

# FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

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## HOUSING AND PLANNING REFORM

Two bills announced in the Queen's speech earlier this month will bring centralisation of government power in the areas of planning and housing.

The Planning Reform bill reveals the influence of corporate lobbyists on behalf of firms such as Tesco and McAlpine over government policy that should be concerned with citizenship and quality of life. Blair's dismantling of local planning under the 2004 act is clearly to be completed under Brown.

The bill speeds up the planning process by removing democratic space for objections. Under the new system, the government would issue national policy statements, some of which would identify major site-specific developments including motorways, airports and nuclear power stations which are considered to be in the national interest. A final decision on whether particular projects get the go ahead will be taken by a newly created and unelected body called the Infrastructure Planning Commission.

Out of town supermarkets are also deemed to be of similar national interest to national infrastructure projects, and benefit from similar relaxations of planning procedure. There is no national planning need for out-of-town hypermarkets, and an overwhelming climate change case against them.

The pattern of retailing is a local concern and, besides, to bias planning against low-carbon urban density and towards transport-rich dispersal is

archaic and nonsensical.

The proposed bill would leave major planning decisions subject to no democratic institution at all. This is likely to have an adverse effect on communities, countryside, and the environment, and will leave concerned residents with no other recourse than litigation. Decisions will now pass from locally accountable planning committees to the courts, from those who care about the future of their communities to those who care about fees and lobbyists.

"[The bill's] proposals will strip away one of the public's key democratic rights to have a say on how their area is developed, easing the way for a whole range of climate-damaging developments," said Friends of the Earth's planning coordinator, Naomi Luhde Thompson. According to legal opinion obtained by the campaigning group, the measures contained in the bill may be unlawful.

In a related move, the new Housing bill also announced in the Queen's speech will allow the creation of a new Housing and Regeneration Agency merging the Housing Corporation, which distributes funds to housing associations to build new social housing, and English Partnerships, which plans housing projects in new growth areas.

The bill includes a proposal to give public money to private developers. It is claimed that this last measure stems from ministers' frustrations over



On 10th November, many thousands of Czech antifascists and anarchists prevented neo-nazis provocatively marching through the Jewish quarter of Prague on the anniversary of 'Kristallnacht' (the 1938 night of terror when Jewish homes, businesses and synagogues were attacked). After one neo-nazi shot into the crowd with a gas pistol, the situation got out of control. Over 250 were arrested during the violent clashes.

housing association inefficiency in building new homes, while property developers are deemed to be more efficient and less corrupt.

However, private housing developers

do have one primary responsibility; maximising profit for their shareholders.

The measure largely correlates with the original fears voiced by national campaigning group Defend Council

Housing, which suggested that Housing Associations would effectively kill off the prospects for new council housing in the long term.

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## PCS OUT, UNISON DOWN

Following markedly divergent campaigns for strike action over a range of grievances, the two largest public sector unions have completed ballots with the PCS voting to strike, and Unison staying in.

Around 68% of PCS members voting were in favour of industrial action over a national dispute on job cuts within the service, poor pay and privatisation. The PCS has already had two one-day strikes this year which had little apparent impact on government policy.

Anger has been building throughout the union, which has a strong presence in the civil service, over a swathe of job cuts being pushed through by

Gordon Brown which have they say been crippling the service.

Alongside a poor pay settlement imposed by the government, the cuts and attacks on pensions, worsening working conditions have also been cited as being partially behind the vote.

Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary, said: "Civil service management and the government must be in no doubt of the determination of their own workforce to take action if necessary, to achieve a fair settlement over jobs, pay and conditions and must now find added urgency in reaching an agreement with the union."

Meanwhile Unison failed to draw out members to vote after a 'Yes' campaign which many unionists felt was lacklustre. One very senior Unison executive member was allegedly heard saying they were actively opposed to strike action and would be working to undermine the campaign.

A narrow majority was carried for action on a 24.4% turnout in the final vote, a poor enough turnout that the

National Executive Council was able to simply rule out industrial action as an option.

Instead, Unison sent out a 'warning' piece to the government, declaring: "This is effectively our members' fourth consecutive annual pay cut and they have decisively put government and local authority employers into the 'last chance saloon'. Since 2003 local council workers across the UK have seen their pay packets falling further behind the rise in living costs."

Similarly in the NHS, fourteen trade unions have sent the government a message demanding above-inflation wage increases for next year, having accepted this year's offer.

While they did not threaten action over the matter, the unions did point to new research showing poor morale.

More than 24,000 NHS workers were surveyed by researchers at Incomes Data Services. They found that 60% of NHS workers have considered leaving the NHS in the last

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## MEXICAN FLOODS

Writers on Chiapas Indymedia have slammed the Mexican government's response to the flooding crisis which has hit the country.

In the Tabasco province of Mexico, one estimate has suggested that around £900 million will be needed for reconstruction, a number that is conservative if we look at the sheer size of the tragedy.

Some people are saying that now is not the time to ask who is guilty or demand in investigation into the actions of government or state officials – these voices demonstrate a frank naïveté.

Aid and solidarity through donations must be present in the coming months to support people of all the ages of this area of the country – yet more than half of the donors believe these resources will not arrive at their objective.

"Everything is desperately needed right now, from water, medicines, tinware, soluble coffee, milk, nappies and sanitary towels. Combined with

this is the need for reconstruction and reestablishment of productive activities and infrastructure across the rest of the country.

"We insist it is necessary that the causes of this tragedy are investigated, from those who handled the hydraulic works, to the actions of planning officers building inadequate and dangerous urban zones and the non-relocation of people based at the border of the rivers.

"It has left millions of people astonished and depressed to hear from the UN office responsible for oversight into the prevention and management of such disasters that this could have been avoided with simple alert measures and plans of evacuation to take to the population to safe places.

"One would hope that the abuse does not prevail again and that those responsible for the lack of forecast before the announced emergency and for cutting resources destined for the hydraulic plan are called to account."

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# Home and away

**ARMS:** Even after including figures from EDO Artisan (EDO MBM's smaller US sister company) the official and doctored grand total shows a massive drop in profits for the company from £304,000 in 2005 to £94,000 in 2006.

Employees of the Brighton company are anxiously awaiting a visit of executives from an even bigger arms conglomerate IIT Corporation. IIT, the worlds 12th largest arms firm is in the process of taking over EDO unless another arms giant make a better offer.

**CARE:** Workers in disabled day care centres employed by the Council were on strike in Glasgow on 5th November. They work with vulnerable children with learning disabilities and other special needs. Up to ten of them were picketing the City Chambers at lunchtime. One told me the reasons for the strike. The Council is cutting their pay under the guise of a 'regrading' exercise.

**CLASS WAR:** Conflicting reports have suggested that between 80 and 250 people gathered on Portobello Road for a 'Bash the Rich' march on the house of Tory leader David Cameron.

At around 3pm the march left in the direction of Cameron's house and the scale of the police presence became evident, with marchers heavily outnumbered throughout.

There were a handful of arrests, including someone for sitting in the road after the police penned the demonstration in at Ladbroke Grove.

**MONOPOLY:** Provisional findings from the Competition Commission over the effect of supermarket monopoly on the groceries sector has been heavily criticised as an effective whitewash.

The commission found that the groceries market is "delivering a good deal for consumers" while failing to address accusations that producers and their workforces have been forced to take the strain of cost cutting to maintain supermarket profit margins.

Strong indications that alternative suppliers and non-mainstream producers are being effectively crushed beneath the market muscle of Tesco, Sainsbury's and Asda were ignored as outside the commission's remit.

**POLICING:** The verdict on the Jean Charles De Menezes killing found the Metropolitan Police guilty of putting the public at risk during the operation. The force was ordered to pay a fine of £175,000 and £385,000 costs. Calls have been made for the resignation of Met chief Ian Blair over the incident.

**NHS:** NHS workers marched in London on 3rd November in protest at health reforms. Organisers estimated 7,000 nurses, midwives, doctors, physiotherapists, hospital cleaners and technicians had joined the march to Trafalgar Square. The 'I Love The NHS' march culminated in a rally with speakers and entertainment. After a meeting at Temple Place on the Thames Embankment, the march progressed through Westminster to Trafalgar Square.



# Around the world



**CHINA:** To make Disney's Christmas toys, hundreds of workers from Tianyu Toys factory in Dongguan (Guangdong) were forced to work up to 16 hours a day, from 8am until after midnight, receiving only 3 Yuan an hour for overtime, less than half of the minimum wage. Jenny Chan of Hong Kong based Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehaviour, denounces that the workers went on strike in September, but only succeeded in having an increase of 3.5 Yuan an hour for over time. The group also says that many workers receive a monthly salary of just 5-600 Yuan (US\$66-80).

The company denies the accusations, while Disney spokesperson Alannah Gross limited herself to promising "close inspections".

Thanks to low labour costs, the vast majority of the world's toys are produced in China. The leading Japanese company - Tomy - has based over 90% of its production in China, but on 1st November it announced that it aims to move 30% of its production elsewhere, (perhaps in Vietnam or Thailand) within the next three years.

**IRAN:** An Iranian court has sentenced a dissident labour leader to five years in jail, a judiciary official was quoted as saying.

Mansoor Osanloo, who runs a union grouping bus drivers, was detained in July for "distributing statements against the system". Western rights groups say Iran has launched a crackdown on dis-

senting voices, although Tehran denies this.

