

FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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PF-I DON'T BELIEVE IT!

An explosive new report has found that PFI projects across Scotland could be costing around £2.1bn more than their state-run counterparts, a figure which would rise to more than £6bn if applied across the UK – enough to give every single public sector worker a £1,000 bonus with cash to spare.

The *At what cost* report, commissioned by Unison Scotland, investigated a number of projects across the country to calculate how much value for money they offered.

They found that not only were the costs of the projects massively in excess of their capital value, but that huge 'insurance policies' were being taken out, effectively eliminating the economic risks it is claimed PFI projects take on instead of the state.

The report noted: "An incredible £3.5 billion 'insurance' policy is effectively paid to the private sector to cover the risks of things going wrong with the contracts. This is despite the fact that ultimately risk is effectively retained by the public sector, as shown by the recent collapse of London Underground PPP contractor Metronet."

Analysis of official figures from 35 schemes found that in comparison the public sector was on average 6.4% cheaper than outside PFI contractors.

While the capital value of all current projects in Scotland stands at £6.4 billion, the sums PFI companies have demanded for the work come in at a

massive £22.3 billion over the course of their contracts, according to Unison.

Dave Watson, from Unison Scotland, said: "Our research published today confirms from the official figures that the scandal that is PFI is costing taxpayers in Scotland billions of pounds more than public sector funding.

"Documents show that funding new schools and hospitals the conventional way could cost around £2.1 billion less. They also show that £3.5 billion has been added to the taxpayers' bill, to massage the figures in favour of private funding.

"These are just two figures from the range of ways in which private companies are profiteering at the expense of school children, hospital patients and taxpayers. Other factors include refinancing, high rates of return, the higher cost of private financing, land sales and the PFI private equity market."

Unison pointed to a range of factors contributing to the difference in price between major public and private sector infrastructure projects, including the ability of the public sector to borrow at cheaper rates, the lack of a need to pay out shareholder dividends, and a substantial difference in available expertise.

Despite this, PFI companies have consistently undercut public sector 'bidders' in contract negotiations, thanks to a mechanism where public



NUKE DUMP TACKLE: A protester is detained in the antiatomnoy action in Pieter on 11 October. The action was protesting against the docking of a ship carrying large quantities of nuclear waste from Europe to be dumped in Russia. Putin's government have been selling the right to dump nuclear materials on the Russian people to European nuclear powers.

Photograph: Russia Indymedia

sector bids are artificially inflated to take account of the 'risk factor' of keeping work in-house.

The risk factor effectively artificially

blocks the public sector from taking on new infrastructure projects.

Unison's investigative team heavily criticised the lack of transparency

surrounding PFI projects, which are not covered by public sector freedom of information legislation, strongly

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CWU FALTERS AS PCS STAND AN OVERVIEW

As the CWU executive calls off the dispute at Royal Mail, Unison and the PCS have called strike ballots after months of prevarication and are waiting for the results as *Freedom* goes to press. A deal was struck on 12th October between Royal Mail and the CWU after TUC chairman Brendan Barber was called in to mediate between the two sides.

Catch, a member of the libcom collective, which has been covering the dispute and producing a dispatch leaflet for the workforce, explained the Royal Mail deal and its implications: "It may sound a bit conspiratorial, but I'm wondering if the CWU essentially gave them the high court injunction – they

had already made the same mistake earlier in the dispute and it's difficult to believe they would do it twice by accident.

"They have been able to present the deal when no-one is out and able to talk about it freely, and the wildcats are isolated.

"The deal is awful, they look good with that 5.4% figure thrown in, but a £175 lump sum for six months is barely 1% of an average annual postal wage – they've fudged the numbers. With flexibility it's going to go to local agreements, which are going to be done with no national support and workplaces will be isolated and crushed one by one.

"It's shocking with pensions, it's going to be a couple of years and after that they'll do it again, except this time there will be no united front. For the new workers they'll make the deal slightly better and they'll destroy final salaries for everyone else.

"I think it would be lazy to just call this a sell out though. The membership hasn't been up for it enough to stop

them doing this other than a few isolated offices.

"There's a faction who are distrustful of the union bosses but this doesn't translate into any mass action. When the shop stewards are told to go back to work by the reps they don't have the independence to stay out."

The result effectively ends the prospect of a united front between the CWU, Unison and PCS unions, which could have caused the government substantial trouble. The PCS is balloting on the defence of jobs and pay within the public sector, as Brown's government continues to try and hack away at the service. PCS members are facing below inflation pay offers, serious threats of compulsory redundancy or relocation and increasing privatisation.

Unison meanwhile are voting on strike action after across-the-board below inflation pay offers for its members, and is asking for a 5% or £1,000 increase on behalf of its 800,000 members covered by the National Joint Council (NJC) terms and conditions.

Anarchists this year have seen some major occasions to rise to, both for activists and class strugglers. Activists have claimed some success with both the mobilisation at G8 in Germany internationally, and at the Camp for Climate change in the UK.

Actions have been taken on anti-war issues, no borders, anti-prisons, in solidarity with Oaxaquenos, Burmese monks, Palestinians, against arms and nuclear power and pollution. The struggle at Titnore Woods saw activists engaging with local people to widen their support base.

Indymedia has continued to provide some excellent coverage of these events, and helped to bring together otherwise isolated groups.

However the activist movement has been conspicuous by its absence in the recent postal strike, and it remains to be seen whether it will come out to defend public sector workers. In general, its tactics have continued a familiar pattern, and have not proven deeply troubling to the government.

In class struggle organising, all the major federations have found themselves with work to do, as first the CWU, and soon the rest of the public sector, have come out and needed support.

This year has been a far busier affair than 2006, with stronger attacks on the working class than have been seen in recent times prompting stronger responses. Libcom's online work has been fantastic in providing up to the minute news, sometimes not only out-thinking the mainstream press, but even getting the stories first.

Several small victories have been scored, particularly by the IWW in Scotland with the Crichton campaign, and through solidarity actions over a range of issues and industrial actions.

But reaction times have often been slow for the federations nationally. Class struggle continues to lag behind its more colourful activist cousin in getting its agenda out to be heard, and has also proven of little lasting threat thus far.

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Home and away

ANTI-WAR: October saw the Big Blockade send-off for the year-long Faslane365 action and it went with a bang. On the day of action around a thousand people from across the UK and Europe descended on the main gates of the base.

There was also a roadblock including a tripod on the A814 to Garelochhead, leading to The Royal Naval Armament Depot (RNAD) at Coulport, Loch Long – where Trident nuclear missiles are stored. Around 100 people were arrested, and it ended at 3.30 with a closing ceremony.

ANTI-WAR: Protesters have marched down Whitehall to Parliament Square, despite being told the protest was illegal. Students, campaigners and trade unions joined the rally in Trafalgar Square, before marching down to Parliament. The group was told it could not march down Whitehall because of a law passed in 1839 which protects the right of MPs and peers to get to Westminster. But a last-minute decision to let the march go ahead was hailed by organisers, who said they had struck a “significant blow” for democracy.

ENVIRONMENT: Activists from Manchester Climate Action and Manchester Plane Stupid blockaded the security check-in of Terminal 3 of Manchester Airport this month. Passengers were denied access to the departure lounge by seven activists locked together using arm-tube devices.

MEDIA: Indymedia UK has been issued with a takedown notice from lawyers acting for Russian business tycoon Alisher Usmanov. The notice served to Indymedia charged it with publishing allegedly libellous accusations.

The author of the posting, Craig Murray, claims to have inside knowledge of the businessman's allegedly illegal dealings. Murray suggested that Usmanov has a criminal past and underworld connections.

Usmanov's lawyers told Murray that Usmanov was pardoned, and all charges against him were removed from police records. Murray responded: “Alisher Usmanov is a criminal. He was in no sense a political prisoner, but a gangster and racketeer who rightly did six years in jail. (The pardon) was achieved through Karimov, from 1991 President of Uzbekistan. Karimov ordered the ‘pardon’ because of his alliance with Usmanov's mentor, Uzbek mafia boss and major international heroin overlord Gafur Rakimov.”

JOBS: The jobs of up to 1,000 people who work for The Shaw Trust are under threat following a Government decision to place ‘Welfare to Work’ contracts for up to a million disabled people in Britain with Australian Multinational, Ingeus.

The Shaw Trust workers help several local authorities find suitable work for disabled workers through programs like the New Deal and now Pathways to Work. They work in out-reach programs in Job Centres drawing up action plans based on job seekers disabilities.

PENSIONS: New proposals which will affect 277 Citizen's Advice Bureau staff advocate replacing pension security with a money purchase scheme that provides no guarantee for workers when they retire.

The devastating announcement comes hot on the heels of a 20% cut

Around the world

CANADA: Workers at the mining company QIT Fer et Titane in Quebec have been on strike for over a month, with no end in sight.

