sports of the Guatemalan Banana Workers Union of Izabal, SITRABI.

Marco Tulio Ramirez was also the brother of Noé Antonio Ramírez Portela, the union's General Secretary. He was gunned down outside his home by masked men carrying high calibre weapons as he was leaving for work at 5.45am on Sunday 23rd September.

The background to this murder is particularly disturbing. The ITUC recently protested about the forced entry into SITRABI's premises by five soldiers from the Guatemalan army at the end of July. They demanded the names of the union's leaders, the size of its membership and the nature of its activities. SITRABI complained about this incident to the authorities and only last week had a meeting at the Ministry of Defence who promised there would be an 'internal investigation'. Just five days later, Marc Tulio Ramirez was murdered, in what was clearly a targeted attack.

ITALY: The virtual strike in Second Life against IBM, which operates business centres staffed by real sales executives inside Second Life, now faces a protest organised by the RSU union representing 9,000 workers in Italy.

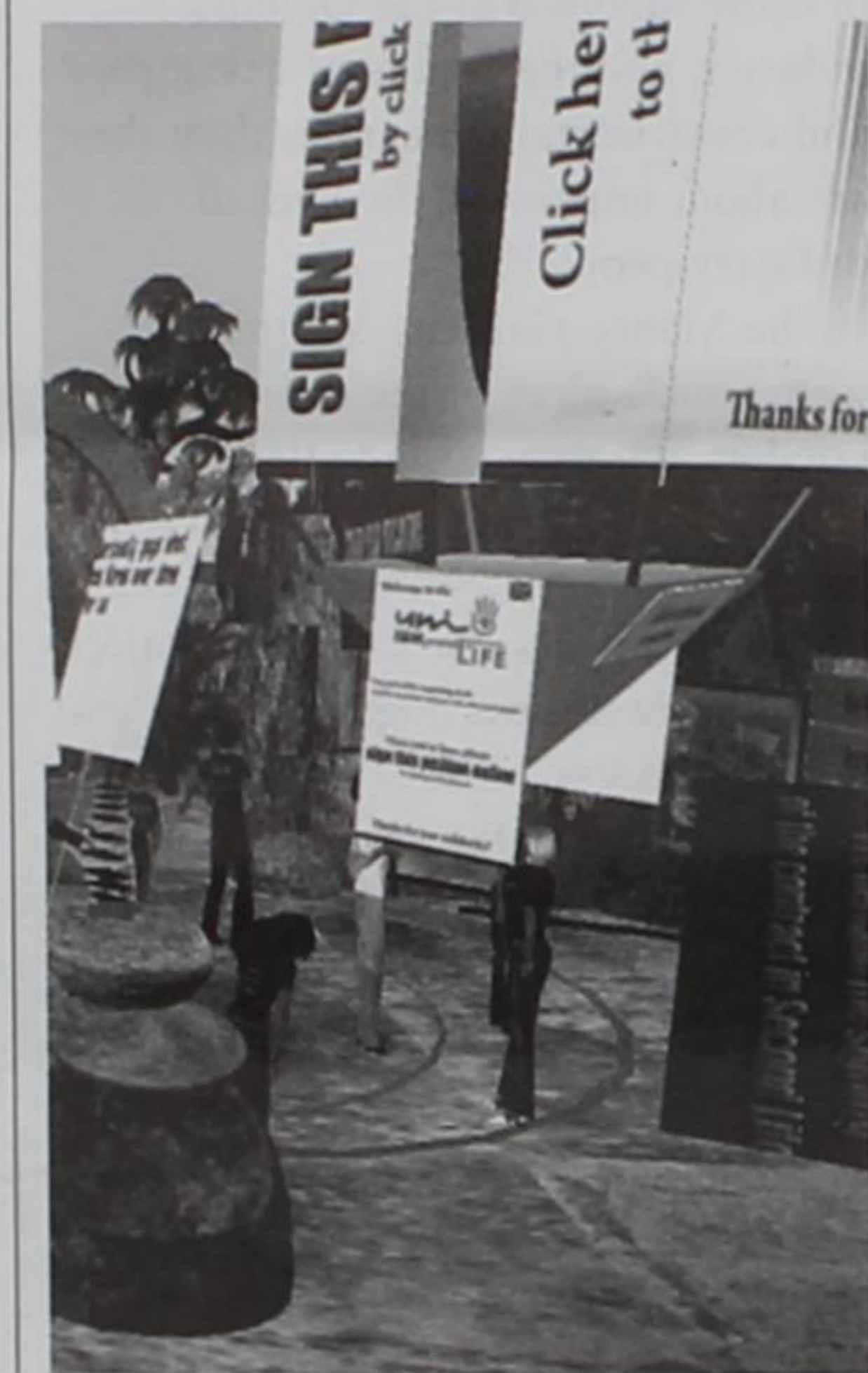
However, what is believed to be the first virtual strike is more than workers' avatars picketing, wearing strike T-shirts and carrying signs. The RSU and Union Network International have lined up support from other international unions, and IBM workers in eighteen countries are expected to take part in today's action.

"During the talks to renew IBM's Italian internal collective agreement, the works council, supported by the majority of IBM Italy employees, asked for a small salary increase. IBM responded by cancelling their 'productive results benefit', resulting in a loss of 1000 euros per year for each employee. For a company that wants to lead in corporate social responsibility, this is unacceptable."

The union responded by calling the protest, organised through Uni (Union Network International), a global union network claiming 15 million members in 900 unions worldwide including affiliates in the UK.

Using email, blog and union networks, it has invited supporters from around the world to join their picket lines at IBM's virtual 'islands' in Second Life, which it uses to promote the company and build new links with customers.

Real-life protest pickets outside IBM offices in Italy will accompany the virtual picket with workers handing out information on the dispute.



Prison news

Anti-fascists jailed

Maksim and Vladislav are anti-fascists from Minsk, who are doing three years sentences in Belarussian camps for their activities. They support football club MTZ-RIPO, which is famous for its uncompromisingly anti-fascist fans.

Maksim turned 18 years old in late July. He has been in the anti-fascist movement for three years, and was one of the organisers of Food Not Bombs in Minsk, which made actions in Gorki park, Victory square and other places in the city.

In December of 2006 they had an encounter with nazis, who ended up being defeated. One of the nazis figured out that Maksim was participating in the event, and he went for the cops. Eventually Maksim and Vladislav were sentenced to three years for "aggravated hooliganism", that is statue 339 part two of the Belarussian criminal codex.

Friends are asking for letters of support to be written to Maksim and Vladislav. Their addresses are:

- Gubski Maxim, VK-2-21, Batowa str. 4 Bobruisk, 213800 Belarus
- Vladislav Vladimirovich, Plyashkevich, IK-10 otryad 4, Novopoltsk-5 Vitebskaya oblast, 211440 Belarus

International day of solidarity

It's now almost two years ago since the sentences of José Delgado and Gabriel Da Silva (14 and 13 years respectively), were declared. Long sentences for an escape from yet more imprisonment by briefly taking hostages during a confrontation with the police.

Both had escaped a couple of months before after an imprisonment of 20 years in the gulag of the Spanish state. Both wanted to be free and finally continue the struggle outside that they have been fighting inside. Both stayed true to the anarchist struggle and its principles in spite of years of being locked up in the infamous FIES isolation regime and for that they have to pay with more prison, now in Germany. Of course

the judges didn't listen to their past, they only used it as an argument against them. They were convicted because they are anarchists and we can't forget that.