"This verdict is certain and he is currently serving his jail sentence" the deputy prosecutor in Tehran, Hassan Haddad, was quoted as saying by the official IRNA news agency, but without giving details of the charges. Iran's judiciary says Osanloo's union is an illegal organisation.

**MEXICO:** Indigenous representatives attending an intercontinental gathering in Vicam, Sonora, have called for a boycott of the 2010 Olympics Games. The meeting, which was attended by over 1,500 delegates representing nations from the US, Canada, Mexico, Central America and South America, began on 11th October and ended on 14th October. Indigenous people met to discuss 515 years of invasion and resistance to colonial occupation of Indigenous lands, with the Olympics a central theme.

Delegates agreed that the 2010 Games, to be held on the occupied Indigenous territories of Vancouver BC, will have an immense negative impact on Indigenous people's lands and lives. Reading from the proposed resolutions delivered at the gathering, Gord Hill, a Kwakwaka'wakw delegate, stated that "Olympic related mega development on Indigenous lands have already disrupted hunting and fishing grounds and destroyed sacred sites". The resolutions also drew attention to the death of esteemed Elder Harriet Nahanee, who died after she was imprisoned for protesting the expansion of the Sea to Sky highway - the primary artery to the main site of the 2010 winter Games. In the final statement, adopted resolution number two states "We reject the 2010 Winter Olympics on sacred and stolen territory of Turtle Island in Vancouver, Canada". Angela Sterritt, Gitksan participant, said "Not only

are the 2010 Games destructive to the environment, but they will accelerate violence against Indigenous women. Prostitution is being actively promoted and referred to as a 'tourist attraction' for the games".

**PALESTINE:** A delegation of ten people from Brighton arrived in the Tubas region of occupied Palestine this weekend. The delegation is part of the project by the Brighton-Tubas Friendship and Solidarity Group. The group's aims are to highlight Israeli war crimes against Palestinians in the region, raise awareness about life under occupation and create practical solidarity links between grassroots organisations in Brighton and Tubas region.

The Jordan Valley, part of which is situated in Tubas region, has been de facto annexed by Israel. The Israeli occupation forces using land expropriation, house demolitions, militarisation of vast swathes of land and enforcing a system of pass laws.

This summer the group helped to fund the building of a school in the village of Fasayil in defiance of Israeli military restrictions. Volunteers from Brighton also went out to help construction. Palestinians in Fasayil are prevented from building any new structures by the occupation force's military administration.

On 17th October the Israeli military issued a demolition order on the school and ordered that the building be removed before 29th November.

A resident responded: "They can knock our school down as often as they want. We cannot stop them from doing so. We will build the school again and again and again. They cannot destroy our determination to give proper education to our children. Our children's education is our future. They will not succeed in their attempts to drive us from our land."

**TURKEY:** Turks and Turkish Cypriots from many and varied political tendencies are taking initiatives to oppose the war fever that has gripped Turkish society. Military and political preparations for the invasion are well underway, including daily bombings of Kurdish villages inside Iraq by jet aircraft and shelling by heavy artillery of the Armed Forces of Turkey. There are reports that more than 100,000 troops have been amassed at the border, waiting for orders to move forward.

Inside Turkey and in northern Cyprus - which is occupied by the Armed Forces of Turkey - a nationalist war frenzy is being whipped up in order to create a climate favourable to war. Mobs of nationalist pro-war demonstrators have been attacking the offices of leftist organisations and newspapers, vilifying them as 'traitors' and 'supporters of the enemy', who in this case is the Kurdish people's Liberation movement and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

**UNITED ARAB EMIRATES:** More than 4,000 south Asian workers have been released after being imprisoned over the weekend for taking strike action.

About 160 other strikers, including 90 Indian nationals, are still in custody in Dubai's central jail after United Arab Emirates authorities determined they had participated in violence during the strike, said Tahmiz Ahmad, the Indian ambassador to the Emirates.

The workers went on strike over harsh working conditions and demanded pay increases, improved housing and better transportation to construction sites. On Saturday, workers threw stones at riot police and damaged police cars.

Ahmad said most of the estimated 4,000 to 4,500 Asian workers, many Indians, who were released returned to their jobs.

# Prison news

**A night of democracy in Bologna** Five anarchists have been beaten and arrested by Italian police. On Saturday 13th October at around 4am, a girl who was sleeping on the piazza Verdi was noticed by police on patrol. The latter decided that the girl's behaviour was 'abnormal' and must be corrected by compulsory sanitary treatment (TSO). They called the ambulance while keeping the girl under their custody against her will.

Five comrades of the anarchist place 'Fuoriluogo' witnessed the episode and could not help expressing their contempt at the police. They did their best to prevent the arrest of the girl. The police's answer was brutal: armed with truncheons and even guns they chased the comrades.

As the latter fled, six more police vans were called on the scene and the short escape ended in the piazza San Vitale. The five were handcuffed while being severely beaten by the cops. A few residents in the area were clearly indignant at the police's behaviour but did not intervene.

The accusations against the comrades are quite heavy: aggravated robbery (the cops lost a pair of handcuffs), resistance and damage (of a police van in which one of the comrades had been taken). The five are imprisoned in La Dozza prison. Two girls were eventually put under house arrest.

In the evening a spontaneous march in solidarity to the arrested anarchists was carried out. Some of the demonstrators decided to express their solidarity also through 'dangerous' writings on the walls of the town. Caught by Digos officers, they are arrested and tried summarily: Juan and Bogu were sentenced to ten months and taken to prison whereas Davide, Alessio and Belle were sentenced to four months and put under house arrest. A 17 year-old comrade from Rovereto is also accused.

The addresses of the imprisoned comrades are:

- Cristian Facchinetti, Federico Razzoli, Andrea Tessarin (arrested

- on Saturday 13th) and Miroslav Bogu (arrested on Sunday 14th), Casa Circondariale La Dozza, Via Del Gomito 2, 40127 Bologna, Italy
- Juan Antonio Sorroche Fernandez (arrested on Sunday 14th), Casa Circondariale di Ferrara, Via Argione 37, 44100, Ferrara, Italy

**Broken promises for Spanish anarchists**

Having spent four years imprisoned after their arrest in Barcelona on the 16th September 2003, two of the four remaining imprisoned comrades have obtained a 'third degree of imprisonment', which entails having to return to prison to sleep (Igor) or back to a prison-owned flat (Carol).

These situations occurred after they had been first transferred to Can Brians prison, except for Joaquin who was transferred to Castellón prison.

After a promise from the prison director that they would receive 'third degree' imprisonment progressively after enjoying a few weekend-home permits, when it came to Rafa's turn

for his weekend-home permit (which will then lead him to 'third degree') they were denied.

This is the only way they have to torture him psychologically and punish him for his anarchic and rebellious attitude after all these years of imprisonment and supposed "bad behaviour and lack of adaptation to life in the module".

You can show solidarity and send faxes to Can Brians prison as a way of putting pressure on so Rafa can be out in the streets soon.

There was a campaign day on 8th November, but further faxes can't hurt. Can Brians prison fax is (0034) 93 7713661.

**Coroner Reform Bill shelved**

The government has shelved plans to include a Coroner Reform Bill in this parliamentary session. Bereaved families have been promised reform for years.

Helen Shaw, co-director of the campaigning prison reform group

# News

## Serious fears on crime bill

Controversial measures in a bill which has just been cleared could be a danger to our future liberty

Strong warnings have been sounded over the recent passing of a major new bill designed to tackle organised crime which could potentially cause problems across a wide swathe of activity.

The Serious Crime Act 2007 gives the police and other sectors potentially far greater access to information about individuals across the UK, and greater powers of detention and restriction.

The Act, which received Royal Assent at the beginning of this month, gives police the power to:

- Take control of suspects' possessions if they are suspected to be the proceeds of crime.
- Widens the scope of criminality to include 'encouraging or assisting somebody' in committing a crime or offence.
- Extend the ability of law enforcement agencies to look at information on you held by banks, health or social services and other public bodies in the course of their investigations.

Meanwhile up to 30 people a year could be given a new form of 'super-asbo' forcing them to stop associating with places, people, financial dealings, working life, communications and any other actions which it is felt could be criminal or encourage further criminality.

To help track down breaches of this order, their right not to have covert surveillance evidence used against them will be waived, so hacked emails or taped phone conversations would be admissible as evidence.

These control order will be handed out to those deemed serious criminals. Exactly what it means to behave in a

manner "that was likely to facilitate the commission ... of a serious offence" will be determined by the judiciary.

The Bill expressly states it does not matter if the person did not intend to facilitate the commission of a serious offence, or if he had no knowledge that he was conducting himself in a way that was likely to facilitate serious crime.

An order could last for up to five years.

Both campaigning group Liberty and the Law Society have expressed their worries over the issue. In a parliamentary briefing, the Law Society said: "the proposed orders are a measure of expediency to deal with cases where a prosecution is not possible because there is insufficient evidence".

The Criminal Bar Association has declared that "there can be no public policy that necessitates such a draconian course which rides roughshod over the legal principles upon which our criminal justice is based".

Law groups have expressed strong fears that the government are using civil processes to effectively bypass both the need for substantive proof and current restrictions to the use of certain kinds of evidence in court in ridding themselves of unwanted elements.