Workers are protesting against the two-tier pension system that the company, a subsidiary of Rio Tinto, is trying to impose on new workers. Workers had already accepted a freeze on benefits to allow the company to make up pension shortfalls.

The workers are also demanding a salary increase and there are further non-financial demands.

CONGO: A report released earlier this month has accused the World Bank of encouraging companies to destructively log the world's second largest forest, endangering the lives of thousands of Congolese Pygmies.

The report into the bank's activities in Democratic Republic of Congo since 2002 follows complaints made two years ago by an alliance of twelve Pygmy groups.

An area of 600,000 square km (232,000 square miles) of forest was earmarked for logging companies.

The panel said the bank had “distorted the real economic value of the country's forests” by looking solely at the tax and revenue that increased industrial logging might generate.

DENMARK: While hundreds have been released from prison following a mass attempt to occupy a new building in Copenhagen, police are expected to



bring charges against many of the 437 people arrested.

Police used tear gas against thousands of demonstrators who had been protesting against the closure and demolishing of Ungdomshuset (Youth House) earlier in the year, and who were demanding a replacement building.

FRANCE: Interns across the country went on strike demanding that the government withdraw new laws on their freedom of movement.

Fifteen thousand interns nationwide demonstrated on Friday to further publicise their strike. In Paris around a thousand interns blocked traffic at the Place de la Bastille and held a symbolic jog under the banner ‘American jogging for an american health service’ in Strasbourg and Lyon they gave blood. Protests were held in all major cities.

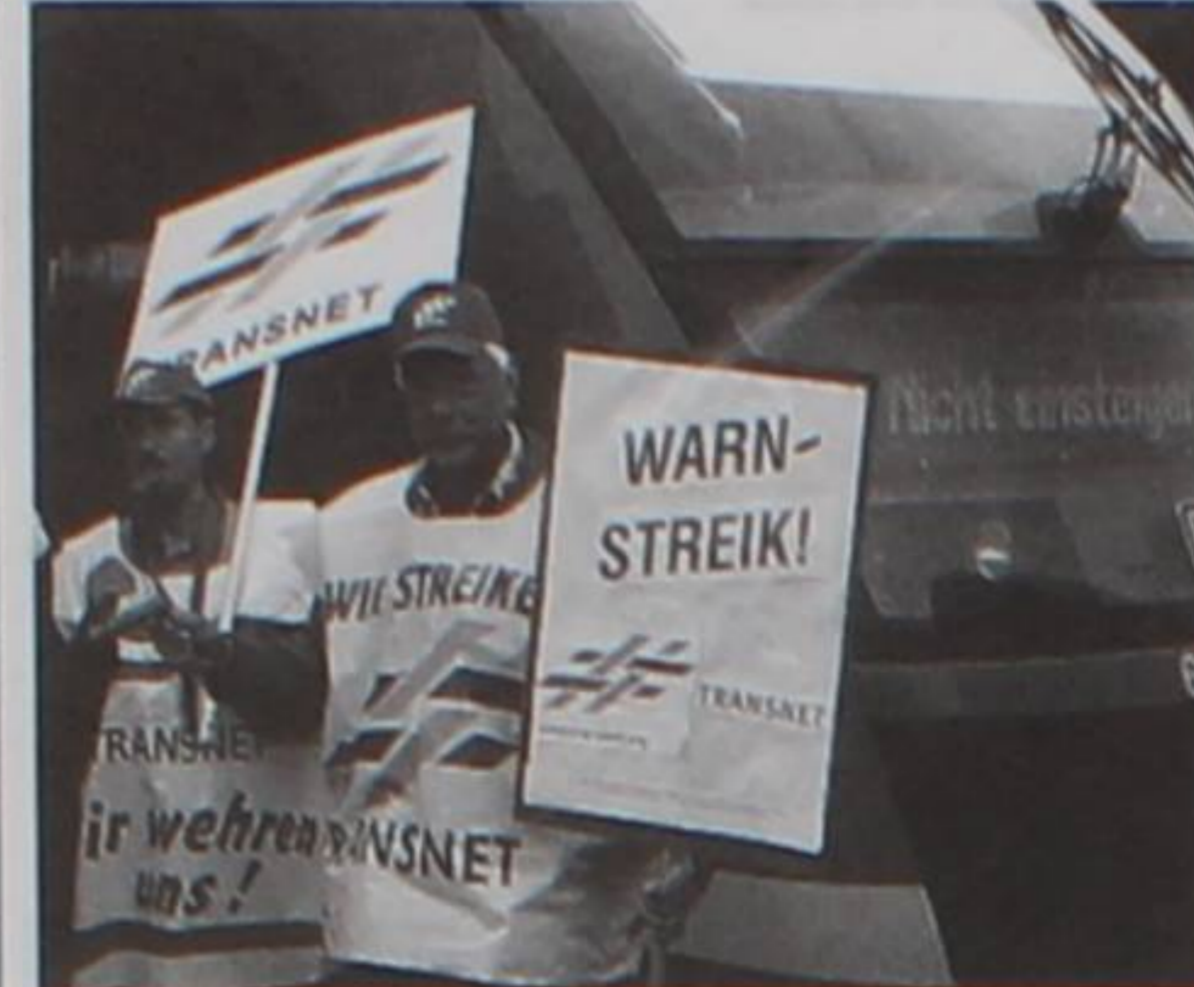
The strike began on the 27th September and with the one union that was holding out joining action on Tuesday observance is close to 100%.

The major point of contention is a new law allowing for doctors to be excluded from the state medical system if they practise in an area that already has too many doctors.

GERMANY: Workers in the GDL union went on strike earlier this month after refusing a pay offer.

In the first German rail strike since 1992, 8,000 drivers from the smallest rail union went on strike between 6am and 9am. Deutsche Bahn, the German rail company, had previously obtained a court order preventing workers from striking on national or freight services.

The strike caused the cancellation of two-thirds of the 750 planned national rail services and half of the 19,000 local services. In Stuttgart two of the metro lines were shut down and in Munich the service was reduced to a single line running every 40 to 60 minutes.



The union has rejected the original 4.5% offer made to the entire workforce of 134,000, demanding up to 31% for new drivers. They have also taken the divisive step of demanding a separate wage agreement for drivers. Deutsche Bahn has since offered 10% and a working week shortened by two hours.

HONG KONG: McDonald's has cut its free staff meals from two to one, and KFC's HK\$16.18 average hourly wage is the lowest among seven fast food chains in Hong Kong, according to a Catering and Hotels Industries Employees General Union study.

Members of the union protested at various Tsim Sha Tsui fast food restaurants on 6th October and appealed to Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yum-kuen to establish a minimum hourly wage of HK\$30 in the Policy Address next Wednesday. The union is under the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions.

MEXICO: On Tuesday 2nd October between two to three thousand students and members of the local popular resistance APPO (the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca) marched from the edge of Oaxaca city centre to the Zocalo (central square).

Among them were around a hundred masked youth who extensively spray-painted walls on the route with slogans to commemorate the 1968 student massacres, condemn the corrupt local governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, call for the release of political

prisoners and a boycott of local elections this Sunday.

SOUTH AFRICA: Student protests this month over an announcement by Wits management of fees increases and privatisation of student residences were met by police repression, rubber bullets and arrests. The Zabalaza anarchist group said in a statement: “It is clear that what is happening at Wits – the fee increases, privatisation of residence, etc. – is part of the ANC government's plan for the general neoliberal restructuring of the universities in order to turn them into “market universities” orientated first and foremost towards generating profit. This is a hard fact which both the ANCYL and Sasco students leading the protests have tried studiously to avoid admitting.”

SWITZERLAND: Protestors against the far-right Swiss People's Party (SVP) took control of the main square outside parliament, routing both police and SVP supporters in a surprise attack.

The attack follows an election campaign by the SVP which has attracted widespread condemnation for its posters depicting three white sheep kicking a black sheep out of Switzerland with the message “our home, keep it secure”.

The UN's xenophobia watchdog, based in Switzerland, described the explicit anti-immigrant message as openly racist.



Prison news

Success for Bowden campaign

John Bowden was recently returned to open conditions, but was sent to HMP Noranside, a remote former asylum.

John has been moved to what is effectively a halfway house on the edge of the prison estate, and will be allowed to recommence home-leaves.

His current address is: John Bowden, 6729, HMP Noranside, Fern By Forfar, Angus, DD8 3QY. Scotland.

In a separate development, a full investigation has been launched into the report by social worker Matt Stillman and his smearing of the Anarchist Black Cross as a terrorist organisation. The report has been accused of having serious irregularities.

MOVE's Mumia Abu-Jamal still waiting

On 17th May, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia heard oral arguments in Mumia's case and there

could be a decision at any time.