In the meantime they're under a regime of permanent control. José already went through four prisons and often has to undergo restrictive measures. After a series of conflicts with the prison authorities, for four months, he can only get visits behind glass.

This was originally supposed to be for three months, after they found him with cannabis after a visit. Recently though, this turned into a permanent 'security measure'. José refuses to accept visits behind glass. Judicial steps were taken against this measure but these can drag on for a while. Gabriel's situation is similar. He describes his regime as "similar to FIES (and in some perspectives even worse)".

An international mobilisation in solidarity with José and Gabriel and with all prisoners in struggle was called on the 29th September at the

prisons of Rheinbach and Aachen in Germany, and any support for the pair will be welcomed.

- José Fernandez Delgado, JVA Rheinbach, Aachenerstrasse 47, D – 53359 Rheinbach, Germany
- Gabriel Pombo Da Silva, JVA Aachen, Krefelderstrasse 251, D – 52070 Aachen, Germany

For more information on prisoner struggle in the UK, go to:

- ABC Brighton, PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ, email: brightonabc@yahoo.co.uk
- ABC Bristol c/o Kebele, 14 Robertson Road, Easton, Bristol, BS5 6JY, UK website: www.geocities.com/bristol_abc email: bristol_abc@yahoo.co.uk
- ABC Leeds PO Box 53, Leeds, LS8 4WP, UK, email: leedsabc@riseup.net website: www.myspace.com/leedsabc
- ABC Manchester PO Box 326Sale, Manchester, M33 4YQ email: mail@manchesterabc.org.uk website: www.manchesterabc.org.uk
- ABC Norwich c/o Norwich Anarchists via norwichanarchists@hotmail.com or PO Box 487, Norwich, NR5 8WE

News

Deaths in custody

Following a demonstration at HMP Send, Pauline Campbell writes on the disturbing increase in deaths in custody

Figures from the Forum for Preventing Deaths in Custody show almost 600 people die annually in prisons, police cells and other units. Two-thirds of the deaths are natural causes, the figures reveal, the rest being self-inflicted, accidents, overdoses or killings.

The forum's chairman said the number of deaths in custody was too high. The figures show that in the year to April 2007 there were 523 deaths in custody, the vast majority of them being natural causes in mental health hospitals.

The total figure covers deaths in prisons, police cells, secure hospitals and juvenile units and it is the first time the figures from across the criminal justice system have been brought together. The figures also include 73 self-inflicted deaths in prisons and a further 41 in secure hospitals.

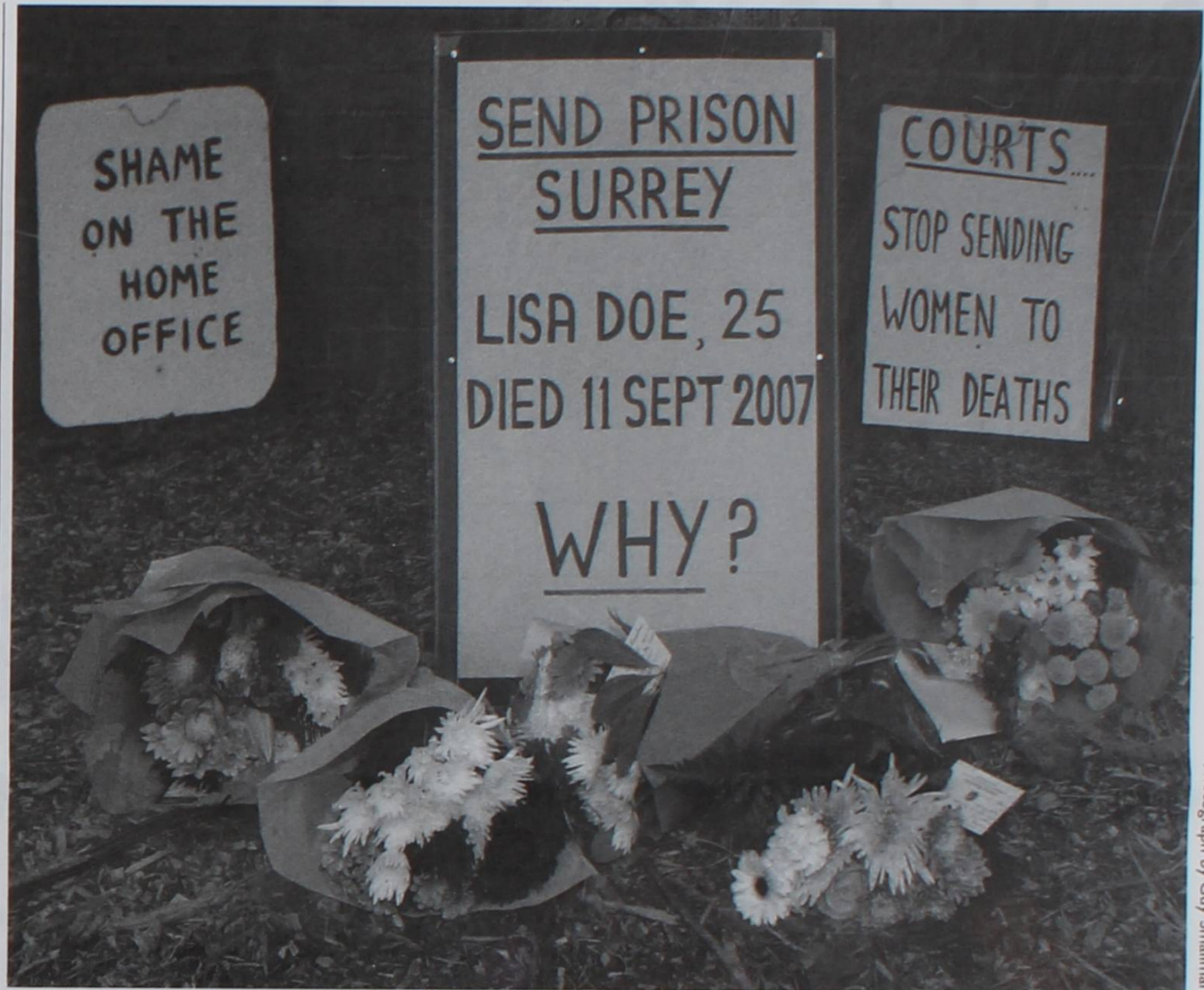
Pauline Campbell writes: The protest on 20th September 2007 was the 26th demonstration to be held since protests began in April 2004. It seeks to demonstrate against the tragic death of the young mother Lisa Doe, aged 25 who died on 11th September 2007 while in the care of HMP Send, Surrey. Lisa Doe is the seventh woman to die in prison so far this year. Thirty-nine women prisoners (including Lisa Doe) have died since Sarah Campbell's death in 2003, and lessons are not being learned.

A small group of protesters held a peaceful three-hour demonstration outside HMP Send and, for part of the afternoon, were joined by two

relatives of Ms Lisa Doe, who laid flowers in memory of their loved one. At 2pm, Mr Andy Peacock, Head of Reducing Reoffending (Duty Governor for the day) emerged from the jail, and spoke to protesters, but said he was unable to comment on Ms Doe's death. A Serco prison van was stopped as it attempted to enter the jail. The driver was informed that protesters considered the jail to be unsafe, in view of the recent death, and he was asked to take the women to a place of safety. Surrey Police were summoned to the prison. The Sergeant indicated that Section 14, Public Order Act 1986, would be invoked if the prisoner transport van was not allowed to proceed into the jail. The Serco vehicle was eventually allowed to enter the prison, and no arrests were made. A number of visitors to the jail spoke to protesters, and expressed concern about the physical and mental wellbeing of their loved ones held in HMP Send.