On law campaigner wrote: "The role of civil process ... is to provide a mechanism for resolving private wrongs where the public element of the wrong is absent. With the proposed introduction of SCPOs as a civil injunctive order, the Government is guilty of confused and highly dangerous thinking."

In the case of a SCPO, it will be sufficient for the Government to show that there are reasonable grounds to



Recent proposed changes to legislation will make the distribution of free food an offence. If it goes ahead it will make soup runs illegal and also add to the crimes committed each week by Food not Bombs activists. With this in mind, now is surely a perfect time to become a free food criminal. For details see "Distribution of Refreshments" on page 14 of the download at [http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/upload/public/attachments/1250/071015%20As%20advertised%20\(FINAL\).pdf](http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/upload/public/attachments/1250/071015%20As%20advertised%20(FINAL).pdf)

believe that there will be "involvement by the person [subject to the SCPO] in serious crime". The extent of anticipated involvement and the nature of the predicted crime need not be specified.

The Serious Crime Act is potentially extremely dangerous to libertarian groups, particularly those engaged in successful direct action campaigns, should the state decide to crack down.

The use of a hybrid of civil and criminal law allows the government to both monitor and prosecute dissent in a much more flexible way than has thus far been the case.

## Marching, but where?

As *Freedom* has previously reported, the problems the health service is facing are piling up. Privatisation, closures of hospitals, cuts in services, growing waiting lists, low pay and morale. In response the NHS Unions have been talking for over a year about organising a march and rally.

At the beginning of November the march eventually took place as part of the TUC's 'NHS Together' campaign. This according to the TUC's website brings "together all the NHS unions to work for a better health service". Except that all the unions weren't at the rally.

Noticeable for their absence was the Royal College of Nurses, who did not officially support the rally. The unions that did attend were less than wholehearted in their enthusiasm which may explain why only just over 5,000 workers attended the march through London.

One union insider told *Freedom*: "Unison and Unite didn't want the march because they were worried that it would embarrass Brown. They did their best to put it off." Unison's head

of health Karen Jennings who spoke at Trafalgar Square will be a candidate for the Labour Party in the next election.

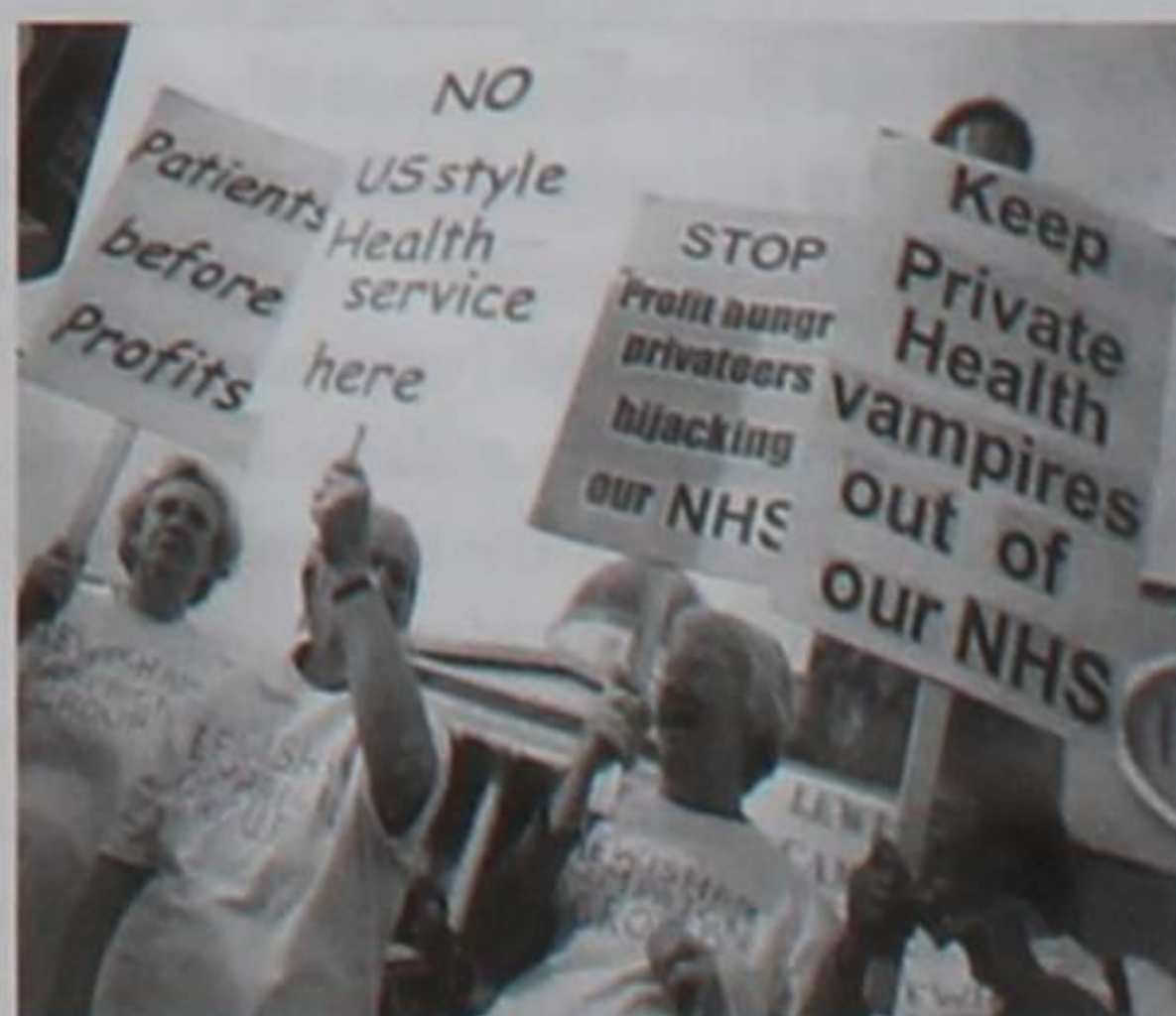
On a positive note the rally saw for the first time IWW health workers march under the Wob's banner. Union members handed out a large number of leaflets about proposed cuts at the National Blood Service which IWW is campaigning against.

An IWW member said following the march "hits on the website are up since the weekend. An entire Unison branch has now offered to help with the campaign." The IWW has seen a growth in membership of its health Industrial Union.

In recent evidence to the independent review body Labour has called once again for a squeeze on pay, calling for health workers like nurses to receive just 2% from next April. Any rise above that they claim would mean job losses or cuts in services. However the Department of Health is planning to make a surplus of £400 million this year – money that could be invested in decent pay for staff.

"The government invested in Agenda for Change because NHS pay was slipping and they were struggling with recruiting staff" an Anarchist Federation member told *Freedom*. "That was two years ago – ever since then they have been trying to claw the money back. More and more health workers will leave the NHS if this carries on."

While there is no doubt that NHS workers are angry with the way they are being treated, after this year's back down by their unions, it is questionable whether they will believe the likes of Unison will have the stomach for a real fight for decent pay and conditions.



## CWU goes to ballot

The end of this month will see the results of the CWU ballot on whether to accept the latest deal proposed by Royal Mail.

Ballot papers were finally dispatched on 9th November, several weeks after industrial action was called off and the Postal Executive Committee of the Union signed off on a proposed agreement negotiated by CWU chief Billy Hayes.

The ballot closes on Tuesday 27th November, with CWU chiefs blaming a continuing backlog of work for the slow mailout.

Merseyside Amal, Essex, Bristol and Edinburgh have already come out strongly against, saying the deal has been a cave-in by the union leadership.

A pay deal worth 2.5% a year, acceptance of attacks on working time, terms, conditions and overtime pay are largely similar to the deal being proposed by Royal Mail chiefs Alan Leighton and Adam Crozier before the dispute began.

The implementation of flexible

working, while at present set to be negotiated by workplace, is feared to be a means of splitting the workforce and isolating weaker branches for implementation of the unpopular measures.

Pensions have been excluded from the deal, with negotiations starting as *Freedom* goes to press and expected to conclude in mid-January, with implementation set for April 2008.

The negotiations will mainly focus on points within an overarching agreement signed up to as part of the negotiations last month, but will be subject to a separate ballot as a group-wide issue.

However initial indicators have suggested what will be offered would see existing members' final salary pensions initially protected while new incomers are forced onto a lower-paying pension averaging wages out over working life.

High turnover of staff within Royal Mail could see this splitting the workforce should further attacks on pensions be made in future years.

# News

## The claws sink in

The World Bank has brought its attention to Bangladesh as the labour movement there speaks volumes through its silence

**D**irect World Bank involvement in Bangladesh has spiked following the accession of an ex-employee to the highest position in the country, and an increase in the country's tactical importance as a possible future transport and trade hub in the region.

The World Bank has repeated its demand that the country reduce subsidies on oil in the country just weeks after similar demands prompted mass demonstrations in nearby Burma from people unable to afford fuel.

It has also requested that privatisation of the country's industrial centres be sped up, that more 'special economic zones' where normal labour and tariff rules don't apply are set up, and is looking at investing in a major new gas refinery in the region.

Presently about 270 enterprises are operating in the zones making an investment of \$1.8 billion

Bangladesh has proven natural gas reserves of up to 15 trillion cubic feet (425 billion cubic meters). Foreign companies have invested millions of dollars in order to explore and produce gas alongside the state-run company, Petrobangla.