If the Third Circuit Court of Appeals rules to uphold the death sentence or denies Mumia's appeals for a new trial or hearing, the Partisan Defence Committee calls for protest.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a former Black Panther Party spokesman, supporter of the MOVE organisation and an award-winning journalist known as the ‘voice of the voiceless’.

He was framed up in 1982 on false charges of killing a Philadelphia police officer. Sentenced to death based on his political history and beliefs, Mumia has spent 25 years on death row for a crime he did not commit.

Prepare now for emergency mobilisation for Mumia's freedom, encourage your friends, colleagues, unions, and organisations to email their telephone number to the artisandefence@yahoo.co.uk to go on the phone tree, and organise others to come out!

Contact the Partisan Defence Committee on 020 7281 5504, write to Partisan Defence Committee, BCM Box 4986, London WC1N 3XX, or see partisandefence.org.

The day after the decision, a protest will be held at the US Embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1, at 5pm if a weekday, or 1pm if a Saturday

Prison shake-up

A huge shake-up of prisons across England and Wales would see ‘high risk’ offenders in women's prisons isolated in smaller jails while low risk people kept in community prisons.

Under the plans the 15 women's jails would be replaced by smaller units run as family units holding up to about 20 women. Only women jailed for long periods would be in the unit.

The document does not say what would happen to the existing women's prisons but some, such as Holloway in North London, could be sold for

housing, while others could hold men.

“The very small percentage of prisoners assessed as posing high risk of serious harm to the public to be placed in a dedicated ‘federal’ estate, the rest placed in closed or open community prisons,” the document said.

A theory of prison struggle

A new pamphlet has been brought out by the volunteer group Hobnail Press, with all proceeds going to the Anarchist Black Cross.

Application of Anarchist Theory to the modern-day prison struggle charts the relationship of the individual to the state, and the state's use of the penal system to enforce acquiescence through fear. Drawing from a wide body of anarchist theory, including key excerpts from DeCleyre, Goldman, Proudhon, Kropotkin, Taber and Ghandi. Price £2, available from Hobnail Press, Box 208, Earl's Court, London, SW5 9FE.

News

NHS: Icerbergs ahead

The NHS unlikely to meet increased costs as it faces another wave of reform, finds Richard Griffin

The Treasury has claimed that the NHS will receive a 4% rise in funding over the next three years. Derek Wanless, the ex-head of Nat West bank in a recent authoritative independent report, *Our Future Health Secured?* argued that on the available evidence the NHS would need at least 4.4% a year over the next few years to meet demand. In reality the NHS will not even get the 4% Labour boasts its receiving.

The truth of the matter is that £2 billion of the extra funding is money the government took off the Department of Health last year. That's right – in the year that 13,000 jobs were being lost and wards closed Gordon Brown as Chancellor was taking money away from the NHS.

The government also expects hospitals to make 3% efficiency savings each year for the next three years. That means squeezing £8 billion out of a system already under pressure. It seems likely, as with this year that staff will take the brunt with more low pay and increases in workload.

It is also unclear to what extent Labour will continue to squander money on bringing private sector providers into the NHS. While there has been a slowdown in the use of private companies, health secretary Alan Johnson has refused to rule out their involvement and in a recently published policy review a government advisor has recommended more private sector involvement and yet more reform.

Although Wanless reported that the government's endless reforming on the health service "has been costly" and showed little evidence of improving

care more is on the way. Despite pleas from health workers for a period of stability it looks like reform is set to continue and gather pace with the publication of Lord Darzi's report on the future of health care.

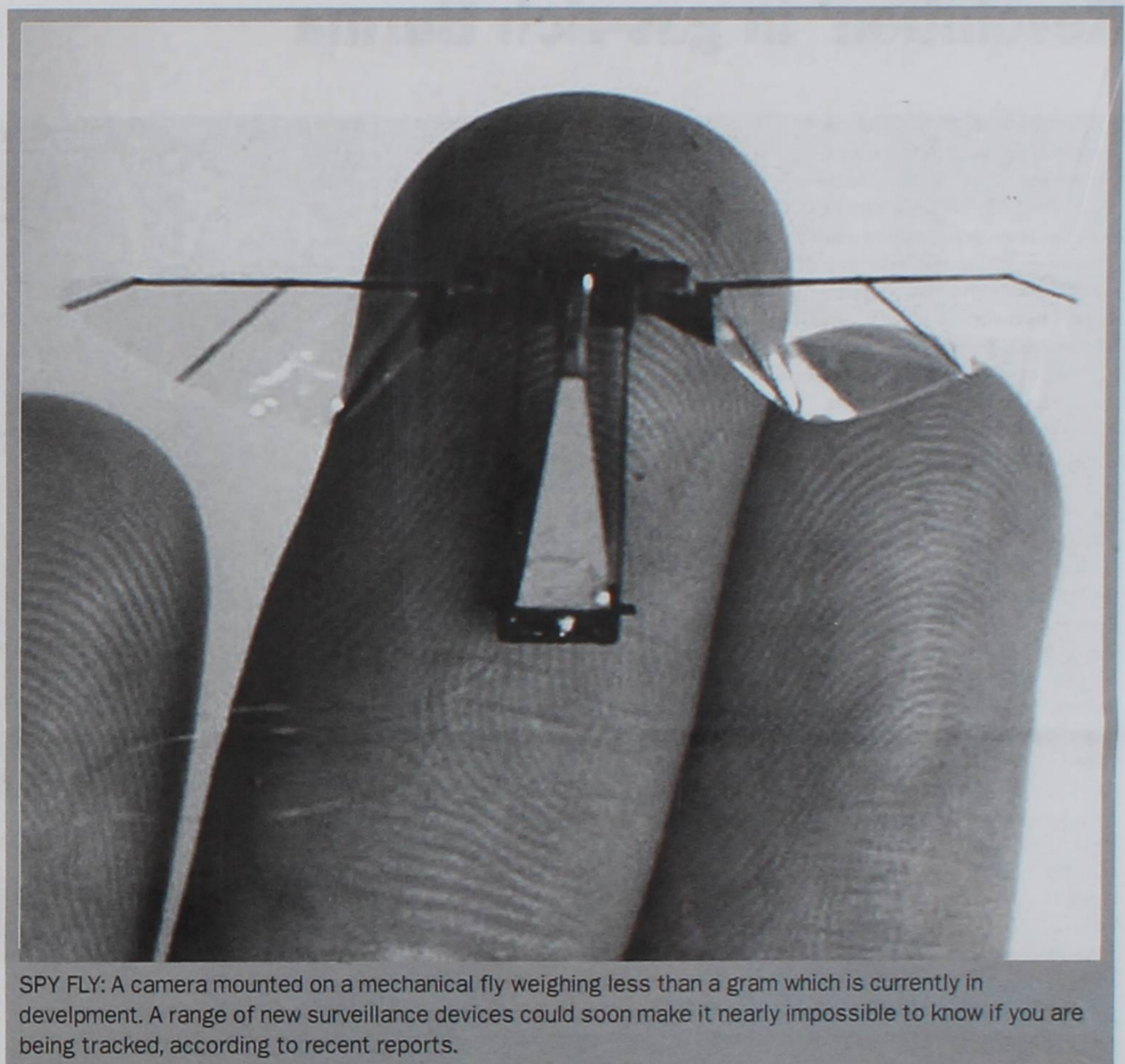
Some of the proposals reflect failures in Labour's policies like the commitment to reduce hospital infections.

A week after the report was published it was revealed that 90 people had died at Maidstone hospital from outbreaks of the bug *clostridium difficile*. No where is there a recognition that privatisation of hospital cleaning services is a significant reason why infections are rising. Instead more targets will be set.

The report also signals that the government remains committed to closing hospitals despite ongoing public opposition. Two weeks ago 14,000 people marched in protest against the planned closure of the Princess Alexander Hospital in Haywards Heath.

Darzi's report says that for many patients the "days of the district general hospital are over". An Anarchist Federation member and health worker described the report as "a charter for cuts. We saw attempts to shut hospitals last year. It looks like this was just the start".

Just as worryingly Darzi praises the use of the private sector despite, as previously reported in *Freedom*, of the fact that many independent treatment centres received millions of pounds in taxpayers' money while not treating any patients. Allyson Pollock, the director of the Centre for International Public Health Policy at Edinburgh



SPY FLY: A camera mounted on a mechanical fly weighing less than a gram which is currently in development. A range of new surveillance devices could soon make it nearly impossible to know if you are being tracked, according to recent reports.

university, commenting on Darzi's report said it "reveals a return to pre-1940s thinking and the launch of US-style healthcare – deserts of poor quality or no healthcare for the many

millions (primary care polyclinics) and a few little islands of excellence for the lucky few." Darzi would like to see GP clinics being set up by 'independent contractors'.

On Saturday 3rd November, health workers will be gathering in London to protest against the privatisation of the NHS – get along before it is too late.

Pensions attacked again

A new round of attacks on pensions is following hard on the heels of the public fight between unionists and Royal Mail.