The Conservative MP for Mole Valley, Sir Paul Beresford, was invited to attend the demonstration, but did not respond to the invitation. The protest was attended by Sky Television; local reporters and photographers, and was also covered by local radio. At the end of the afternoon, protesters left bouquets of flowers and a memorial placard at the prison entrance, in memory of Ms Doe.

Another woman has died, and another family is left to grieve. This latest death at HMP Send brings into sharp focus the prison's custodial care record. Two young mothers have lost



Photograph by Guy Smallman

their lives at Send Prison this year: Emma Kelly on 19th April 2007, and Lisa Doe on 11th September 2007. It is particularly worrying that both women were on 'suicide watch' when they died.

Courts must act responsibly and

stop sending women, many with psychiatric and drug-dependency problems, to the punitive regime of a prison, when they are in need of treatment and care. Unless and until this inhuman practice stops, more families will have to deal with the

tremendous pain and anger resulting from the death of their loved ones.

Pauline Campbell is the bereaved mother of Sarah Elizabeth Campbell, 18, who died while on 'suicide watch' in the care of Styal Prison, 2003.

Latest nuclear 'consultation'

On 8th September, I attended an event in Liverpool organised by a major public relations firm for The Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR) formerly The Department of Trade and Industry, headed by John Hutton, Cabinet Minister, member for Barrow-in-Furness (of Trident fame). Mr Hutton was opening and closing speaker. It was one of nine such meetings being held around Britain that day entitled Talking Energy: The Future of Nuclear Power. Its purpose was to "help Government take a decision ... on building new nuclear power stations". But it seems that decisions had already been taken, and this exercise was designed to engineer our approval.

The *Guardian* (13th August 2007) reported that our hosts, DBERR, had secretly briefed the government that they fell a long way short of agreed-on targets for "green energy", but they could "wriggle-out" of them.

About 80 randomly selected voters came from around the north-west. The event was billed as a 'Government

consultation' in the invitation, saying that "You will be given all the information you need to take part in this discussion" (but only things that the nuclear industry will permit, they should have added). It was obvious how 'loaded' this event was going to be. The media reported that Friends of the Earth and Green Peace had refused to contribute, which was the right thing to do.

Most of the day was spent in telling us about how global warming is caused by carbon emissions polluting the atmosphere. Their answer: nuclear power, which only causes some carbon emissions. Carefully, avoided were the facts about the problems caused by that option, and how the costs of it far outweigh the benefits (present nuke-waste clear-up is £52 billion). Nor was there any assessment of how such material will mix with other bad stuff in the environment. Throughout, was the hidden assumption that there is such a thing as "safe doses of radiation", which is like saying that there are 'safe' doses of poison. No-one refutes the claims that exposure to

radiation causes genetic damage; defective births and sterile plant life. However, we were given the impression that nuclear waste can be safely stored for ever. It was not mentioned that this is a technology which can only be tried and tested in the long term. Among the half-truths, given as information, we were told that some Trades Union support nuclear power, with no mention of those which are opposed to it.

Brief opportunity was given for us to study material for discussion, followed by questions "to test opinions". But the answers were assumed in the ways in which questions were put to us and feedback from the small-group discussions showed much misinformation about alternatives to nuclear energy like wind power.

Summing-up found participants who may have been in favour of nuclear power were still highly suspicious of the government's hopes of passing it on to the private sector: "If they made such a mess of the railways and hospitals, what's next??"

Martin S. Gilbert

Battle of Lewisham

Saturday 15th September saw a commemorative event for the 30th anniversary of The Battle of Lewisham. Around 60 people gathered at Clifton Rise to begin a walk along the route the fascists planned to take.

On the 13th of August 1977 the fascist National Front attempted to march from New Cross in London to Lewisham. The march through an immigrant area was deliberately provocative, and protected by a huge police presence. Both the NF and the cops however bit off more than they could chew that day as thousands of antifascists and local people mobilised to confront the march. For the first time, riot shields were used by British police (who had previously only used them in the north of Ireland) and there was fierce hand to hand fighting, with more than a hundred antifascists arrested. But the march was utterly smashed, and the NF routed. It was a decisive event in British antifascist history, and one from which the NF never recovered.

One of the many antifascists arrested that day was John Bowden. In the weeks

before the march, John had been involved in mobilising support for the counter-demo, and was arrested on the day for throwing a smoke flare at the NF as they lined-up to march from New Cross. As John Bowden was unable to attend the event himself, a supporter (also a veteran of the battle) spoke about John's role, and 'Free John Bowden' stickers lined the entire route.

At 3pm with sun shining the walk began with a few speakers giving the assembled group a taste of the action of that day, 13th August 1977, and what to look out for along the route. There were about six stops along the way with speakers giving a description of their experiences that day. The ANTIFA banner was unfurled at each stop, the only banner on view on the day. The walk itself finished up at the clock tower in Lewisham where the walk and talk were wound up by the inevitable hijack speech from the SWP. All in all the walk was a success and even though it took the best part of three hours to complete all in attendance seemed to enjoy the day.

Mark Barnsley

News

Fresh clashes in Bangladesh

As the struggles of the garment workers escalate again in Bangladesh, Ret Marut reports

New clashes have broken out in Dhaka's industrial zone. Up to 25,000 garment workers came out on a wildcat strike and fought both police and the management-hired thugs with over 50 people, including cops, being injured – some seriously.

The trouble began at the Nasa Group factory, who are supposedly one of the more 'responsible' employers – Nasa supply Primark in the UK and Wal-Mart in the USA amongst others. Nasa workers had been on strike for two days demanding payment of wage arrears, bonuses and extra holiday allowances. Whilst demonstrating at the factory gates – in defiance of the government's ban on protests – workers learned that management had now decided to indefinitely lock them out of the factory. Reports stated that 3,000 workers responded to the lockout by marching to the nearby Sepal Group factory to picket workers there. Fighting then broke out between the workers and thugs hired by factory bosses. The Sepal workers initially refused, but later did join the Nasa strikers – as did many other factories, bringing up to 25,000 workers on the streets. As the hired thugs joined forces with hundreds of cops and army personnel against the workers, a large area became a battlefield. Twenty factories were damaged, buses were burned and roads blocked.

The background to the present unrest is the still unresolved enforcement of the minimum wage and conditions agreement of June 2006. Though the ready-made garment employers feder-

tion, the BGMEA, claim 97% adherence to the agreement, unions say the real figure is that only 20% of 4,000 ready-made garment factories have implemented the agreement. The government has said it will take action against any employer not complying by 30th September; yet they have never enforced similar threats in the past, having already deferred the deadline twice.

Unpaid wages and brutal work conditions remain commonplace – strikers were quoted as saying that the owner used to force them to work under inhuman conditions. They alleged that factory officials would forfeit a significant part of the salary and overtime bill if anyone was found taking rest even for a minute during work hours. One of them said, "They beat us up even for a minor mistake" (*Daily Star*, 23rd September 2007). Even the cops blame the employers for the unrest. "We asked them to resolve the issue to avoid untoward incidents. But they said they were not bound to have talks with the workers," said a top police official seeking anonymity.

The renewed unrest is a setback for the caretaker government. Its western backers will be unimpressed with its inability to contain the class struggle, which has in recent weeks found a new burst of energy in the ready-made garment sector. Nor will western buyers be impressed by more labour unrest; some were already put off by last year's major troubles in the garment factories. Garments are Bangladesh's biggest export earners



with sales abroad earning more than nine billion dollars last year, or three-quarters of the country's total export earnings.