A shortage of gas has encouraged Bangladesh to trade with Burma, as reported in previous issues of *Freedom*.

The actions of the World Bank, largely funded by the US and Europe, jar with recent condemnations of the actions of China and India in continuing to support Burma through huge violations of human rights.

Similarly to Burma, Bangladesh is

largely controlled by a ruling military junta, though there is a nominal civilian 'interim' government.

The interim government is led by Fakhruddin Ahmed (pictured right), a former world Bank economist, whose power rests largely on his military support base – which itself allegedly took power only after gaining the tacit support of senior western diplomats.

The military took power last year after the country joined the South East Asia Free Trade Zone last year, forcing it to drop tariffs on garments which are its main manufacturing base.

The result, combined with a major state campaign to privatise the massive Jute Mills which form much of the country's manual employment base, caused widespread suffering in the population. The economic fallout saw a massive uprising across the jute industry which was exploited by one of the two main political parties, the Awami League, to undermine the upcoming elections.

Continuing unrest, blame for which was partly laid at the feet of the Awami League, forced an interim government to step down, and led to violent military reprisals, with hundreds of thousands of arrests, torture and, it is alleged, murders.

In the aftermath, Ahmed was installed.

According to Ahmed and the military, a major campaign has since been launched against endemic corruption in the country, which justifies a continued massive military presence in the region and the arrest of large



numbers of people – the government itself estimates around 200,000, though this is likely to be a conservative figure.

There is no doubt that corruption has been significantly damaging Bangladesh economy. It drained government wealth estimated at \$2.1 billion during the first half of 2000 (January to June), according to Transparency

International, which believes that up to 75% of all developmental grants have found their way into the pockets of bureaucrats, and about 3% of total GDP.

However, an ominous silence is now noticeable from both political parties and trade union groups. Fears have been raised that the military have used the

crackdown not only to remove corrupt officials, but to silence the labour movement which has repeatedly stymied efforts to push through privatisation and free market reforms demanded by the world Bank and IMF.

The situation has been made more murky by the closing of private media and censorship of national stations.

## US notes

**I**n Southern California, while people were still watching their homes burn last month, emergency-response body FEMA decided to call a press conference.

This must have been in part to anticipate fears that they were going to put political advantage ahead of lives and safety, as they did at the time of Hurricane Katrina two years ago in the Gulf Coast.

With a quarter of an hour's advance notice, FEMA invited journalists to call in by phone and listen to (not participate in) a press conference. Several of the major networks carried the conference – including Rupert Murdoch's Fox 'News' and Bill Gates's MSNBC.

There were questions, which were apparently from journalists at the event.

"Are you happy with FEMA's response so far?"

"I'm very happy with FEMA's response so far. This is a FEMA and a federal

government that's leaning forward, not waiting to react. And you have to be pretty pleased to see that." (Harvey Johnson, the FEMA deputy administrator)

"What lessons learned from Katrina have been applied?"

"And lessons learned from Katrina, it's like, is there day and is there night? And if you take a look at Katrina, where there really was no leaning forward, really, there really was not a fabric of federal partners, where there wasn't good smooth communications between the governor and the administrator of FEMA, the governor and the President ... following a game plan, we didn't do any of those kind of things in Katrina. And what you're seeing now is a very smoothly, very efficiently performing team." (Johnson again)

There was only one snag – the people asking the questions were all FEMA staff, pretending to be journalists. It was a fake news conference, not staged

for training purposes, nor even packed with patsies at a time of a perceived need for reassurance. It was planned, total, unequivocal deceit. One FEMA member of staff who pretended to be a journalist has since been promoted to become head of public affairs at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Diane Farsetta, senior researcher at the Center for Media and Democracy, commented: "I think it has to be seen as an attempt at deliberate deception by the Bush administration and one in a long string of cases where we've seen this type of behaviour, this really is contempt for the role of a free press in a democracy.

"It happened almost two years to the day that there was a quote-unquote 'teleconference' with the troops in Iraq that President Bush held, where it turned out that they had been prepped beforehand by the Pentagon's lead PR person, Allison Barber. So we've seen this time and time again."

## Bookfair 'state threat'

**A**n anarchist bookfair planned in Washington State was accused of being a 'homeland security threat' by local police earlier this month and attempts were made to intimidate the landlord of the venue out of allowing it to go ahead.

On 2nd November, the landlord of the building which houses the Pitch Pipe Infoshop received a call from a Tacoma PD lieutenant.

He told her that the Infoshop and the Anarchist Bookfair was a homeland security threat and would be monitored by police for the entire weekend. The landlord then approached residents of the building and initially threatened to evict them, though as *Freedom* goes to press there is no longer an immediate threat of this.

A member of the collective noted: "The government just threatened us with the same apparatus that we are fighting against – the Department of Homeland Security. The same apparatus that is keeping people

locked in cages in the detention centres while we write this."

The activists came to police attention as they prepared a demonstration against the 1,000-bed Northwest Detention Centre in the town, which detains immigrants who are due to be deported.

The Tacoma PD encouraged the Downtown Merchants Guild to remove all portable items from their storefronts and asked business owners to be the 'eyes and ears' of the police and report any suspicious activity. The police stated that potential actions might be directed at shutting down the Tacoma Link Light Rail or towards destroying property.

At the march, which saw a crowd of between 50-100, two men and a woman were arrested on suspicion of disorderly conduct and for failure to obey a police officer. Jonnie Crivello, founder of March for America! Washington, was the only person to show up for a planned counter-protest.

## Feature

# Haiti is hurting

Sam Urquhart looks into horrific levels of death and destruction surrounding the 'UN protected' conflict zone

Three years after their elected president Jean Bertrand Aristide was overthrown by a band of US-trained adventurers, Haitians continue to deal with the consequences. Violence persists, both within desperately impoverished communities and directed at those who resist the UN-supported government, with frequent raids being undertaken by UN forces on opposition strongholds like Port au Prince's Cité-Soleil.

Thousands have died since Aristide was deposed, mostly under the two-year dictatorship of Gerard Latortue. A study published by *The Lancet* reported in 2006 that in the 22 months after Aristide's removal, over 8,000 people died violently with over 35,000 women and girls being raped. The whole country was essentially raped, with the connivance of the UN mandated MINUSTAH security forces, leaving a trail of fear, resentment, psychological scars and, with the police now staffed by many ex-participants in the 1991 coup (which also targeted Aristide), a budding police state. It's been quite an intervention, and it's completely off the rails.

The government has little control over right-wing paramilitaries and the police, while UN forces bludgeon impoverished communities into obedience. As journalist Ben Terrell has reported: "Though elected by the country's poor majority largely because of his past association with Aristide [he was Prime Minister in the first Aristide administration which ended in the 1991 coup], most activists I spoke to now see Preval as at best ineffectual in standing up to rightist forces."

Yet despite this, the resistance shown by Haitian civil society against the return of paramilitaries and foreign intervention has demonstrated that Haiti can't be shocked into docility. Lavalas, far from melting away and disintegrating, has bounced back.

In 2006, when popular protests brought a round of elections, it was a Lavalas' old-hand, Rene Preval who took the presidency. That was despite massive corruption in favour of candidates more closely aligned with the US-Canadian-French co-ordinated occupation.

Political activism also spread from Lavalas, and fed into it again, via a range of civil society organisations which developed in direct response to disappearances, massacres, corruption, poverty and the trauma of sexual assault. One of the most prominent has been the September 30 Foundation which has worked in the poorest areas of Port au Prince, with rape and torture victims, with the so-called 'chimeres', with the relatives of those killed in the brutal interventions carried out by

MINUSTAH in Cité-Soleil and by the Haitian 'police'.

But that was decimated in recent months by the abduction in August of the September 30 Foundation's inspirational leader, Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine. Haitian democracy and society took another blow last week when it emerged that another inspirational Lavalas activist and humanitarian worker, Maryse Narcisse, had disappeared.

With elections on the horizon and resistance rising, Lavalas and Haitian activists are under attack. MINUSTAH does nothing. Foreign governments too have done nothing. Their silence betrays a complicity in Haiti's torment that needs to be reported.

### Why Pierre-Antoine and Narcisse?

It's not hard to see why powerful people might want to remove Pierre-Antoine from Haiti's political map. A long-time Lavalas organiser and radical psychologist (he worked for years with the victims of the 1991 coup and the Duvalier dictatorship), Pierre-Antoine never hid his allegiance to the Haitian poor and his commitment to activism. He also never hid his opposition to the removal of Aristide and the subsequent UN-backed regime.

As he told *Democracy Now!* in December 2006, "What happened in Haiti is a continuation of a war of genocide against the poor population. And that is an expression in fact of the class struggle in Haiti. What happens is that the United Nations by what is called the MINUSTAH [United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti] is an accomplice of this war against the poor in Haiti."

Speaking after MINUSTAH troops had mounted a deadly operation in Cité-Soleil, supposedly in pursuit of gangsters, he railed against "what happens every day in Cité-Soleil where soldiers kill the poor for nothing, and what happened this past 21st, 22nd of December of this year. This campaign against the poor in Haiti where they give them some kind of pejorative name" adding that "the presence of the United Nations forces is just an expression of the continuation of the 2004 coup d'etat."

Never afraid to make dangerous enemies, he then told Juan Gonzalez that "Because all the people who were doing crimes at the end of 2003 and all the former military, they don't have any problem. They are just circulating freely in the country."