Airport giant BAA announced on 12th September that it intended to close the company's final salary pension scheme to new entrants from 1st December 2007, a measure which Unite, the PCS and Prospect are gearing up to fight.

The company, most recently notorious for its actions in the Gate Gourmet dispute when baggage handlers walked out on wildcat strike, has been accused of mounting a cynical attack after it was revealed that its deficit was just 1.4%.

It is thought that the measure could be linked to the buyout of BAA by Ferrovial, a multinational construction company, which is looking to find savings after overreaching itself in the deal.

In the Fire Service meanwhile, a strike ballot has been threatened by

FBU members in a row over ill-health pensions.

Three members of the union based in London who retired due to ill health have been told that their pensions will cease, on the grounds they were 'capable of performing some duties'.

The union believes the vague statement could open the door to the denial of retirement rights to many of its members who are in similar circumstances.

One of the firefighters involved was struck deaf after a number of incidents during his time with the service, including explosions during callouts. His request to go back to work on non-operational duties was refused.

The issue, which severely undermines the concept of care for firefighters injured in the line of duty, has angered the workforce across the country, with a national strike possible.

Pensions disputes have been a major feature of the last two years after a

slew of attacks last year saw major cutbacks to payments for large swathes of the workforce.

The biggest deal in the public sector saw the PCS and Unison agree to new final salary pension deals which will exclude all newcomers to the service.

A deal to allow existing workers to keep their final salary payments was bought by agreeing to place newcomers on working life schemes paying out up to £20,000 less per worker.

The deal, which mirrors the one offered to Royal Mail workers, has been strongly criticised as a short-term deal likely to split the workforce down the middle if more attacks on the final salary pension are launched in a few years time.

Unison activists have expressed concern that newcomers to the public sector will be difficult to motivate for a strike if attacks are launched on the final pension salaries of existing workers who have effectively pulled the ladder up behind them.

Leaving tax behind

The privatised rail industry is profiting from a tax loophole to the tune of £1.3 billion, according to a report brought out by the RMT union.

The report, prepared by tax expert Richard Murphy, found that nearly half of all rail industry dividends paid out over the last five years has been funded by a system of unpaid taxation.

The money, which can legally be deferred in order to encourage investment, is unlikely ever to be paid back, the report found.

Comparing pre-goodwill profits and current tax charges that will actually be paid showed that the big nine rail companies' profits rose from £584 million in 2002 to £894 million in 2006, while the tax they actually paid plummeted to £109 million in 2002 and just £71 million in 2006.

In his executive summary, Murphy said: "Two points are clear: first that these balances seem unlikely to be paid

and second that deferred tax charges can therefore be ignored as real tax charges. They should instead be considered to be interest free loans to the railway industry for which there is no repayment date."

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: "Passengers are facing a future of massive fare increases and the government is cutting direct subsidy to the rail industry by £1.5 billion over the next six years, yet these private companies are sitting on a tax-break nest-egg worth £1.3 billion.

"This is money that should be funding railway engineering, but it is being used instead for financial engineering and turning hidden subsidies into pure profits for shareholders.

Summary data within the report showed that while turnover and taxation have remained almost entirely stable since 2002, profits have risen year on year, almost doubling over the same time period from £440m to £820m.

News

International power play?

Rob Ray looks at the economics surrounding the 'Saffron Revolution' in gas-rich Burma

In the aftermath of the Burmese protests, in which hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets alongside Buddhist monks, there has been mounting international pressure on China and India to pull back their substantial economic support to the country.

Over 2,100 people were arrested last month with over 1,000 still being held after widespread protests against Burma's ruling junta, sparked by a rise in fuel prices of 500%. The number of deaths is unknown. Deaths by torture are also being alleged.

Calls have been made to impose further sanctions against Burma, and the UN have made a unanimous statement "deploring" the violence, while the US has threatened to pull out of the Beijing Olympics should China choose to back the regime's actions.

But looking at the politics surrounding Burma, a murkier picture emerges of exactly how the crisis evolved, along with the motivations of the west in reacting so strongly to it while in neighbouring Bangladesh mere months ago similar violence drew so little international attention.

Burma, which is massively mineral and gas-rich, has been subject to heavy sanction from the US and EU since 2003. This includes a ban on all military sales and corporate investment, bar a loophole for the extraction of fuel resources which allowed French fuel giant Total to continue operations extracting Burmese gas for export.

The country has also kept its membership of the IMF and World Bank – with the former's recommendation that the junta 'wean' its population off fuel subsidies cited as the main reason for the hikes which sparked the protests.

The World Bank has banned Burma from taking any more loans as it is deemed a HIPC (heavily indebted poor country), but has continued to use its monetary clout to give itself and the IMF influence.

While the IMF and World Bank allow the west a foothold in Burmese politics, and Total's stewardship of the gas pipeline out of Burma has given the west access to some gas resources, the future of Burma as a supplier is less sure.

Burma has strong alliances with both China and India, who have few sanctions on Burma and provide most of the country's foreign investment, allowing it to circumvent some economic pressures from the west.

Through these two regional powers, a battle has been going on over the direction of future gas pipelines and profits. A project to build a second major pipe through Bangladesh and into India – backed by US company Chevron and Daewoo – ran into trouble earlier this year after project leaders cited strong Chinese and Bangladeshi blocking tactics, hinting at an effective bidding war between India and China, both of which are suffering from chronic fuel shortages.

Massive recent investment from the two powers and some western companies



is marking the beginning of a potential explosion in gas extraction in Burma, with new offshore fields worth up to \$52 billion due to come online over the next few years.

In looking at the Saffron Revolution, the motivations behind the movement is all-important.

The IMF's ultimatum to Burma's ruling class, almost guaranteed to spark protest and violent reprisals, has given the west the perfect opportunity to pile pressure on China and India to pull back their main means of influence, and drive a wedge between them and Burma just as gas

profits look set to skyrocket.

In this international power play, it is the working class of Burma which is suffering, and although many big guns are being levelled in the region, it is not the junta they are pointed at. The only saviours the mass can expect are themselves.

Notes from the US

It has emerged that a month after the invasion of Iraq, the United States began airlifting plane-loads of cash (literally, pallets of bank notes) to Baghdad – a total of US\$12 billion over the next fifteen months. Of this at least US\$9 billion remains completely unaccounted for.

Meanwhile the scandal at Blackwater, the world's largest private mercenary force, on which *Freedom* has reported previously, careers on. Just before press time there were reports of yet another shooting in Baghdad involving one of the many private companies profiting from war in Iraq. There have been congressional hearings and the promise of an FBI probe.

However, the people assigned to protect the FBI while it is in Iraq looking into, for example, last month's atrocity in Baghdad in which Blackwater allegedly shot and killed more than two dozen Iraqis, were employed by ... Blackwater. While Bush has claimed that his government is conducting its own investigation

into that shooting, the person who wrote the State Department's preliminary report was one Darren Hanner, a contractor working with the US Embassy in Iraq for ... Blackwater.

A congressional memo revealed in September that Blackwater mercenaries have been involved in nearly 200 shootings since early 2005, firing first 80% of the time. And presumably from the additional \$150 billion just allocated by the senate for its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan the Department of 'Defence' has just awarded a contract worth up to \$92 million to ... Blackwater.

But in case anyone mistakenly thought that the US elite is concentrating too closely on Iraq and Afghanistan, a Pentagon official, Debra Cagan, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Coalition Affairs, explained last month: "I Hate All Iranians" during an official meeting with British MPs in the United States

The partisanship of the White House was further exposed in the

second week of October when it applied pressure to defeat a US bill recognising the Armenian genocide, one of the first modern, systematic genocides between 1915 and 1917. Since the Turkish state is against such recognition, the junta in the US has also declared itself against the move because it would "harm relations with Turkey".

Finally, it emerged in late September that the Pentagon has been 'encouraging' US snipers in Iraq to target members of the resistance by scattering 'bait' in order falsely to incriminate those who pick them up.

A captain in the 501st infantry regiment has actually admitted and described the process in a sworn statement: "Basically, we would put an item out there and watch it. If someone found the item, picked it up and attempted to leave with the item, we would engage the individual as I saw this as a sign they would use the item against US Forces."

Louis Further

Sugar cane strike

Up to 5,000 workers in the Haft Tapeh sugar cane factory in Khuzestan province in Iran are thought to have gone on strike in defiance of anti strike laws.

The factory workers, who say they have remained unpaid for several months, have said they are remaining firm despite government forces being sent in early on in the strike.

An Iranian blog, 'Kaargar' (meaning worker) has reported that thousands of workers, under the banner "Haftapeh workers are hungry" tried unsuccessfully to demonstrate in front of the governor's office but were stopped by police.