On taking power in January the caretaker government presented itself as determined to clean up the rampant corruption throughout the political and commercial life of the country. The army has pursued relentless anti-corruption purges against leading politicians and businessmen (alongside

World Bank/IMF-directed privatisations). But now evidence has begun to appear that the present regime is taking its own advantages from its ruling position.

The continuing high level of militancy among ready-made garment workers appears to have made government and employers so far reluctant to push for any decisive confrontation with the predominantly female (90%) workforce. Yet they have felt confident

enough to largely continue to refuse to conform to last June's agreement on wages and conditions. Workers and their families suffer rampant inflation of basic goods and a decline in real wages – wages that are already less than adequate to guarantee survival. As conditions for the Bangladeshi poor continue to deteriorate, circumstances lead one to think that – sooner or later – something has got to give.

Original article and updates at libcom.org

Burmese uprising

The anti-junta demonstrations across Burma recently mark the largest peaceful protests against the military regime in the country since 1988.

After the military's mid-week 'crack-down' on the Monks protest, many thousands of Burmese civilians have joined the rallies. It is thought that there are about 400,000 monks, who are well organised nationally and who historically have instigated social change in the country. In opposition to the junta the monks are closely linked to their communities. Increasingly, as the economic and social situation deteriorates, buddhist temples have become HIV-Aids clinics, orphanages and schools and provide the only social-welfare in the country.

The Burmese junta has now banned gatherings of more than five, and sent thousands of troops to take control of the streets. There have been reports from Mandalay that the military have used live electricity to disperse crowds.

Nearly twenty years after the 1988 uprising which was violently quashed, the regions political and economic situation is significantly different. China is now in a difficult position and its international profile is under scrutiny. The shooting of a Japanese journalist covering the demonstrations has led to an explicit threat from the EU's most powerful political grouping that China's 2008 Olympics faces boycott unless it intervenes. China's support for the Sudanese Government has already led activists to dub the 2008 games as the 'Genocide Olympics' forcing Beijing to persuade the Sudanese government to accept a UN peace plan.

Economic trading between China and Burma has increased by almost 40% this year alone and is estimated to stand at around \$US1 billion. The Chinese have been the biggest arms supplier to the Junta since 1988. At the same time Burma supplies China with primary materials such as timber

and minerals and China hopes in the future, energy in the form of gas. The political situation in Burma and the uprising against the junta has lose parallels with the kind of situation that most threatens China's own one-party political system. Early this year China and Russia both vetoed the UN Security Council resolution to release political prisoners and improve human rights in Burma. Although it is reported that in June of this year China held a meeting in Beijing between US and Burma envoys and contacts in the opposition.

The demonstrations have come in the same week as the UN General Assembly has reconvened in New York, with some leaders calling for an emergency meeting of the Security Council. Placing pressure on international politicians may just provide some space for the Burmese people to take a greater role in the creation of their future.

Victoria Harris

Egyptian protest

Thousands of workers have taken control of one of Egypt's biggest state-owned textile factories in a continuing protest over pay and work conditions. The workers also want the head of the company to be sacked, and are demanding the release of five representatives who were detained by police on Monday 24th September.

The strike at the Misr Helwan Spinning and Weaving Company's factory in Mahalla al-Kubra began on Sunday. A strike at the plant last year led to a wave of labour protests across Egypt.

The industrial action in December forced the government to back down and meet the workers' demand for annual bonuses equivalent to 45 days' wages. But representatives for the workers said the textile company did not fulfil its promise despite posting profits of 217 million Egyptian pounds (\$39 million) for the last financial year, and are now demanding a fair share.

The protests by an estimated 27,000 workers brought the textile company

to a standstill. Groups of employees beat drums and chanted slogans demanding the dismissal of the chairman of the board, Mohib Salah al-Din, and criticising the management of the government holding company which owns the factory.

Workers demand raises and rights. They also called for the dismissal of the representatives of the government-approved labour union who visited them on Sunday.

The protests intensified on Monday after the public prosecutor ordered the detention of five of the workers' representatives on charges of inciting the strike, unlawful gathering and destruction of public properties.

There are fears that labour unrest might spread to other low-paid industries as it did last year. While it is much easier to crush a handful of political protesters in Cairo, using police force against thousands of striking workers could prove to be a far more difficult task.

Feature

The union business

An anarchist who worked for trade unions talks about the lessons he's learned

As an anarchist who worked for trade unions from 1986 until this spring, 'RPG' talks to *Freedom* in this interview about the lessons he has learned over the past decade. 'RPG' is also a member of both the AF (Anarchist Federation) and the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World).

Freedom: How did you originally get into union work?

'RPG': My family firmly believed that the labour movement was the only hope for working class people like us – my dad still does. My first job, after a brief spell at a paper mill in north Kent, was working for the Labour Party in the House of Commons. The MP I worked for lost her seat in 1986 so I lost my job. Luckily there was a vacancy as a researcher at Apex, which I applied for and got.

At that stage my motivation was very much about wanting to do something for my class but my year with the Labour Party meant I started to realise how out of touch people at the top of the movement were with the working classes. Although the MP that I worked for represented the people of Thurrock in Essex which included poor working class towns like Grays and Tilbury she actually lived in Richmond and had a doctorate in theology!

How long were you at Apex for, were you part of their merger with the GMB?

I worked for Apex for just a year. The merger was actually the reason I left. It came out of weakness. Apex was losing members as its traditional base – clerical workers in the car, steel and coal industries – was eroded as Thatcher destroyed Britain's manufacturing industry.

Rather than look to recruit more workers (like clerical staff in the city of London where employment was growing) it took the easy option and merged with a bigger union.

The GMB at the time, led by John Edmonds, was seen as the great hope for the future of unions by the Labour right as it promoted so-called 'credit card' unionism. Rather than recruit workers on the basis of class interest and solidarity, Edmonds thought that offering cheap loans, AA membership and credit cards would bring the punters in. It didn't. Despite further mergers the GMB has declined in membership and is trying to merge itself. You can still get a GMB credit card – although I notice its charging 13.9% interest! I couldn't stomach the GMB's politics so I quit.

You moved on to Prospect, what did you take from that?

They represented civil service engineers and scientist in government. The big issue during that time – which I was closely involved in – was a new pay deal which my union had signed but the other civil service unions had opposed. This deal included performance pay.

Prospect, then called IPCS, had been given a sweetener by the Tories to break ranks, which was an independent review of pay levels compared to the private sector, plus, compared to what other civil servants were getting, an okay pay increase to get onto the deal. This was a classic Tory tactic – divide and rule.

Sadly the union fell for it, promising their members a big catch-up. Trouble was the 'jam tomorrow' never came. After nearly a year negotiating with the Treasury we got very little out of the review. In the meantime the other unions had also accepted performance pay because their members were worried they would lose out. In fact they also got very little and the Tories were able to bring performance pay into the civil service.

The unions were also weakened which helped speed up privatisation. When I worked for IPCS there were five or six unions representing civil servants. Too often we were competing with each other rather than working together for the common good of members. One union makes a lot of sense to me. That's one reason I'm an IWW member.

Next was the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP), were there any major disputes there while you were involved?

A couple of years after I joined the CSP there was nearly a national NHS dispute when the Tories tried to muck around with the independent Pay Review Body.

Members were furious – particularly as pay levels were being cut back and the Tories were trying to introduce performance pay and local bargaining into the NHS. We, along with other unions undertook an 'indicative' ballot – basically testing whether members would be willing to take industrial action over national bargaining – and got a big yes vote back. There was then a big march and rally in London. In response the government called talks.