Pierre-Antoine has consistently defended the poor of Port au Prince against accusations of lawlessness and criminality, preferring to argue that the poor have been deliberately represented as sub-human 'chimeres' – the easier to then shoot them down when they resist. In the *Democracy Now!* interview he even accused the UN and the govern-



ment of staging kidnappings to create an atmosphere of crisis ("precisely so that they could target Cité-Soleil, to give the impression that they were trying to fight against insecurity," he told Gonzalez).

This year, he moved into even more dangerous territory when he began to link together police brutality, the UN occupation and US "democracy promotion". As he said in an interview with the human rights group Haiti Action, the US has been seeking to detach an 800-strong contingent of loyal police to form a new Haitian 'army'.

This would be a disaster for Haitian democracy, Pierre-Antoine argued, noting that it was "The absence of the army prior to the 2004 coup [that] made the completion of the coup impossible, so the US had to get openly involved in order to finish the job, even though they wanted to keep their involvement covert."

It wasn't just that Pierre-Antoine said things which upset the powers that be in post-coup Haiti, however. The problem was that he then acted upon his own analysis. As he told Haiti Action, "we in the 30th of September Foundation will be campaigning against the creation of this parallel security force". Before his disappearance, he had registered as a Senatorial candidate for Lavalas and had been leading demonstrations against the continuation of the MINUSTAH meeting.

Coupling that energetic activism with an uncompromising loyalty to the poor made Pierre-Antoine a marked man. A man who could tell foreigners that "It's always the poor who rise up to defend

national sovereignty [and] that is why in the eyes of the Bourgeoisie, in the eyes of the intellectual elites, these people are no different than the 'va-nou-pieds', nothing but criminals, whereas in my opinion these people are the protectors of our sovereignty" would be a danger to authority and elite rule in any country.

Maryse Narcisse comes from the same tradition – the defence of Haitian democracy, a commitment to the poor and a willingness to alienate the rich and powerful. In her capacity as Jean Bertrand Aristide's spokeswoman, it has been Maryse who has relayed many messages of support back to Haitians from their exiled president. Just like Pierre-Antoine, Narcisse has coupled her politics with humanitarianism, working as a medical doctor "in the forefront of efforts to provide community-based health care and education for all Haitians" according to Haiti Action and risking a return to Haiti in 2006 "to restore democracy".

### Who cares about Pierre-Antoine?

If Pierre-Antoine and Maryse have been disappeared and the worst has transpired, then these are intolerable, disgusting violations of human rights and basic decency. This is, however, made doubly intolerable as they have occurred under the supposedly humanitarian eyes of a UN mission. But it's worse than that, at least from a Canadian perspective.

Pierre-Antoine was abducted in the middle of the visit of a human rights delegation which was investigating abuses committed by the Haitian police and MINUSTAH forces. Roger Annis,

a Canadian, was one of the members of that delegation, and as he wrote in a piece for Znet on 27th September: "On 15th August, I and another Canadian member of the delegation visited the Canadian embassy to urge Canadian ambassador Claude Boucher to make a public statement of concern about Pierre-Antoine's disappearance. That request was refused by the embassy, and it has made no such statement to date."

Annis also told *The Hour* that he suspected the Canadian silence was far from coincidental. As he told journalist Christopher Scott, "Canada is playing a very decisive role in ... financing the Haitian judicial system [while] the RCMP are the training force for the Haitian National Police." The official line remains that Canada "doesn't get involved" in Haitian politics, according to Annis. Human rights activists can expect no help from that quarter, to Canada's shame.

Like the Haitian people rebuilding their democracy, campaigners looking for official support for human rights in Haiti will have to work on their own, and petitions have begun to circulate across the world to demand action and end impunity for Haiti's political classes and the multi-national occupation. There may still be time to derail the occupation and prevent the re-militarisation of Haitian society along US-approved lines. There may be time to rebuild a social justice movement in Haiti. Yet there is a brutal right-wing assault under way on Haitian activism and whether the people of Haiti can respond, only time will tell.

# Commentary

## FREEDOM

Volume 68 Number 22

### 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

There has been some discussion going on at the paper about our future – and even whether we have one.

At present, a combination of factors have been stymieing our best efforts to get the paper out on time, despite the heroic efforts of our small battery of existing contributors, our layout lady, our long-suffering mailout guru Ed who courageously battles on putting the paper in envelopes and who I really should help out more often...

So there has been some talk about how to get the paper out on time and what should be done with it. One idea is going to 16 pages and reducing the size to A4, thus allowing the folding to be done by Aldgate Press and reducing turnaround time. Some more talk has suggested that we go monthly and Matt and I work as co-authors, cutting down on both our workloads and increasing the quality of what goes out.

However, all this stuff would almost certainly mean a complete rethink of the format, so we want to know what you think should be done – if anything!

Contact us at the address below.

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### Next issue

The next issue will be dated 1st December 2007 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 22nd November. Send articles to us by email to [copy@freedompress.org.uk](mailto:copy@freedompress.org.uk) or by post addressed to The Editors, Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

### More on Monbiot

The letter from 'London Squatter' (*Freedom*, 3rd of November) left me somewhat perplexed. Apparently, the anarchist notion of 'self-help' as regards housing is now "standard World Bank practice". I was not aware that the World Bank advocated squatting and non-payment of rent. Perhaps 'London Squatter' could provide the appropriate documentation to substantiate his/her claims?

Somehow, though, I doubt that s/he will. The World Bank does not advocate anarchist notions of self-help, in housing or anything else. Rather, it advocates that working class people simply try to survive as best we can while respecting private property and the authority of the state. Neither of which, it is churlish to note, is advocated by anarchists.

He/she states that 'self-help' notions "freed governments from the responsibility of addressing housing issues and their underlying causes". Except, of course, governments still continue to address 'housing issues' by enforcing capitalist property rights in such a vital area of life. It also acts to stop collective working class self-help to address such issues and their underlying causes in favour of ensuring that the banks and landlords make a profit from their investments. As my article stressed, neo-liberalism intervenes continually in the economy in favour of the capitalist and landlord class. This is obviously the case of housing.

It is true that since the 1980s, the state has withdrawn from being a landlord in favour of letting private landlords reap higher profits. Yet one of the reasons why it became involved in the housing issue in the first place was because of a healthy attitude of 'self-help' from below in the form of squatting and rent strikes. This pressure, and pressure like it, forced the state to address such issues. I'm sure that faced with a similar wave of 'self-help' today, the state would quickly try to address the "housing issues and their underlying causes".

Ultimately, while it may like to use the rhetoric of freedom and 'self-help', neo-liberalism will use the state to try and break any movements for genuine political, social and economic freedom (hence its opposition to unions). Our job as anarchists is to build a social movement which states cannot ignore or crush. By doing so, we can create our own solutions to the problems we face or, at least, force the state to take into account priorities other than profits. Unless we practice 'self-help' the state will happily ignore us and foster 'solutions' to various issues

which favour the few over the many. Only someone ignorant of anarchism would confuse this with the neo-liberal agenda – as George Monbiot did.

Iain McKay

### The Lives of Others 2

I'm still not convinced by Tom Jennings' reply (*Freedom*, 6th October) to my comments (14th July) on his review of the German Oscar winning film *The Lives of Others*. The film, it seems to me, alludes to a platitude or truism that all societies are corrupt. "Thanks be to God for corruption" says a Brechtian character in his play *The Threepenny Opera*, "for men are human and judges are bribe-able and with corruption even the innocent may get off".

Tom suggests that if the Captain Wiesler's bosses hadn't been corrupt he wouldn't have had a change of heart, arguing "if his superiors had been Stalinist zealots with integrity (rather than slime) he would probably have carried on wrecking lives regardless". I take his word that there is no recorded case of a "Stasi officer actively sabotaging investigations ..." but he lets the side down when he adds: "and anyway, the records can't be trusted". If the records can't be trusted if they record a case of sabotage, how can they be trusted if they *don't* record a case?

The fascinating paradox in the film is that not only the Stasi Captain Wiesler believed in the 'State Socialist God' but the playwright victim he spies on did so as well. And yet both are disillusioned in the course of the film. Tom admits: "my reviews seek neither to be authoritative nor objective (and could never be 'systematic' in covering all the angles)..." I would expect nothing less (or more) from a post-modernist. But if Tom can't cover all the angles why should he expect a film or 'work of art' (assuming he, as a postmodernist, believes in such a thing as art) to deal with all aspects of a historical event.

He says "the film ... invites identification with the powerful". It does more than that; it deals with the dilemmas of power associated with the enforcement of commands, the administration of orders and how power can be subverted, if only because here "change [is] hinging ... on [the] vicissitudes" of a middle-ranking 'power' figure such as Captain Wiesler. Indeed, the film invites us to consider the powerlessness of 'the powerful' so-called in the same way as, on a much grander scale, Tolstoy's book *War and Peace* did in examining the claims to power of Napoleon. Given that the sociology of power is so problematic and is not an

exact science, I am not sure it is helpful for Tom Jennings to use categories such as 'the powerful' in the way he does.

Brian Bamford

### Housing and planning reform

page 1

The bills will make it easier for government to introduce new house-building and regeneration schemes such as Pathfinder. This scheme has demolished 10,200 properties and has 37,000 still scheduled to go. So far, although 40,000 homes have been refurbished, only 1,100 have been built, and a recent National Audit Office report raises questions about the £2.2 billion spent on the project.