The workers, the majority of whom are Ahwazi Arabs, are protesting against months of unpaid wages, the lack of democratic trade union organisation and the effects of economic liberalisation on the sugar sector, which has led to an influx of cheap sugar imports that has devastated privately owned sugar producers.

They have also demanded the resignation of the provincial governor; Khuzestan has seen frequent changes in the provincial governorship since the Ahwazi uprising in April 2005.

The blogger added that Haft Tapeh workers have gone on strike before and each time the government gave them promises but never kept them.

Kaargar said: "on the fourth day of striking and demonstrating, some other workers from Dezful sugar can factory who had lost their jobs joined the Haft Tapeh workers. The workers chanted, 'our salary is our absolute right' (the Iranian government's slogan is 'nuclear energy is our absolute right')."

Kaargar alleged that security forces attacked several workers and injured ten. One activist, Ferydoun Nikofard, was arrested at his home.

Pejvakezendanyan (means echo of prisoners) says [Fa] that after two days of striking, Iranian intelligence agents started to put pressure on workers and threaten them with severe punishment.

Feature

In depth: The CWU dispute

Rob Ray explains the full extent of the fight Royal Mail workers have had on their hands

The problem, according to headlines in the mainstream press, was a 2.5% pay rise being offered by Royal Mail to its 190,000 workers, along with some vague problems to do with 'terms and conditions'. The reality of what is being faced by the postal workers is far more complex and vastly more damaging, not just for them, but for everyone who wants to be sure of getting their mail.

In a recent talk to unionists, Nigel Kemp from the CWU explained the full situation: "During the '80s and '90s the post office was making a healthy profit. The Tories, instead of investing they kept clawing the money out to fund other projects. We came to a point in 1998 where our machinery was out of date and we needed investment and a campaign was run to ask for the funds.

"This was achieved but a regulator was attached. They were supposed to oversee the public services, but there had also been an agreement to open up the markets in Europe."

In the UK, the postal regulator, appointed in 2000, would be the body tasked with delivering a privatisation the Tories had been unable to accomplish.

The original 1997 EU agreement on postal services was a masterwork of neo-liberalism. It agreed to the introduction of competition across the EU zone, with the idea being to gradually destroy publicly-owned postal monopolies across the bloc, thus putting them in a position to be sold off in an orgy of privatisation by 2009.

The EU debates on how to implement this scheme however were more complex than originally envisaged, with only Blair's Labour government strongly backing an immediate introduction of partial competition.

It wasn't until five years later, in 2002, that the agreement would be signed off and published as directive 2002/39/EC. The deal would only affect Britain in the first instance, and would only affect the movement of high-profit items such as packages and business post – where most of the real money is made – along with all outgoing cross-border mail services.

Nigel explained: "In the end Europe set up a new system and everyone had to have a licence for the EU area. As part of the new agreement, which is designed to eventually privatise the mail across Europe, our government opened UK markets in 2006, while the rest of Europe agreed to do it two years later."

The agreement bound Royal Mail hand and foot. Under it, all the major European monopolies, secure within their own borders, could compete for Royal Mail business but Royal Mail was banned from competing in a

similar way in European markets.

To add insult to injury, under the new law of competition, Royal Mail's public service monopoly position was considered to be too powerful for newcomers to compete with, so it was placed under severe restrictions to stop it from overwhelming its new competitors.

"We had to allow competitors to come in and use our facilities, as they didn't, and still don't have an infrastructure capable of covering Britain themselves," Nigel added.

"We also had price constraints placed on us. That led to a decrease in revenue for the post office. At present, a customer can post something with TNT, and all they do is collect it. We then deliver TNT's mail for them, charging a set price of 13p. We have to charge 30p to do the same job direct, but TNT can charge 25p an item while making us do it. It's a suicidal agreement, why pay 30p when you can pay 25p for exactly the same job?"

Effectively, the Royal Mail has been forced into not just a position of equal competition, but an unsustainable, anti-competitive one. The company is even banned from making special offers such as temporary bulk mail discounts, for fear they will draw people back to the Royal Mail rather than promoting a continued haemorrhaging of custom.

It is in this context that Royal Mail bosses Allan Leighton, Adam Crozier, the government and the press are saying the strikers should be condemned for potentially losing Royal Mail its customers.

Meanwhile other EU members have since decided that rather than open their own markets as promised they will put off the decision on whether to do so until 2011.

Leighton and Crozier have been staunch supporters of this agreement, which has seen revenues fall off a cliff since it was introduced. Royal Mail's half-year figures for 2007 showed an 86% collapse in profits to £22 million.

In an effort to push Royal Mail workers towards their way of thinking, they offered bonus payments and 'phantom shares' worth 20% of the company to workers, setting them up for one-off payouts should job cuts go through unopposed and privatisation happen without a hitch.

The pair have also presided over an increasingly murky financial picture. Last year a deal was made with the government to take a £900m loan to 'plug the pensions gap'. Another loan in 2001 was used, according to the company, to finance overseas acquisitions at a time when the company was starting to fall into heavy debt

The result today? "When we put in



for our pay rise we were told there was no money, and now we are also having trouble with pensions, where they want to get rid of final salary payments to pay for their mistakes. People could see their pensions reduced by between £60,000-£100,000 if that happens. Each.

"They are also after our terms and conditions. Totally flexible attendances, changing terms and conditions at a moment's notice, changing our pay to a yearly total – with 30-hour weeks in the summer and long shifts in the winter effectively wiping out overtime payments. In addition, they want performance targets for attendance, turnover ...

"They did take a loan from the government, we are trying to get a Freedom of Information Act request in to find out what has happened to that money."

While these attacks on workers' wages, terms and conditions, and retirement savings have been taking place, and are likely to be ongoing over the next few years, a five-year restructuring plan has also been gathering pace, which would see up to 40,000 workers laid off.

The cuts follow 53,000 layoffs already accomplished since 2000, and would represent a total loss of nearly half of all Royal Mail employees over the course of this

decade if carried through.

While the workforce faces cuts, unionists have become increasingly furious about the payouts top managers at Royal Mail have been receiving for carrying out this hatchet job.

Allan Leighton got £800,000 this year and a bonus of £165,000, while his deputy Adam Crozier saw a £370,000 bonus on top of his £615,000 salary. In 2005, hitting targets netted Crozier a cool £2.2 million bonus for his role in axing 33,000 jobs over the previous three years.

While the profitable sectors of the post are being removed from Royal Mail, they are still expected to provide a universal service, which often includes delivering to rural areas at a loss. Private operators have expressed no interest in taking on the unprofitable task, and look set to charge far more to build a profit if they do, creating a two-tier system of delivery and further disadvantaging the rural poor.

Nigel added: "The longer the rules in Europe continue the more things will go downhill and we are having to pay for it. Our members have no choice but to fight. If we lose everyone pays. We have a responsibility to deliver to rural areas at cost, but private companies don't."

It is the government who have been the architects of the downfall of the post office over the last ten years,

aided by a postal regulator whose sole role has been to remove all barriers to a free-market sacking of the service.

The union leadership have been little better in their belated response, bringing out the workers on a series of one-day rolling actions which have severely stunted their impact, and calling off the strikes altogether for a prolonged period to enter into negotiations which were highly unlikely to succeed given Leighton's stated intent to make this his "miners' strike".

Other unions, despite being in a similar position on pay have also been extraordinarily slow off the mark to bring united pressure to bear, with little movement likely before November, a full five months after the CWU began their fight.

The postal workers are fighting an uphill battle. In the press they have been labelled greedy, lazy, thieving scroungers who need to fall into line with the rest of the market. Yet is it the workforce, not the government, who stood up to be counted and demanded that a universal post run to the best of its ability and not be driven into the ground.

The recent deal, while staving off the worst of the changes that Royal Mail originally mooted, does nothing to solve these long-term problems. And the regulator will return for the kill.

Commentary

FREEDOM

Volume 68 Number 20

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

To get a national-level publication out groups need to be big, well organised and generally have at least a couple of people involved who know how the industry works. *Freedom* has the last one, and kind of the second one, but we don't have the first, which is crippling what we can achieve with what is basically the only regular anarchist newspaper around.

We need people who can dedicate a bit of time to building us up. The two editors *Freedom* has are also its main writers, we physically can't be marketers, distributors and administrators too.

We need a pictures editor, a features editor, a reviews editor and a letters editor, we need marketing people to build up our name and explain where we're coming from. We don't need a bunch of people trying to reinvent the wheel when we have something ready to roll. We need physical solidarity from the movement to turn a good newspaper into a successful challenge to what passes for left-wing journalism in this country and abroad. *We need you.* Contact us using the details below, or talk to us at the *Freedom* stall at the bookfair.