On the morning of them having a coffee with colleagues from other allied health professions union I read in the *Guardian* that there would be no dispute! We knew nothing about it but basically the big unions had already done a deal which allowed limited local bargaining. Rather than negotiating with the government we spent most of the day arguing with the likes of Unison and MSF (now Unite) who wanted us to sign up to the deal



Mixing industrial and environmental action on 12th April 1997

even though it included what our members and theirs opposed – local bargaining.

Although we got a side deal on the back of this, understandable CSP members felt that we had let them down. By that stage I had reached the conclusion that the people at the top of unions are more interested in status and power than their members' concerns.

Did you see people compromising during your time in the union structure?

Most people who chose to work for trade unions do so for the right reasons – at least at first. There is plenty of evidence that most union officers are politically to the left of their membership. At my first meeting with CSP stewards I was shocked that the majority of them were reading the *Express* and *Mail*! I know a lot of really sound people who work in unions although a number have left in recent years out of disillusionment.

The problem I think lies higher up and with the whole structure. I spent nearly four years negotiating. I spent nearly with the new NHS pay system and spent longer with government officials and union national officers than members. There is no question that unions spin things – highlight the good bits of deals, twist stats, bury bad news and compromise.

Sometimes compromise might be necessary to get something through

but too often that's not what it's about. Look at the recent NHS pay 'dispute'. Unions rattled their sabres when the government staged this year's offer in England, some, including the RCN even threatening industrial but did any of them actually ballot? No. In the end they are likely to settle for a few scraps. No wonder that members are disillusioned.

Personally I tried not to compromise and tell things like they are but there were times, particularly earlier in my career when I was told to 'sell' pay deals to members.

What conclusions would you draw towards the TUC unions from your experiences?

I have always thought it vital that anarchists don't ignore trade unions. That's why a few of us set up the Anarchist Trade Union Network a few years back. Millions of workers belong to them so we should make sure our voice is heard.

The work-based initiatives that AF, Sol Fed and IWW are taking like the Education Workers Network and Radical Health Workers Association are really important. As an individual worker belonging to a union makes sense. Unionised workplaces are better places to work in but from a collective point of view reformist unions will never deal with the root cause of the problems working people face – they are not about class struggle. However the industrial relations academic John Kelly has shown that those unions that

are the most militant – RMT, FBU and the postal workers get the best results for their members. We need to get the message over to workers.

Reformist unions are too distant from member's workplaces and everyday concerns. Workers are more than able to organise and defend themselves. We need though to link things. It was great when Earth First! and Reclaim The Streets joined up with the Liverpool Dockers, mixing industrial and environmental action and throwing in an international perspective on top. Local groups are important here too. The work Leicester IWW, for example, has been doing trying to stop the closure of a local post office or the Sol Fed Northampton with their local hospital. That is something I hope we can do in the East Kent AF.

What other lessons from your time there would you want to pass on?

I started working for trade unions over twenty years ago because I thought that they were part of the solution. They are not. They are part of the problem. That's why I left. Although I was a trade unionist, I still advocate that anarchists need to engage with unions at the workplace level but that we need to point out the problems with them and help build autonomous rank and file initiatives.

Commentary

FREEDOM

Volume 68 Number 19

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

It's been a hive of activity here as we make our preparations for the Anarchist Bookfair this year, which will be held at the new venue of Queen Mary University on Mile End Road in the heart of the East End of London, the birthplace of anarchism in Britain.

The Bookfair is the largest and most important regular gathering of anarchists in the world, and reflects the full range of anarchist groups, publishers and activity. Alongside the latest books, magazines, pamphlets and all the other stuff, there will be meetings and discussions on all aspects of anarchist activity, as well as a professionally run creche and hot food. And if that wasn't enough, there's also anarchist cabaret with Tony Allen and others throughout the day, plus a full programme of films for you to watch.

Some of the many events you might want to look out for are the anarchist quiz with Martin Howard, Ian McKay on *An Anarchist FAQ*, find out who or what the *Camden Parasites* are, and of course don't forget to visit us at the Freedom Press stall.

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Next issue

The next issue will be dated 20th October 2007 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 11th October. 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.

The libcom debate

I refer to the correspondence between Mark Barnsley and Rob Ray in the 8th September issue of *Freedom* (I haven't seen a later edition).

Whilst I haven't followed this debate in detail (and had I done so, I suspect I might well have been sympathetic to Mark's position), I am concerned that Rob's defence of *Freedom*'s editorial stance should also be extended to the 'libcom' website, given Mark's insulting reference to that site.

I have, it seems, also been the subject of some personal malicious rumour spread on a particular discussion thread on that site, though it is clearly not in potentially the same category as something similar affecting a prisoner of the state.

Some occasionally irresponsible or insulting discussion threads will inevitably occur but that risk is worth taking for the overall benefit of the more widespread and serious discussion and organising which the site can facilitate.

Whilst libcom and its organisers are not above criticism, I take the view that this site is, on balance, a valuable additional resource to existing and potential class struggle anarchists and communists and is worthy of our continuing support.

Hopefully *Freedom* will continue to publicise the site.

Mike (Manchester)

The Afterlives of Others

Brian Bamford (14th July) is quite right – my review of *The Lives of Others* (16th June) glossed over the "sincerity and good faith" of its East German state intelligence goon betraying his masters. After all, the film's mainstream hype gushed relentlessly along those lines, praising its 'moral' about the civilising redemptiveness of High Art soothing the savage beast – but hardly hinted at the questions I raised. And okay, "sad nasty Stasi bastard" was harsh – but, hey, Brian, can I get some poetic license, or is that too 'postmodernist' for you? Besides, reaching Captain will have been no picnic – Wiesler was so good at torture, he taught courses for the lower orders. Stricks in the crew somewhat, applauding his decency, no? Specially as, if his superiors had been Stalinist zealots with integrity (rather than slime) he

would probably have carried on wrecking lives regardless.

However, the argument that high-ranking whistleblowers and turncoats may develop benign motives is well taken – plus, sure, yer average footsoldiers doubtless have qualms too. Still, there is no record of Stasi officers actively sabotaging investigations (complaining more or less publicly years later is another matter; and anyway, the records can't necessarily be trusted!). At least with *Schindler's List* there was a documented historical Schindler. But the main point, surely, is that the film not only invites identification with the powerful, but further implies that change hinges entirely on their vicissitudes – a staple propaganda trope of Hollywood and its pale imitations (whereas organised grassroots collective dissidence or struggle scarcely registers – and when it does, individual heroes usually pull the strings there too). Therefore, in general, my reviews seek neither to be authoritative nor objective (and could never be 'systematic' in covering all the angles) – preferring to expose the avalanche of bourgeois mystification otherwise plaguing the media public sphere.

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Freedom with thinking

I am not entirely clear what the title *Thinking with Freedom* (John Griffin, 30th June) means. I suppose it is that thinking is no bad thing. In essence Griffin is arguing for free will (he calls it responsibility) and claims this explains how we behave. Okay. Free will is basically thought to account for society. This is the majority view and one most anarchists (and non anarchists) believe.

Anarchy and all other beliefs including capitalism depend on society. One cannot have a political philosophy resting on any other principle. A determinist philosophy, for example, would be meaningless since everything, behaviour, would be a forgone conclusion. There would be no free will. Society is managed by reason and depends on free will.

Things are not that simple, I feel. Free will appears to be wishful thinking. Options and the exercise of choice appear to exist because our understanding of cause and effect is limited. There is an inconsistency here. Logical deduction depends on one argument leading inevitably to another. This is presumably the justification for

anarchism (and other beliefs). There is, however, no choice here and therefore no society. An explanation might be that choice is simply determined by self interest and is therefore not choice.