In response to government plans, others have said that they would like to see the government introduce measures to reduce the amount of empty houses in the UK, estimated to total 670,000. Tim Dixon, professor of Real Estate at Oxford Brookes University, says this figure is equal to the size of a city such as Leeds.

### PCS out, Unison down

page 1

twelve months, while 61% said their morale and motivation had deteriorated since a year ago.

The vote result, combined with a slow start to balloting by the NUT which will see the education union in until at least January, effectively kills off the prospect of official co-ordinated action for this year.

### Prison news

page 2

Inquest, said: "This is bitterly disappointing to all the bereaved families and those with whom they work who have contributed their experiences so generously to proposals for reform."

Inquest's publication *Unlocking the Truth: Families' Experiences of the Investigation of Deaths in Custody* (2007) by Helen Shaw and Deborah Coles argues that: "Complacency and inaction have characterised the government response (to deaths in custody), indicating a failure or unwillingness to ensure that systems are in place to prevent further deaths and ensure accountability."

Around 600 men, women and children die every year in incarceration. Officially, around a third of those deaths are not due to natural causes.

Inquest criticised several aspects of the coronary process, including long delays in getting to the inquest stage after custodial deaths with two to three years the norm, and legal funding being extremely difficult to come by for relatives of the deceased.

At present, despite a pattern of cases where inquest juries have rejected the official version of events and found overwhelming evidence of unlawful and excessive use of force or gross neglect, no police or prison officer or nurse has been ever held responsible. Since 1990, unlawful killing verdicts have been returned in ten death-in-custody cases. Not one case led to a successful prosecution.

*Unlocking The Truth: Families' Experiences of the Investigation of Deaths in Custody* by Helen Shaw and Deborah Coles, is published by Inquest, price £10. Details at [inquest.org.uk](http://inquest.org.uk)

### The 'Cordoba 4'

The Malaga court of appeal sentenced anarchists Giovanni Barcia, Michele Pontolillo and Claudio Lavaza, already sentenced to 11 years on September 1999, for an incident in the Italian vice-consulate in December 1996. Three persons wearing balaclavas imprisoned the consul and an employee, sending a message of solidarity to the Italian prisoners jailed by the Judge Marini (the judge who built a false accusation against Italian anarchists) and disappeared with passports and some money. These three Italians were convicted of this, as well as a previous bank robbery with sentences of 49 years for Claudio, 48 years for Giorgio and Giovanni, three years for Michele. Write to them at:

- Claudio Lavazza, C.P Albalote, Carreterra de Colomera Km 6,5 (Modulo 2), 18220, Albolote, Granada, Spain
- Giorgio Rodriguez, C.P Madrid VI(Aranjuez), Ctra National 400, Km 28, Apdo 2000, 28300 Aranjuez, Madrid, Spain (note that Giorgio can speak English).
- Giovanni Barcia C.P Puerto I, Apartado 555, 11500 Puerto de Sta Maria, Cadiz, Spain

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### Quiz answers

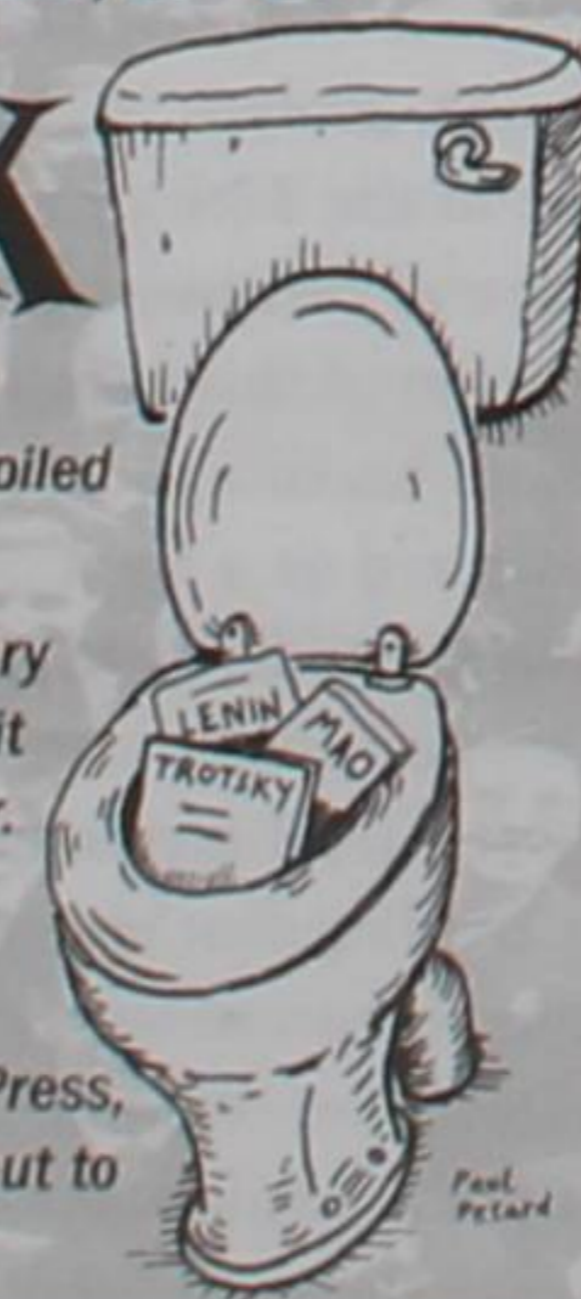
1. Carpenters in Barcelona refused to repair them, in solidarity with their comrades in prison. The authorities decided to get them repaired in Majorca. They had to be loaded onto a ship by soldiers as the dockers refused to load them in Barca. In Majorca the dockers, again CNT members, refused to unload them, and the island's Woodworkers Union refused to touch them. After much struggle, the gates were repaired by scabs from the socialist union the UGT.
2. In the late '70s, the Irish state wanted to build four nuclear power stations there. Mass direct action coupled with the political fallout from the Three Mile Island disaster led to its defeat.
3. The Mauthausen concentration camp. He was part of the committee that planned the prisoner revolts that liberated the camp before the US Army arrived in 1945.
4. The Workers Revolutionary Party, under Gerry Healy. They received over a million pounds in the 1970s from Arab regimes and the Palestine Liberation Organisation. From 1979 they provided intelligence on Iraqi dissidents to Saddam Hussein and voted to approve the execution of 20 dissidents, one of whom had brought fraternal greetings to a WRP front organisation.

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# REVIEW

## John Pilger spoils a concise exposé of US foreign policy with uncritical pandering to Latin American nationalists, finds Tom Jennings

**T**he cinema release of veteran journalist John Pilger's *The War On Democracy* (co-directed with Chris Martin) permits more wide-ranging thematics than his usual scrupulous but relatively narrow television coverage of specific historical outrages (most famously in Vietnam, Cambodia, Nicaragua and East Timor).

Summarising Washington's installation of brutal regimes in Central and South America over five decades, he wanted to analyse 'freedom' and 'democracy' as spun by Western governments: "revealing through vivid testimony, the story of great power behind its venerable myths ... [in order] to understand the true nature of the so-called war on terror".

The replacement of social democratic formations with rule by death squad throughout the region is then contrasted with Venezuela and Bolivia, where Presidents Chavez and Morales have recently been elected vowing to derail the rich and foreign elite gravy train in the interests of the dispossessed.

The experience in Chile – where Pinochet's fascists seized power on 9/11 1974 with extensive CIA support – is contrasted with the 2002 right-wing coup in Caracas which failed purportedly due to street protests by the urban masses.

Despite local and US media saturation denouncing Chavez's project as evil communist insanity, ordinary Venezuelans clearly rejected the certain misery of unfettered neoliberal dictatorship – the film counterposes footage from 2002 with visits to shanty towns and a millionaire's mansion, succinctly conveying the social bases of political polarisation in the country.

Similarly, the litany of slaughter and repression under American tutelage precedes a chat with Duane Clarridge, ex-CIA chief in Chile, reiterating the continuing utter contempt for human rights. Pilger then interviews Hugo Chavez, showing his personal integrity, humility, and a warmth for the common people reciprocated in the barrios – cementing the populist appeal of promises of a basic welfare state now capturing imaginations across the continent.