Rob Ray

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Next issue

The next issue will be dated 3rd November and the last day to get copy to us will be Thursday 25th October. Send articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post to The Editors, Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

Sacco and Vanzetti

In Boston on 23rd August 1927, some eighty years ago, two revolutionary anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were executed, having been wrongly convicted of an armed robbery and murder that took place at Baintree, Massachusetts in April 1920. A similar armed robbery had taken place some months earlier, but nobody was injured and the robbery was, in fact, a fiasco – but witnesses identified the robbers as Italians. The trial of Sacco and Vanzetti in July 1921 was an absolute travesty of justice.

The judge was biased and unscrupulous and expressed a marked animosity towards the defendants; there was no evidence at all that the two men were at the scene of the crime, for both had substantial alibis. And neither man had previously been convicted of any crime. The trial had taken place against the background of the hysterical 'red scare' at the end of the First World War. Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman and Luigi Galleani had all been deported from the United States a few years earlier. What then led to the conviction of Sacco and Vanzetti? Apparently, the fact that they were Italian immigrants, had possessed guns at the time of their arrest and were militant atheists and anarchists.

The judge, as Paul Avrich wrote, played on the emotions and prejudices of the jurors to get the two men convicted.

Both men were Italians and were in their late thirties. Nicola 'Nick' Sacco worked in a shoe factory and was a skilled and reliable worker and was happily married with a family. He was a vital and energetic individual, who spoke little English; not an intellectual, he nevertheless threw himself body and soul into the anarchist cause. Bartolomeo Vanzetti, in contrast, was a bachelor. He worked as a fish vendor, selling fish in the Boston market. He was a lover of the outdoors and nature rather philosophical, and as one of his friends recalled, "anarchism personified. Always well groomed, Vanzetti sported a large moustache. Upton Sinclair described Vanzetti as "a quiet and gentle man with a wonderful dream of justice for the working class and peace on earth". But both men were revolutionary anarchists who preached insurrectionary violence, and where followers of the Italian anarchist Luigi Galleani (1861-1931). Publisher of the periodical *Cronaca Sovversiva* (Subversive chronicle), Galleani was one of the most powerful propagandists for anarchism, although Galleani hardly gets a mention in most histories and anthologies of anarchism, no doubt because of his advocacy of insurrectionary violence. But Galleani was one of the leading Italian anarchists in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century, a great radical orator and a man with a magnetic and striking personality.

The miscarriage of justice with regard to Sacco and Vanzetti was so blatant and ghastly that while on death row many anarchists, radicals, and even liberals, sprang to their defence. Their supporters included the philosophers John Dewey and Bertrand Russell, the socialist Eugene Debs – who visited them in Charleston state prison; Felix Frankfurter a professor of law at Harvard University, the novelists Upton

Sinclair and H.G. Wells, the French writer and Nobel prize laureate Anatole France, as well as the novelist John Dos Passos, who served on their defence committee and wrote a moving plea on behalf of the two anarchists; "Facing the chair".

On the day of their execution there were protests outside the prison, and demonstrations throughout the world. In Paris there was a general strike, and on the following day there were riots and protests in many European cities – including London – as well as a general strike in Buenos Aires.

This gross miscarriage of justice has become a part of American history – for the trial record clearly demonstrated that Sacco and Vanzetti were sentenced to death not because they were guilty of any crime but because they were immigrants and anarchists.

Indeed the *cause celebre* has an enduring significance for socialists and anarchists – at least those with a sense of history – partly because of the dignity in which Sacco and Vanzetti conducted themselves during their long ordeal, and partly because of the sentiments that they expressed in their last days. As Vanzetti said in one of his interviews: "If had not been for this thing I might have lived out my life talking at street corners. I might have die unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. This is our career and our triumph. Never in our full life can we hope to do such work for tolerance, for justice, for man's understanding of man, as now we do by accident ... The taking of our lives, lives of a good shoemaker and a poor fish peddler – all! That last moment belongs to us. That agony is our triumph!"

Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti continue to be a symbol of justice against the might of state oppression, as Emma Goldman expressed it, and their spirit lives on.

Brian Morris

Group updates

Freedom contacted members of four different anarchist federations to get snapshots of how things have been progressing over the last year.

The AF

In my opinion the AF has been in an upsurge over the last few years, and this year the influx of new members has been reflected in a real diversity of activity. Across the country we have run regular public meetings on anarchism, a free cinema, helped run several social centres and open a new one in Liverpool, built a community garden in Reading (and subsequently set up a public forum over council land ownership). Industrial activity has shot up through work with the IWW, and we have been able to field people for various antifascist events.

We're quite clearly moving from a

propaganda heavy organisation to an active solidarity organisation, without losing any of regular publications like *Resistance* and *Organise!* – the growth of the fed has let us do both, and actually increase that original role too: there are now more AF publications, either through group blogs or local community newsheets, than before. I think all libertarian groups are probably benefitting from the collapse of the Left, and I look forward to some uniting class struggle campaigns we can launch finally free of sectarianism.

SolFed

There has been some growth in SolFed and the organisation is getting more efficient, with *Direct Action* in particular showing some marked improvement, along with a bit of movement on things like information campaigns for workers' rights.

In terms of campaigning, there's actually been a fair bit of activity, particularly from the South London, Manchester and Preston branches, and nationally the Education Workers Network has made some progress – they should be at the bookfair in fact.

Some of the solidarity work around things like the JJB dispute and mental health strikes in Manchester has been excellent.

We've been really bad about letting people know about the activity we have done though, and we were too slow off the mark on the CWU dispute.

There's been a lot of discussion as to the direction of SolFed over the last few months, though mostly this has been informal via the internal mailing lists, and it's been good to see the North East London SolFed branch picking itself up again, so it looks like we have a couple of branches for London on the go.

Class War

At the moment the main focus has been on getting out publications and helping get together the Bash the Rich March in November, though that's not all us there's several different groups involved.

We've done a revamp to the websites and we've just come up to our third issue of *Touch of Class* (the new magazine complement to the paper *Class War*), plus there's been the revamp of the newspaper. We've also been involved in Antifa to an extent as well.

We've been growing a lot in the north, there's been some recruiting going on and there may even be more members there than down south now!

IWW

The IWW is continuing to grow, we have had a busy year! We have been in the forefront of campaigns to save the National Blood Service, with No Sweat and others, we're continuing the effort to organise Starbucks workers,

and are active in moves to develop a radical network of health and education workers. Our biggest campaign has been against the closure of Crichton Campus by Glasgow university, which we won after months of hard solidarity work, defended individual members and opposed the closure of a post office in Leicester.

Our most recent new branch has been in Norwich.

PFI

➔ page 1

hampering investigations into their efficiency.

The Scottish parliament also came under fire for apparently failing to properly scrutinise the deals that were being made.

The team found that despite approving 102 PFI projects across the country worth a total of £22.3 billion the Scottish Executive had in several cases few of the key documents which would have allowed them to make an informed decision.

Final Business Cases – vital for decision making on the viability of projects – were absent in all nine of the country's major sewage works developments.

A spokesman for the Scottish Executive has said the report will be "studied in detail".

The PFI sector has grown from its introduction 15 years ago to dominate a large swathe of public spending, with contracts worth £60 billion currently in place across the UK.

Rob Ray

News in brief

➔ page 2

in the government funding grant which has led to a major restructuring and redundancy programme.

PRIVACY: The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) has had a clause activated which allows a person to be compelled to reveal a decryption key. Refusal can earn someone a five-year jail term.

The Home Office launched a consultation which culminated in Part III being made active on 1st October. Section 49 of Part III of RIPA compels a person, when served with a notice, to either hand over an encryption key or render the requested material intelligible by authorities.

Quiz answers

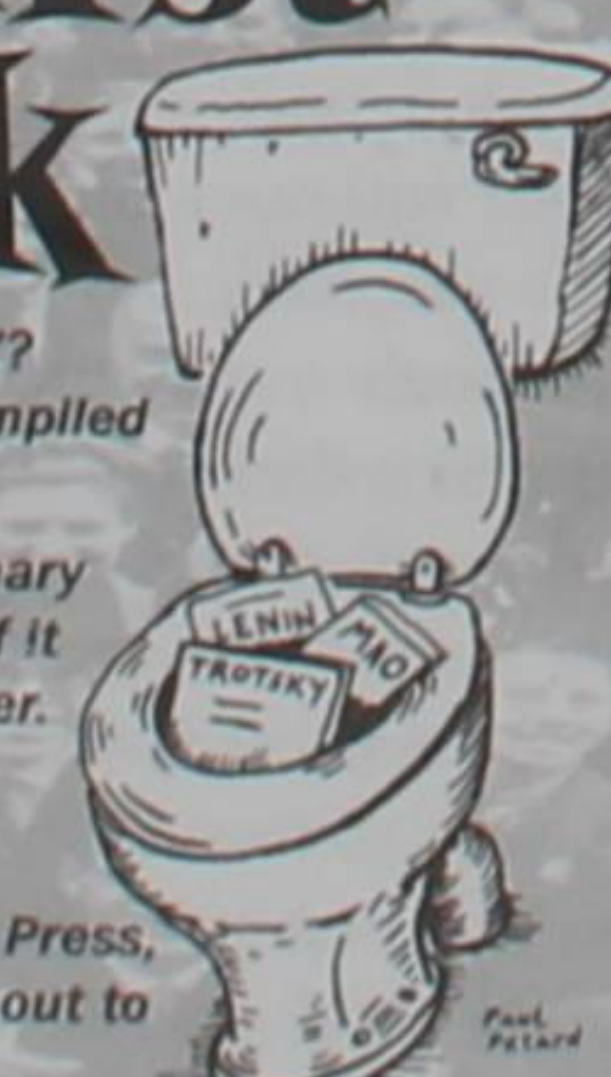
- Originally, a heckler was a worker whose job was to to tease or comb out flax or hemp fibres. In nineteenth century Dundee, the hecklers in the flax mills had established a reputation as the most radical and belligerent element in the workforce. While they worked, one of them would read out the day's news while the others worked, to the accompaniment of interruptions and furious debate.
- Le Gorille, or the Gorilla. A gorilla escapes from a zoo and sodomises a judge. The song contrasts how the judge reacts compared to earlier when he was sentencing a man to the guillotine.
- A revolt against the introduction of the draft in 1917 in Oklahoma, after the US entered World War One.
- Somalia was more equal, and the extent of extreme poverty lesser than in governed West African nations. At the time Somalia had been without a government for 14 years.