Griffin's arguments are, for me, incomplete. Freud, according to Griffin, thought it an instinct whereas Griffin claims it is due to "trusting obedience". Okay, but where does this obedience come from? Freud would, I guess, say that the two are the same. I am not concerned whether they are. The point is 'trusting obedience' is hardly an explanation for war (or anything else). It is simply a description of how people behave. An explanation for anger, say, is not frustration although an angry person may be frustrated. It is a description and not an explanation.

Freud was primarily concerned with Freud. Psychology is a good money making ruse. Any argument or advice that is paid for is not to be trusted. Psychology describes the human condition. Griffin appears to want an explanation, a mechanism, for our behaviour. He sees the explanation in terms of psychology – how people behave. The reason for the problems of society is according to Griffin psychotic behaviour. Even if he is correct we need to know more. We need to know why there are psychopaths and sociopaths.

Griffin's argument is that a sane society depends on personal responsibility. This is the same argument. He may be correct but what is this personal responsibility? Why should we be responsible? Are we responsible for one another or just ourselves? Perhaps responsibility has nothing to do with society.

As Griffin says, psychopaths show no responsibility. He claims authoritarian institutions encourage psychopaths. A small point perhaps but institutions are not disembodied entities. They are run by an assortment of psychopaths and are unlikely to create more psychopaths. That would not be to their advantage. It would be like a line of falling dominos – we would all become psychopaths. (Perhaps we have.) The question is what makes a psychopath? They can't be produced by institutions.

Psychopaths are invisible. They exploit people and where better to find them than in institutions. Institutions are alliances of people and are a logical product of society. (An explanation for society is that it exists for mutual exploitation.) If this is so, things look good for psychopaths. This

may be the reason for the prevalence. Griffin has perhaps argued that psychopaths are a product of society. If he is right then there is an obvious solution.

Peter Gibson

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Dublin social centre

➔ page 7

Spraoi is or should be. But the mere fact of creating and maintaining a self-managed, self-funded, non-commercial space in the heart of this most consumerist of cities, a space in which everyone relates to each other as equals, is a political act in itself.

If Seomra Spraoi is an experiment in social organisation, then its results so far are encouraging.

March on Mlaba

➔ page 1

from bulldozing the tin shack in which the Pillay family have lived for the last 16 years in Motala Heights. Last week we had a mass meeting in Motala Heights. The people unanimously asked us to march on Govender next. We have heard their cry."

see abahlali.org

Quiz answers

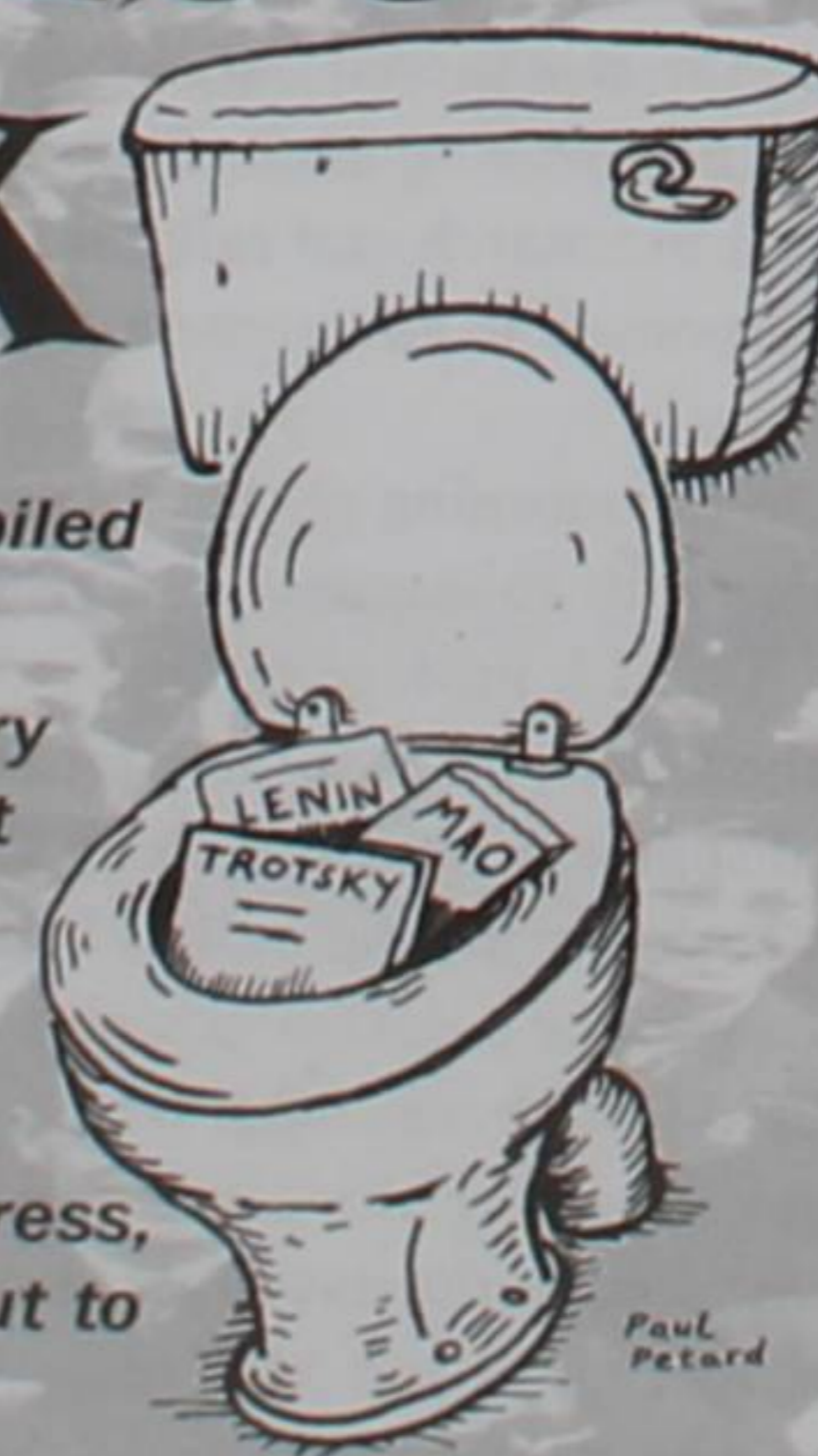
1. By means of rapid natural selection the butterflies evolved a gene to keep the bacteria in check and male numbers were up to about 40% of the population. Who says evolution only works on a geological timescale?
2. Sheikh Khalid bin Mahfouz. Most recently he got a book called *Alms for Jihad: Charity and Terrorism in the Islamic World* withdrawn using Britain's archaic, billionaire-friendly libel laws. Stories about this were spiked in the *Observer* and *Spectator*. He's also been using London courts to try to suppress books published in the US on the grounds that people in England buy them through Amazon!
3. India. The journalists in question had published articles critical of former Chief Justice, YK Sabharwal, who had ordered the demolition of buildings in Delhi, which was said to benefit his sons' business interests. The sentence is currently on hold.
4. Greenwich council in South London have spent £34,000 on smart grey uniforms for library staff. They want them to be "easily identifiable". Workers and users are not happy, wondering why the money wasn't spent on, er ... books?

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.