Naming and shaming the backyard bully

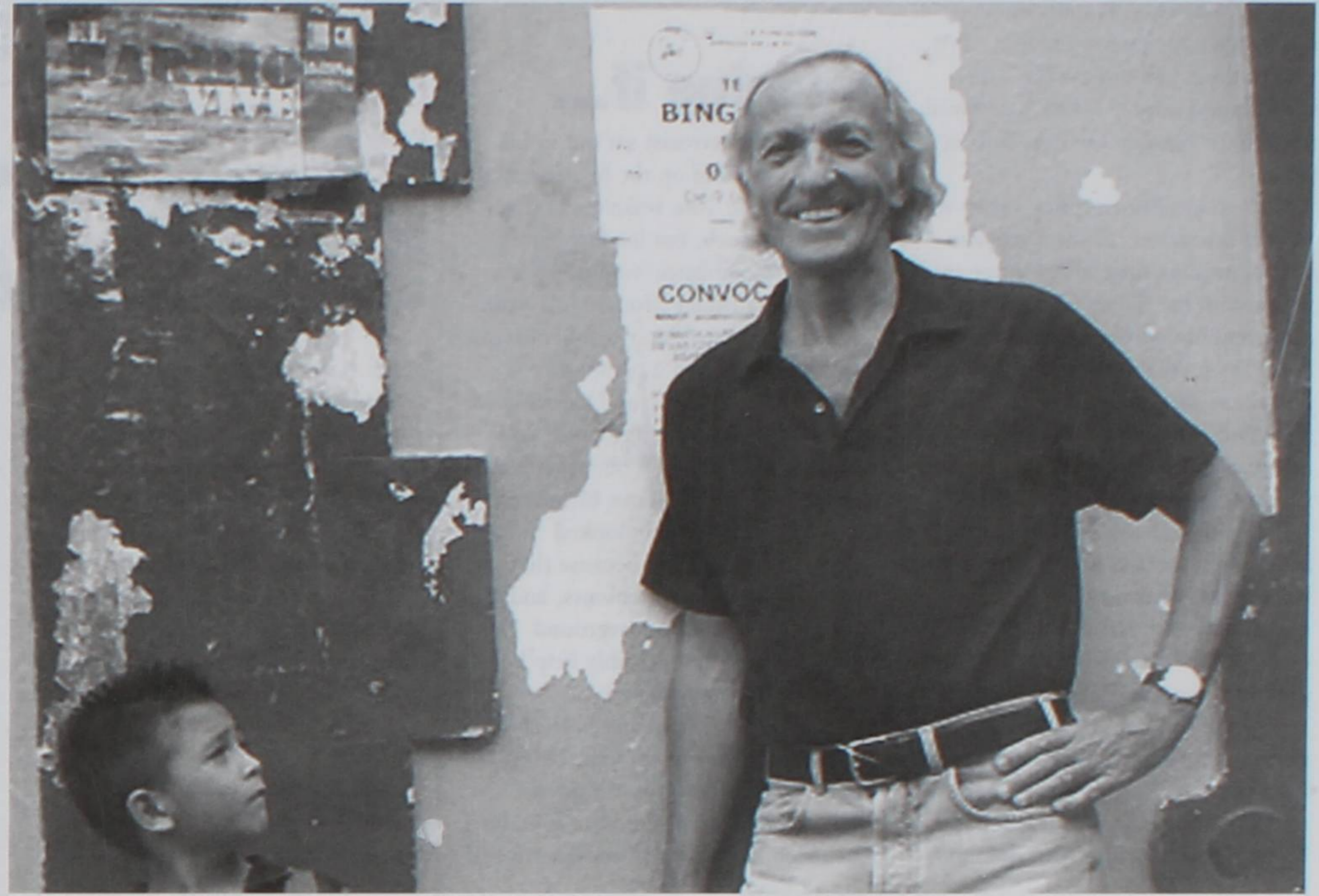
Of course memories of the ravages of military regimes weigh heavily across the region. But two decades of the wholesale looting of resources by multinationals and local lapdogs (IMF and World Bank conditions for 'democracy' to return) – destroying subsistence economies with the concomitant growth of vast slums around cities – doubtless also inflect the motivation to vote for marginally lesser evils.

Actually, a relative waning of Washington's directly malevolent intervention (with its attention elsewhere) has coincided with very diverse developments in South American political spheres crucial to understanding what is happening now.

However, framed only in terms of earlier US foreign policy, *The War On Democracy* ignores the crucial integration into global trade (and subsequent bankrupting) of entire nations – which that historic policy facilitated rather than caused. Thus the far-reaching political convulsions in Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Ecuador are ignored, and the significance (beyond boosting national budgets) of natural resource extraction by American corporations – quite irrespective of Dubya's posturing – is missed.<sup>1</sup>

The rise of so-called Bolivarian social democracy in Venezuela and comparable state-capitalist compromises elsewhere are better seen as strategic nationalist defences against emerging lower-class social movements which have threatened to coalesce in much more radical directions.

For example, Evo Morales has co-opted impressive grass-roots mobilisations of shanty-neighbourhood and indigenous groups (detailed by Forrest Hylton in *New Left Review*, 35 & 37, 2005/6) amid large-scale industrial unrest in Bolivia into a shaky electoral alliance, appealing to the military and local and international capital that revolution can be pre-empted. In 'Is Latin America Really Turning Left?' (reprinted on the libcom website), James Petras explains the contortions of the new parliamentary socialists negotiating corporate demands for super-profits while retaining popular support with negligible redistributive trickle-down from oil and gas bonanzas.



Both phenomena are clear in Venezuela, which has the largest heavy crude reserves in the world and hence room to manoeuvre in buying off popular discontent. After the 1989 Caracazo uprising, unprecedented social movements mushroomed in the country, while an abortive 1992 military coup attempt saw Chavez and other junior officers involved jailed.

Later in the decade his alternative, parliamentary, organisation, and carefully-designed personality cult catapulted him to the Presidency and a world record number of election victories since with manifestoes stressing health, education, housing and job-creation. Sadly the grass-roots networks have been taken over and reconstituted merely as electoral groups and self-aggrandising militarised client bureaucracies dispensing favours, while precious few welfare benefits have materialised.

Dissatisfaction at unmet promises is escalating, with any opposition dismissed as 'counter-revolutionary' and encountering increasingly repressive policing. Most seriously, the government's economic strategy is to sell off the whole of the natural environment for pillage by multinationals (to their

great satisfaction) demanding less than the going international rent in return and with absolutely no regard for devastating consequences for the rain-forest and its indigenous inhabitants or global climate ramifications.<sup>2</sup> And we're supposed to applaud a brave and honest desire to improve the lives of the poor ...

Packing so much in, it's understandable that *The War On Democracy* neglects historical and contemporary complexities in Venezuela. Unfortunately, the results reinforce prejudices about lower-class susceptibility to charismatic leadership while demonstrating little inkling of the real characteristics of the Bolivarian state, the prospects for its modest socialism, or the social, environmental or economic impacts of its national development programme.

Just as parachuting reporters into warzones with no independent sources inevitably yields subservient conclusions, embedding perspective within the Chavista circus here obscures its real contradictions and conflicts.

True, Pilger has consistently broken through the media's role as poodle to power, permitted only sporadic fractional deviations from official dishonesty

masquerading as serious journalism. But despite a welcome demystification of US machinations, this film reproduces the liberal-left's fatal inability to transcend the us-and-them oversimplifications it derides in the mainstream. The need for simultaneous critique of imperialism and nationalism – of the interwoven structures of capitalism and the state – remains.

[www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)

1. George Caffentzis enlarges on the wider context in 'Apocalypse and/or Business as Usual? The Energy Debate after the 2004 Presidential Elections', in *Mute* magazine, May 2007 ([www.metamute.org](http://www.metamute.org))
2. Comprehensive analysis is provided by the Venezuelan affinity group Comision de Relaciones Anarquistas (CRA) in their excellent magazine *El Libertario* (with translations at [www.nodo50.org/ellibertario/english/](http://www.nodo50.org/ellibertario/english/)). See also Hanna Dahlstrom's report on the CRA-initiated Alternative Social Forum, coinciding with the February 2006 tame corporate-liberal World Social Forum in Caracas, at [www.upsidedownworld.org](http://www.upsidedownworld.org).

*The War on Democracy* will be released on DVD in the new year. Unlike Pilger's previous work, it has not been shown on ITV.

## FILM

**Sherrybaby**  
written and directed by Laurie Collyer

In parts resembling by-the-numbers issue-led TV docudrama and quirky low-budget indie feature, *Sherrybaby* exceeds the limits of these genres thanks to the honesty and subtlety of its narrative and Maggie Gyllenhaal's magnificent immersion in the role of Sherry – a 22 year-old New Jersey junkie fresh out of prison trying to turn her life around and resume motherhood of a young daughter looked after by her brother and sister-in-law.

Gyllenhaal exudes worldly-wise determination, vulnerability, sass and naivete, yet this is no naff redemptive melodrama puppeteering its audience's



emotions and pimping its characters.

Instead, shameless manipulation and sentimentality are located firmly in Sherry's behavioural repertoire and are consistently marked as self-destructive, inappropriate and/or abject – but also intelligible responses to the arbitrary, corrupt environment in which she struggles in childlike desperation to negotiate friendship, family and official relationships.

Former documentary-maker Collyer based the story on a close friend's life and her own experiences as social work assistant. So the details of

halfway house, probation routine and rehab groups ring completely true – where those she encounters exhibit occasional goodwill but, in this soul-crushing system, more often hover between cynical, hostile and downright pathological.

Sherry strides cluelessly into the morass fortified by the Bible and simple-minded personal growth slogans, freely deploying her open sexuality and self-obsession to open doors always threatening to slam shut. The excellent supporting cast flesh out Gyllenhaal's convincing naturalistic

depiction of conflictuality: unpredictably sympathetic, alienating, victimised, brave and foolish.

A powerfully poignant realism allows her wholly unrealistic (and potentially catastrophic) personal mythology – caring for a child in actuality rather than fantasy – to crumble as she backslides towards addictive oblivion.

The substance of bbase Collyer's riskiest tactic was to contextualise Sherry's conduct in the

## A Sideways Look

Dictionaries define atavistic as characteristic of "a very old natural and basic habit from the distant past, not because of a conscious decision or present need or usefulness".