The Anarchist Quiz Book

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

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

Get your copy now for £5 (post free) by mail order from Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX (cheque/PO made out to Freedom Press) or from www.freedompress.org.uk



REVIEW

Brian Morris takes a look at esotericism and suggests that we need a social revolution, not a spiritual one

The world is in a sorry state. During the twentieth century we have seen the eruption of violence on an unprecedented scale. Two world wars, the rise of fascism, Auschwitz, the advent of nuclear weapons, rampant poverty throughout the world, wide-spread genocide and political oppression, and an impending ecological crisis. Long ago radical scholars like Immanuel Wallerstein and Murray Bookchin described all this a global or "modern crisis". Karen Armstrong in her latest book refers to such violence and destruction as "dark epiphanies". She is seemingly unaware that such violence, exploitation and oppression may be related to inter-state rivalry and conflicts, and to the ravages of global capitalism. For Armstrong interprets the crisis as due solely to a lack of "spirituality". So what is needed to counter the widespread violence and oppression is not a social but a "spiritual revolution"; a return to the esoteric visions and "spiritual technologies" of the sages, mystics and prophets of the "Axial Age". This was the age that saw the rise of such world faiths as Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism and Judeo-Christianity.

Over forty years ago the sociologist Robert Bellah wrote a classic article on religious evolution. In it he described the emergence of what he called the "historic religions" during the "great transformation" that occurred in the first millennium BCE. This period saw the rise of extensive mercantile trade, the development of metallurgy and literacy, increasing urbanisation, the emergence of large-scale state empires, as well as the development of the "historic religions". Such religions, in contrast to earlier forms of tribal or archaic religion (polytheism), posited a transcendental realm beyond the natural cosmos, emphasised the importance of salvation or enlightenment through esoteric rituals, and preached a universal ethic.

Karen Armstrong's book is entitled *The Great Transformation*. Yet she makes no mention of Bellah's article, and hardly engages with the social sciences more generally. But the book is lucidly written and full of good scholarship and offers an engaging outline of the history of religions during the Axial Age. This was the term used by the philosopher Karl Jaspers to describe the period around the sixth century BCE, for the era produced some important figures in terms of religious innovation – Pythagoras, Confucius, Zarathustra, Lao Tzu, Mahavira, Buddha, and the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah all living within or around this time.

Armstrong's book focuses on four contexts, namely, China (Confucianism, Daoism), India (Vedic religion, Buddhism), Greece (philosophical rationalism), and the Eastern Mediterranean (Judaism). Clearly Armstrong, like Hegel and Arnold Toynbee before her, sees Africa as being outside history, its religions belonging to the 'dark ages'. In fact, Armstrong continually alludes to the tribal context, as do apologists

for empire and the historic religions, as one in which tribal conflict, egoism, disorder and dark rituals prevailed. She also describes 'ancient' religion as involving a "perennial philosophy", although this term is more commonly used by such religious luminaries as Rene Guenon, Seyyid Hussein Nasr and Frithjof Schuon to depict the kind of transcendental esotericism that Armstrong herself seems to espouse.

What is clearly shown in Armstrong's study, although this is quite unintentional, is the close and intimate relationship that has always existed between religion and state power. Not for nothing did the Hindu king see himself as at one with Brahman (the world spirit), the Chinese emperor as having a mandate from heaven, and the prophets of Israel, as messengers of Yahweh, as having the role of political commentators. In their emphasis on kenosis, 'emptying', the spirituality of self-surrender, the emerging religions of the Axial Age were all clearly forms of what Foucault called biopower.

There are of course fundamental differences between Vedic religion (Hinduism), Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism and Judaism. In fact early Buddhism and Daoism can be interpreted as ethical philosophies with a naturalistic bias, and so fit uneasily into most definitions of religion – even though they later developed into religious institutions. But in her emphasis on a uniform 'axial vision' Armstrong tends to play down the differences, and to deny the importance of 'faith' and of metaphysical 'beliefs' – although all these ideologies and the accompanying religious experiences would make little sense bereft of such metaphysical notions as Yahweh, heaven, nirvana, Dao, god or Brahman. Armstrong also insists that such notions are ineffable; they can only be experienced not talked about. This did not stop her writing a whole book about such transcendental notions!

What is characteristic of the axial religions, according to Armstrong, is that they interpreted the empirical self as either an illusion or equated it with egoism – so they emphasised the "spirituality of self-surrender". This was complemented by the notion of a transcendental "dimension" or "realm" that was essentially indefinable – either a deity or universal spirit (god, Yahweh, Brahman) or a psychological state (nirvana) – even though some Buddhist scholars interpret nirvana as the experience or consciousness of some "absolute all-mind" or an unconditioned, transcendental "ultimate reality", which makes it akin to a religious notion. But contact or experience of this "transcendental" dimension comes not through external rituals but through meditation, yogic exercises or esoteric rites, or what Armstrong describes as "spiritual technologies". The spirituality of the Axial Age is thus one involving the quest for "self-discovery", for god is within, or there is an identity between the "true" self (atma) and the divine soul or spirit (Brahman), or spiritual salvation comes from within one's own consciousness. Armstrong is thus



Karen Armstrong

another, the latest, advocate of New Age religion, which virtually equates religion with psychology, and advocates a "religion of the self" and an "interior spirituality". But what is crucial for Armstrong about these historic religions is that they introduced an ethical dimension to religion, as if earlier tribal religions had nothing to do with morality or human well-being. She thus emphasises the important stress that the Axial religions gave to the repudiation of egoism and selfishness and their advocacy of compassion, generosity, tolerance, respect for sentient beings, and non-violence, and the crucial importance of the Golden Rule, as expressed by Confucius: "Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you". But as Peter Kropotkin long ago argued (in his book on *Ethics*) such ethical values are not exclusive to religion, esoteric or otherwise, but are intrinsic to human social life. Religious teachers such as Confucius, Buddha and Jesus were simply expressing the moral values of the common people. Humans of all cultures (including humanists and anarchists) have opposed greed, egoism, hatred, intolerance and violence, and stressed the importance of compassion,

generosity, mutual aid, sharing, non-violence and respect for others. It is what Africans refer to as *umuntu* – personhood.

But what Armstrong fails to see is the intrinsic relationship between the religions of 'transcendence' – with their emphasis on individual salvation and the denial of self-autonomy (equated with egoism) – and the emergence of regional state-empires. Such religions entailed the "colonisation of consciousness" which supported the emergence of state power, in the same way as Christianity served as an ideological precursor in the establishment of capitalism and the British Empire – Pax Britannica – in Africa. Thus it is hardly surprising that Confucianism became the state religion of a unified Chinese empire, that Ashoka embraced Buddhism as the ideology of the Maurya empire in India, and that Christianity later became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Hinduism has always had a symbiotic relationship with coercive state power (the raj), and in the present context Hindutva – the kind of esoteric spirituality based on Advaita Vedanta that Armstrong embraces – has a close relationship with the Indian nuclear state and free-

market capitalism. Thankfully secularism is re-asserting itself in India.

The kind of New Age or esoteric religiosity that Armstrong now advocates – stemming from the religions of the axial age – is, of course, now all the rage. Spirituality is now seen as quite distinct from orthodox religion and those dreadful religious fundamentalists, and as the only answer to global capitalism. But in effect there is an unholy alliance between New Age spirituality and the capitalist system, for 'spirituality' has become a commodity and has provided a way of 'sanctifying' capitalism, just as it did in relation to the early empires. So rather than repudiate reason, as Armstrong contends, we need to re-affirm human rationality, as against the esoteric mysticism that she advocates. We need to repudiate both mammon and mysticism, both egoism and esotericism. We need a social revolution not a spiritual renaissance. The only kind of spirituality we should embrace is *l'esprit humain*. My advice to Karen Armstrong is, in the words of Bertrand Russell, remember your humanity and forget the rest.

Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation*, Atlantic Books, £9.99

A Sideways Look

I've written before about how space for live music and unregulated social get-togethers is being squeezed. The corporate world wants maximum profit from all assets, so back street pubs become flats and informal music venues are licensed out of existence. But in this column I want to look at a different area of our social and cultural lives – sport – and how it, too, is being squeezed as capitalism expands into more and more niches.

A work colleague spends part of his weekend with his teenage son's football club. They train in a local park and his role is treasurer. He asks the kids' parents (and it is mainly dads) for their subscriptions to pay for hire of pitches and equipment, transport and all the other essentials that go to running a club. As far as I know, the trainers and other club officials all give their time for free.

The reason my colleague was asked to be treasurer is that he's big and good at asking for money. He needs to be. A few weeks ago he told me that some of the boys had been playing in trainers. When asked why, they said they wanted to save their boots for the match. It turned out that their boots were too small and too painful to spend much time playing in, and they couldn't afford new ones. The club has now bought them some new ones, with the better off parents being tapped for a few extra quid.

A recent article in *Time Out* on sport picked up on the 4x4s likely to be spotted at some kids matches. But it's not just that the formal clubs are out of reach of poorer kids. Two other factors account for the decline in grassroots sport.

The first, and perhaps most obvious, is the decline in sport in schools. Twenty years of selling off playing fields for housing hasn't helped. Nor has the national curriculum, which orders what must be studied and when. Physical education is in the national curriculum, but after-school coaching and activities have been in decline for years. Partly it's because of the fear of litigation if anything goes wrong, but another factor has to be teachers' workloads. And school competitions lack focus because gifted players will now be picked up by academies connected to the big clubs, rather than helping their schoolmates raise their game.

The other obvious difference from when I was young is that there is much less space for informal games. While I have seen a few kids kicking a ball in some quiet streets, it's a rarity. Most streets are too busy with traffic. Parents often don't let their kids out to play, for fear of traffic and strangers. Where they aren't with their parents, they are usually in the care of a childminder or after-school club. I can remember playing out on the estate I lived on when I was five – few kids get that opportunity now.

Read the newspapers and you'll

regularly find stories about childhood obesity. On the back pages, you'll find stories bemoaning the lack of English players in the Premiership, or the lack of success of national sides in any number of sports. Sporting success is available – for those who have the money to build on a background of talent. Perhaps things will improve when sport just happens, rather than only occurring where there is regulated, 'official', paid-for space, controlled by business or the authorities.

Svartfrosk

The quiz

1. What, originally, was a heckler and where would you have found one?
2. What satirical song, by Georges Brassens, sung in English by Jake Thackray, mocks the judiciary?
3. What was the Green Corn Rebellion?
4. What did the World Bank find when it compared distribution of wealth in Somalia and West Africa?

Answers on page 6

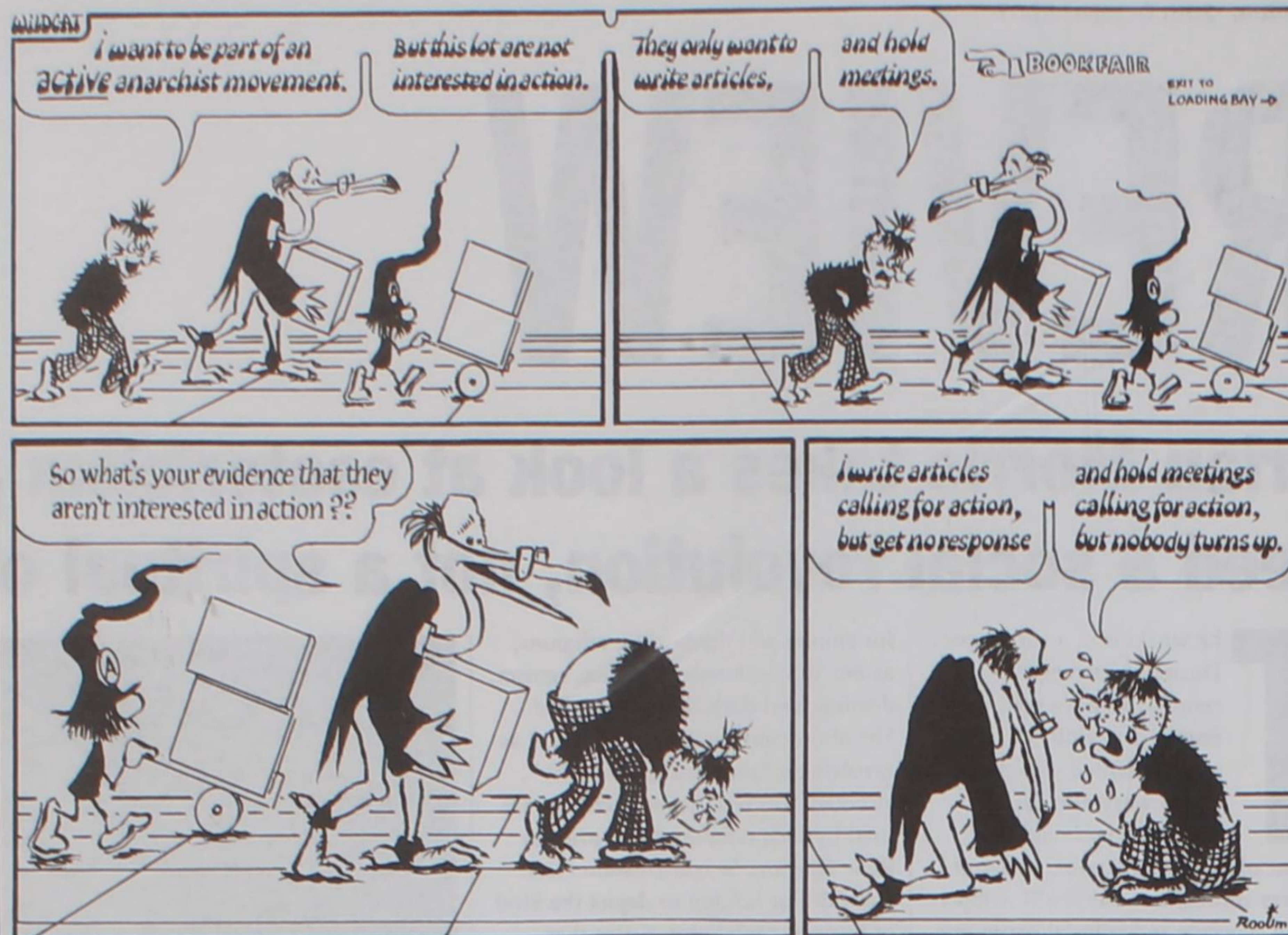
Imagine if...

Al Gore looked fondly at his Nobel prize. Now that Africa was off the agenda for another decade following the 'success' of the Make Poverty History campaign, the environment had almost a clean field for the honour, something he was smirking to Bob Geldof about.

"Barno" he grinned hugely, "I know you must be pissed, but it wasn't just a few concerts I put together you know, it was speaking tours and a film to say how we need to save the world too. Surely you have to see how the prize for 'most influential figure in saving the peoples of the world' was always going to come my way?"

Bob was drunk, and jealous, and for once, he felt inclined to tell a few home truths. "It's just a big political back-slapping exercise Gore, where elites get to show how great liberal democracy is by wheeling out uncontroversial press-friendly types.

"I mean where are the labour activists



murdered in the cause of organising the poor across the world to fight back against their oppressors? Where are the radical environmentalists who preceded your own capitalistic interpretation of environmental salvation by decades?

"I mean all you did was use your celebrity status to manipulate the media, and impose a liberal authority over how we should combat climate change!"

He looked deep into the bottom of his whisky glass. "But then who am I to talk, I've been nominated before for spending years throwing around swear-words and pleas for charity in a vain attempt to make up for a complete lack of real solutions to the results of imperialism and despotism across Africa."

Al was shocked "Um, Bob are you feeling okay? It's just the way you're talking ..."

Geldof raised himself out of his reverie. "Yeah, I'm fine, just jealous I guess. I really thought it would be my turn this time. I'll just have to come up with a film or something, 'An inconvenient continent' maybe."

Listings

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, bellacio@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

3rd November National demonstration to celebrate and defend the NHS, assemble at Temple Place on Victoria Embankment, London, at 11am to march to Trafalgar Square, see nhstogether.prg.uk

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 eastkentafed@hotmail.com

libcom.org



Anarchist Bookfair 2007

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