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REVIEW

Aussie film *Jindabyne* impressed Tom Jennings, capturing a community's complexities in a manner cinema seldom manages

Raymond Carver's 1977 minimalist morality tale, *So Much Water So Close To Home*, was previously adapted in Robert Altman's portmanteau *Short Cuts* (1993). Screenwriter Beatrix Christian's visual novel now expands its context in *Jindabyne*, showing the wider effects of grievous injuries and insults in the titular tourist town in the Snowy Mountains, New South Wales. The cinematography showcases the dramatic landscape's implacable material presence, regularly lingering on evidence of its taming, shaping and corralling – hypnotising viewers with jaw-dropping vistas while subtly influencing our attentiveness to characters whose relationships with the surrounding geography reflect, affect and work as metaphors for their emotional, family and community lives. The resulting rich texture simultaneously grounds, teases apart and weaves together the different interacting dimensions of human existence – unconscious dreams and fantasies, actions and reactions, past and present circumstances – as crises wax and wane within and among *Jindabyne*'s inhabitants.

Car mechanic Stewart (Gabriel Byrne) and his three employees plan a male-bonding fishing weekend in a hidden valley as respite from problems of work, families and women – the latter having their own issues and jealous of the men's self-indulgence but at least temporarily freed from their demands. However, having reached their idyll and casting his line, Stewart spots the body of young Aboriginal woman Susan (Tatea Reilly) floating in the river – whereupon he tethers her and persuades the others to continue their relaxation. Only belatedly raising the alarm, their callousness is pilloried in the town, the local native youth threaten to run riot, and relationships among the men and their partners unravel. Stewart's wife Claire (Laura Linney) unblocks her longstanding depressive ambivalence, repudiating him in active (but unwelcome) compassion for Susan's family while working through hitherto suppressed guilt and

anger concerning her own. Her honest desperation to find a way forward inspires the others to confront their various demons and support each other, starting at Susan's funeral.

We know from the menacing prelude that the murderer is psychotic loner Gregory (Chris Haywood). But the anticipated crime procedural, with comforting resolution of arrest and restoration of law and order (as in director Ray Lawrence's previous film, 2001's *Lantana*), is replaced by a forensic mapping of the heinous act's implications for the surrounding social ensemble. Details of the histories of personality, space and place consistently intersect and overlay each other – with Gregory himself a general building contractor responsible for maintaining the local infrastructure, implying that the pathologies threatening civilisation are intrinsic to the processes sustaining it. Similarly, the hum of gigantic pylons marking the comprehensive colonisation of the land is confused by the visitors with the mystique of wilderness – the boys' own adventure communing with nature already being thoroughly suffused with the conflicts and constraints of everyday routine. The repercussions of their gruesome discovery then demonstrate that conventional discourses of escape to greener pastures cannot wish away obscene reality.

A sorrowful social fabric

Neither can it be tolerated at home. So the community's righteous condemnation serves to displace momentary uneasy awareness of endemic racism and misogyny, via projection (mirroring the film's neglect of the police investigation), onto convenient scapegoats. Symbolically outcasting the men and their families permits normal respectable white indifference to soon return, with potential disturbance to business as usual minimised. And, despite the geographical specificity, similar patterns resonate in any society characterised by migration and stratification. These lower-class Australians are Irish, Anglo-Saxon, American, Italian, mixed-race and native in various archaic and modern permutations and inflections



of background, identification and tradition, whose struggles confound liberal multiculturalism's sedimentation of difference into patronising exoticisations of authenticity. Spiritual and political integrity instead requires pragmatic strategies to deal with tragedy and pain which refuse to externalise frustrated desire into the separate suffering of others.

Nevertheless, the choice to close with the Aboriginal smoking ceremony (which required lengthy negotiations for permission to film) flirts with sentimental redemption. However, Claire's insistence that the group pay their respects encourages them beyond the disavowal of prior contempt, having already placed her in various social and physical perils (including a near-miss with Gregory). The women elders eventually sanction their attendance – interpreting Claire's motivation as genuine, arising out of weakness rather than arrogance. Then, Stewart's faltering apology is met with disgust by the girl's father, whereby the film's acknowledgement of historic and

contemporary outrages perpetrated against native Australians counters detached truth and reconciliation with impassioned humility. Emphasising shared mundane human frailty also undercuts ritual denunciations of masculinity, pointing to the basis of true solidarity in empathetic engagement rather than moralisation – having thoroughly implicated the dynamics of relations between men and women and different generations and sections of the population in reproducing division and domination.

If the treatment of mutual uncomprehending need in marriages straining to survive their contradictions transcends the formulaic thanks to superior scripting and powerful naturalistic improvisation (with Lawrence, citing Ken Loach, favouring single takes in ambient light), *Jindabyne*'s structure of surface levels and murky depths exploits ghost story conventions most poignantly in depicting the children. Striving to overcome overwhelming anxiety originating in unaccountable parental misdeeds leads their febrile

imaginings to conjure supernatural revelations in the dangerously tempting drowned world of the lake – which also functions as the focus of the tourist economy. Here, too, traces of the past concretely haunt the present. The village was moved lock, stock and barrel to higher ground when the valley was dammed – the whole enterprise to meet metropolitan water needs, setting up contemporary socio-economics and displacing natives and settlers alike with the intransigent force of institutional authority. The echoes of submerged histories thus exert material, political, biographical, psychoanalytic, cultural and mythic influence, and this remarkable film convincingly and compassionately evokes such a density of allusion – offering no easy answers; yet optimistic that ordinary folk can negotiate the morass towards a more constructive future outside the ruin of hierarchical power.

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Jindabyne is out now on DVD.

FILM

Taking Liberties written and directed by Chris Atkins

A summary of recent attacks on free citizenship in Britain, this documentary was made for cinema because such a 'one-sided' (i.e. honest) appraisal of the Blair regime's record would not survive the requirements of 'balance' (i.e. censorship) on television. Supported by the producers of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the film apes his populist combo of comic buffoonery and acid commentary in romping through New Labour's neurotic erosion of rights to privacy, protest and freedom of speech, and the more-or-less tacit

embrace of imprisonment without trial, unaccountable extradition and torture. Emphasising the personal experiences of a wide swathe of victims – from peace protesters to those persecuted in the War on Terror – the background to a convincing picture of escalating totalitarianism is then sketched via animated vignettes of the history of legal 'checks and balances' on state power over the centuries, set against a jaunty Britpop backdrop.

Doing the rights thing

Unfortunately, the film's broad-brush knee-jerk jingoism cripples any political understanding of either past or present. Ancient constitutional precedents are

all very well for patronising children with, but the routine reality of peremptory injustice in recent decades has shaped the patterns of close monitoring and control now being ratcheted up – from Northern Ireland policy and racist policing to the internment of immigrants, and from Tory anti-union and criminal justice legislation to the intensifying harassment of 'antisocial' behaviour. After the fall-out from colonialism, kowtowing to global capitalism necessitates that living standards and welfare suffer, while lower-class community, collectivity and autonomy is hammered to shortcircuit resistance – but *Taking Liberties* is oblivious to the structural and economic

framework within which governments discipline their subjects, let alone how they achieve apparent consent for it. Instead we're asked to sympathise with rich bankers the Yanks suspect of corporate fraud – after all, 'we're all in this together'; a supposedly 'freedom-loving' people ...