There is a very strong atavistic tendency in 'Euroscepticism'. I use this term to denote the sort of people who are instinctively, even viscerally, against the European Union, usually from a right wing perspective. They are typified by the UK Independence Party and much of the Conservative Party, and all the right wing print media. They object to "being ruled by Brussels" and the loss of sovereignty for the United Kingdom thanks to successive treaties. Funnily enough, they are nearly always English – this sort of thing just doesn't have the same appeal among Scottish or Welsh people, for reasons I will go into in the future.

Back to the Eurosceptics – they want to pull Britain out of the European Union, arguing instead for a free trade union with the EU instead. They want a referendum on the new EU treaty (which is unlikely to be conceded by Labour as they would lose it). They also tend to object to immigrants and are keen on trading with the Commonwealth.

I should probably expand on the latter point a bit as many readers may be unaware of what the Commonwealth is: Namely, those bits of the world that used to be coloured pink in Victorian Atlases – the last vestiges of the Empire, united through nothing much apart from once having been ruled by Britain. Except for all those bits not in it, like Ireland and Hong Kong. Oh, and Mozambique's in it too.

I should point out that UKIP and their ilk have a point. The EU is a corrupt, bloated bureaucracy that enforces the most destructive forms of capitalism, like Post Office privatisation, on its member states. And, as has been pointed out many a time, the left in this country are strangely silent on its failings. It didn't used to be this way – in the '70s almost all on the left and most unions campaigned to come out of the Common Market, as it was then.

The problem with UKIP – and with most Tories, who agree with UKIP but don't have the courage to say they'd pull out – is that their analysis is flawed. They want to rejoin the European Free Trade Area – set up by Britain in the '60s after the European Economic Community (forerunner of the EU) said no to British membership. The main countries left in EFTA are Norway and Switzerland. Both these countries are rich, and can afford to take on the huge amount of bureaucracy that comes from dealing with the EU, while of course having no say in any decisions made by the EU. UKIP even admit in one of their discussion papers that the EU is "causing significant problems for the Swiss in regard to domestic

laws and regulation". You can't enter into an agreement with a vastly more powerful, protectionist neighbour and expect to have much say in the terms. Would Britain really benefit from leaving the EU? Many of the large multi-nationals headquartered here would move. Without guaranteed free trade why would new ones come?

I can see the appeal of going back to a supposed golden age, with warm beer, cricket and factories exporting to the whole world. But it isn't going to happen. The EU is part of the problem here – anyone on the left imagining that the weak social provisions of EU law are a substitute for working class activity are dreaming.

Svartfrosk

## Imagine if...

Old Tom the terrorist sat out in his veranda, soaking up the breeze and the sunshine. Old Tom wasn't actually a terrorist as such, but his face bore a striking resemblance to notorious Iraqi militia leader Moqtada Al Sadr.

Well, I say 'striking resemblance', he was white and had a completely different shaped nose and mouth, but the hairstyle was similar and if you changed the lighting a bit, stretched the photo, smoothed out blemishes and the like, they only looked completely dissimilar because they were totally different colours, and you know, in a well-lit underground station who could possibly help but make an honest mistake?

He felt lucky he hadn't been shot six times in the face from point blank range or something by the armed police who'd been sent after him, he'd just been hauled away and questioned for 48 hours.

Anyway, after two days of relentless interrogation with little chance of seeing his family, constant intimidation and manipulation, he'd cracked and admitted he really was Moqtadr Al Sadr, now could he please go home?

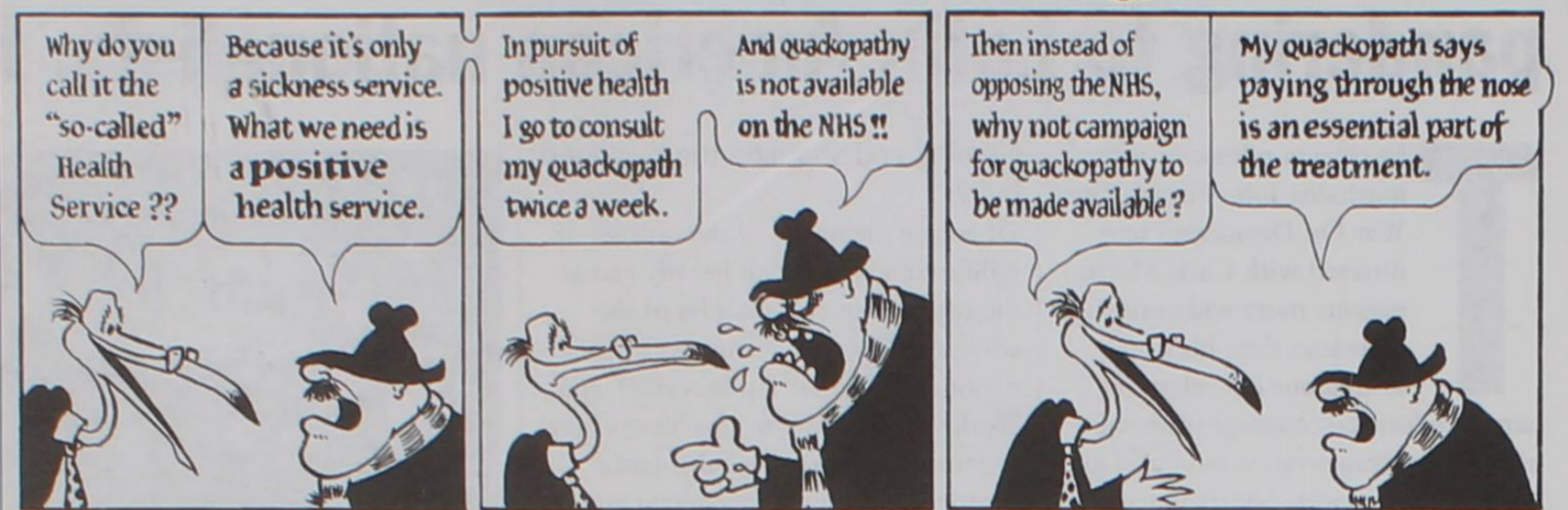
It had almost gone badly for him, until it turned out on the news that Al Sadr was still at large and actually in Iraq, so they'd let him go, looking a bit sheepish and apologising profusely.

Well I say apologising ... they fudged the videotape of his arrest, refused to discipline anyone or admit any individuals had made any mistakes whatsoever, and flat out denied that any kind of punitive measure should be taken against the force. But they did say they were very sorry his time had been wasted by whoever it was, oh yes, very sorry. Dear lord it was a terrible thing. Nothing to do with them though.

That was nice of them.

So now he was back home. Of course, the government were thinking of extending the number of hours again that suspects could be imprisoned without any sort of proof, but he was sure it was worth it for the sake of British freedoms.

He had almost fallen asleep when a car stopped outside his house and armed



police threw themselves out of it.

"Freeze Al Sadr! We know it's you, you have the same hairstyle and everything! This time we'll be able to hold you until you tell us all your secrets, you hardened terrorist mastermind you! Fifty hours you'll have to take! That'll sort you out good and proper after your many years of clandestine living and anti-interrogation training!"

Old Tom held his head in his hands.

## Listings

Until 17th November Aberystwyth Arts Centre showing Shell's Wild Lie, see aberystwythartscentre.co.uk/whatson/exhibitions/

21st November Class Act presents *The Iron Giant*, a smooth, skilled example of animated film making looking at the fearful years of the Cold War as seen through the political lens of the 1990s while turning down all those sci-fi movie parables of the '50s, at Café Crema, 306 New Cross Road, London SE14 from 7.30pm, £4 includes delicious veggie meal

24th November Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) National Gathering from 10am to 6pm at South Camden Community College, Charrington Street, London, NW1, contact anna@caat.org.uk

24th November Don't Attack Iran demonstration, assemble 12 noon in Castle Park (by the bandstand), Bristol, for more info contact bristolstopwar@hotmail.com

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

2nd December 30th anniversary of Animal Aid's Christmas Without Cruelty Fair, at Kensington Town Hall, Hornton Street, London, from 10am

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

10th December Book launch of *The*

*Anarchist Past and other essays* by Nicolas Walter at Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London, from 7pm to 8.30pm, contact info@fiveleaves.co.uk or 0115 9693597

12th December *Black Flag* launch meeting, to mark the re-launch of *Black Flag* magazine we are holding a meeting at Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London at 6.30pm – it will be a brief introduction of the history of the black flag, the magazine and the anarchist symbol itself, followed by discussion

15th December Worldfair, London's liveliest ethical market, will be at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 from 11am until 6pm, see worldfair.org.uk for more

19th December South London SolFed film night presents *Pan's Labyrinth*, a gothic fairy tale set after the Spanish revolution, 7.30pm at Café Crema, 306 New Cross Road, London SE14, £4 includes delicious veggie meal

22nd December Grand Anarchist Winter Solstice Party from 2pm at Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1

## The quiz

1. What happened to the gates of the Modelo prison in Barcelona after they were set on fire during a prison riot in 1931?
2. What was planned at Carnsore in Ireland, and what actually happened?
3. Spanish anarchist militant José Ester Borrás was involved in the self-liberation of where?
4. Which British Trotskyist outfit took money from Middle Eastern despots and rubber stamped the execution of trade unionists?

Answers on page 6

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