The potential of mocking the powerful is further undermined by a tone veering from flippant to hysterical, with overstatements of incipient Nazi-ness among political leaders corresponding to astonishing naivete about influencing them. To Chris Atkins: "Our only hope is that Brown is desperate to claw back some of the popularity that Blair has lost, so if it becomes a big

political issue then he might turn back the authoritarian tide to try and win votes" (*Socialist Review*); and "If several thousand people go to mass lone demos the Metropolitan police will beg Gordon Brown to repeal the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act" (eyeforfilm.co.uk). In other words, *Taking Liberties* may be better than nothing for removing blinkers among viewers somehow previously unaware of what time it is. But the fatal lack of analysis or insight leaves it wallowing in middle-class moral superiority and outrage, and self-righteous symbolic protest – which ultimately comprise more a recipe for apathy than revolt.

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A Sideways Look

There are some things in life that can only be resolved by individuals. If your love life lacks a certain something, you can only work it out with your lover(s). If your neighbour's fence is too high, you can only talk to them. Other people might get involved, but it is fundamentally a transaction between individuals. There are of course other issues we face that require a different approach.

Historically, once people had been forced off the land and artisan crafts undermined by mass production, they were at the mercy of employers in the new economy. The only weapon they had as individuals was to band together and make demands collectively. These demands were not just economic; for better pay and conditions – but also political, such as the demands for the franchise as raised by the Chartists and other working class movements.

Over time, collective bargaining became the norm. Ralph Chaplin's wobbly anthem, *Solidarity Forever*, commemorates this simple truth with the line "Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one". However, those groups of workers in Britain still in collective agreements, such as in the public sector or railways, are now the exception.

Many companies prefer to bargain with individuals. They know that this way they can get away with paying less, overall. Some workers will have the strength and ability to hold out for more and win it. This has always been the case, except under the collective approach all our strengths are pooled to level things up. The system that many employers now prefer is one where things are levelled down. The costs of running a pay and rewards system using individual appraisal are high, but the companies concerned clearly see benefits. Increased specialisation has meant that there are many different roles that have to be catered for – this atomises the workforce. Many workers are micro-managed by 'managers' on scarcely higher pay, whose chief role is to hold them to targets, often set so high as to justify negative appraisals, which in turn affect pay rises. It's also little surprise that the workers most likely to lose out are women and those without the confidence that a middle class education brings.

In some places they have adopted a 'teamwork' approach, getting workers to identify with the goals and targets set by the management and compete to hit the targets, win the pay rise. It's time to rediscover a different kind of teamwork – collective action; where workers fight together for an across the board pay rise. Instead of levelling down, time to level up!

And adopting a collective approach is likely to be useful for future challenges, as there are no individual solutions to climate change, for example.

Svartfrosk

Imagine if...

Walking into the hall for the Labour Party conference for the first time in his life, Socialist Stan was hit by an appalling smell. He turned to an usher. "What is that?"

The man, who was looking a little queasy, pointed to an oily looking group sat at the podium. "It's the Tories, they're all sitting underneath the Brown banner – shit sticks to that thing you know?"

Stan glanced over at the group, which looked a little uncomfortable, though they had been invited by the most powerful people in the building and were now officially part of the top brass of the labour movement.

There was indeed a powerful stench coming from the podium, Stan was amazed that more people couldn't smell it, but many were simply walking around as though nothing was going on.

One of them raised a hand hopefully and brayed "Neh wah but the clarse wah eh? Except Iraq of course." Around him, the others clapped "Oh jolly good Tarquin, I don't like those poor people either, but we should do our best for them what? By the way old fruit, shouldn't your fist be closed when you do that?"

Stan was thunderstruck, even as he looked around he could see people who held more in common with Tarquin than with the socialist left. They all whiffed a bit.

Some though, like the usher, were wandering around looking a little dazed, holding their noses while they tried to find their seats or stood chatting in corners.

"They're faithful labourites" explained the steward. "They were old labour, and they think the party can be theirs again as long as they stick with it. Besides, where else is there to go?"

"But this place stinks of shit and death!"

The usher looked uncomfortable "Well yes, but you weren't around in the days when labour were out of power. Dark



days when Thatcher was in charge. Some of us would do anything to stop that happening again."

Quiet fell across the auditorium as Gordon Brown stepped to the podium. He cleared his throat. "Like Margaret Thatcher, I am a conviction politician ..."

The quiz

- Six years ago, males accounted for just 1% of the blue moon butterfly population on two islands in the South Pacific, because of bacteria that killed male embryos. What happened next?
- Which Saudi billionaire has succeeded in having numerous books pulped in London court judgements with no mention in the national press?
- Where were journalists recently sentenced to prison for criticising a former chief justice?
- Where in England has a council wasted money on uniforms for library workers?

Answers on page 6

Listings

7th October Stop Bombing Afghanistan walk to mark the sixth anniversary of the 2001 invasion, meet 10am at St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, 78 Bishopsgate, London EC2N 4AG, for info contact 0845 458 2564 or visit voicesuk.org

7th October South Place Ethical Society talk on Shelley and Freethought by James Herrick at 11am, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1, see ethicalsoc.org.uk, or contact 020 7242 8034 or spesupdate@yahoo.co.uk for full programme

13th October Keep Space for Peace protest at Menwith Hill, near Harrogate, North Yorkshire from 12 noon until around 4pm, see caab.org.uk or call 01423 884076

24th October Film showing of *No Sweat: Harvard Living Wage* (how students at Harvard took on university managers to help campus cleaners and caretakers win a living wage) followed by discussion of future actions by anti-sweatshop campaign group No Sweat, at 7pm, Cowley Club, London Road, Brighton, for info contact 07811 723131, bellaciao@fastmail.fm or see nosweat.org.uk

26th October Critical Mass where cyclists re-take the roads, see critical-mass.info/international.html#europe

27th October Anarchist Bookfair 2007 at Queen Mary & Westfield College, Mile End Road, London E1, from 10am to 7pm, with books, speakers, workshops, meetings, films, creche, exhibitions, food, and so much more, see anarchistbookfair.org

3rd November 'Bash the Rich!' march on David Cameron's house in Notting Hill, London, see londonclasswar.org for details.

3rd November First Annual Working Class Bookfair from 10am to 5pm at St Nicholas Church, Market Place, Durham City, sponsored by North East NUM

3rd November Gagged! benefit gig

with No Choice, KilnAboy and Gunrack at 8pm, Le Pub, Caxton Place, Newport, £3, email info@gaggedanarchist.tk or see gaggedanarchist.tk

8th November Action on Climate Change: The Time Is Now, public meeting with George Monbiot at the Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London, contact 020 7833 9311 or see campaigncc.org

9th November Books for Amnesty, all books £1 at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London WC1, contact books@amnesty.org.uk or call 07771888825

13th November Gagged! benefit gig with Give Up All Hope, AntiMaster, Jesus Bruiser and Threat Manifesto at 8pm, Le Pub, Caxton Place, Newport, £3, email info@gaggedanarchist.tk or see gaggedanarchist.tk

16th November Gagged! benefit gig with Rejected, Plinth, Gunrack and Drop Dead Darling at 8pm, Le Pub, Caxton Place, Newport, £3, email info@gaggedanarchist.tk or see gaggedanarchist.tk

30th November Critical Mass where cyclists re-take the roads, see critical-mass.info/international.html#europe

8th December International Day of Climate Protest, to demand that world leaders take the urgent action we need to prevent the catastrophic destabilisation of our global climate: *Climate Change Bike Ride* assembles at south side of Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, at 10am to arrive in Parliament Square at 1pm to join the *National Climate March* (assemble at Millbank, 12 noon to arrive Parliament Square 1pm) for the main march to a 2.30pm rally at the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square, see campaigncc.org

Contacts

East Kent Anarchists is now up and running with members from Canterbury, Swale and Thanet. If you live in Kent and want to get involved contact eastkentfed@hotmail.com

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