

FREEDOM

80P ANARCHIST NEWS AND VIEWS

www.freedompress.org.uk

Vol 69 No 2 • 2 FEBRUARY 2008

INVESTING IN DEATH

Arms industry buoyant despite downturn

A new report has suggested that increased sales by UK arms manufacturers both for western warfare and for internal fighting in the Middle East and Asia could see a rush to buy on the stock market as the credit crunch continues.

The arms sector has outperformed UK markets by 13% in the last six months, after a series of major deals in the last few years which have seen billions poured in by both the US and UK, and through major deals clinched with 'emerging markets', including Saudi Arabia and South Africa.

Where governmental spending worldwide is being reigned in, notably in the UK through below-inflation wage settlements, cuts to basic services and attacks on social securities such as benefits and the NHS, spending on arms continues to rise, creating a boom in the industry.

Military contractors are buoyant about the future for arms spending in the next few years despite voicing caution that the Allies could cut weapons spending if they withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Reliance on the two wars is not as great as has been portrayed in recent years, though

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LENS CAP JAN KUCERA, ANTI-FASCIST, AGED 18



Hundreds of people turned out for a funeral march to commemorate the bravery of 18-year-old Jan Kucera, an anti-fascist who was stabbed by a knife-wielding neo-nazi on 18th January in Pribram, a town 50 km south-west of Prague.

In the attack, which was captured on CCTV, Jan was stabbed in the groin and back when he tried to defend his friends, and later died in hospital. A 20-year-old neo-nazi has since been arrested for the attack.

ITALIAN COUP DISCUSSED

The British government considered backing a rightwing coup in Italy in 1976 to prevent the rising Italian Communist party from taking power, recently released documents have revealed. Foreign Office planners wrote in May 1976 that "a clean surgical coup" to remove the Communists from power "would be attractive in many ways", according to documents obtained from the British national archives and published yesterday by the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*. But planners concluded the idea was "unrealistic" since it could lead to "prolonged and bloody" resistance by Italian communists, a potential civil war and even intervention by the Soviet Union.

At the height of the cold war, alarm bells were ringing in London as the governing Christian Democrats grew weak through infighting while

Enrico Berlinguer's Communists edged closer to taking power in elections due to be held in June.

"[Berlinguer's] entry into government would create a serious problem for Nato and the European Community and could turn out to be an event with catastrophic consequences," Sir Guy Millard, the British ambassador to Rome, wrote in a memo quoted by *La Repubblica*. Officials argued that if Communist ministers joined the government, sensitive Nato documents would be sent to Moscow. A Foreign Office memo in April had listed options for tackling the Communist ascendancy, ranging from financing rival parties to "subversive or military intervention against the Italian Communist party". Fears receded as the Christian Democrats finished 4% ahead of the Communists in the lower house of parliament.

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ISSN 0016-0504



NEWS

IN BRIEF

ARTS: Funding changes to by the Culture Ministry have prompted a number of demonstrations and complaints from the industry, as a new formula of 'funding excellence' sees major institutions favoured over local arts groups.

Despite a £50m increase in arts funding, cuts have been so sharp in East Anglia that a march was organised through Norwich, with spokespeople from around the Eastern region turning out to protest plans which would see renowned local groups either closed or drastically scaled back.

Of the 990 ACE-funded organisations, 195 (nearly 20%) will have their funds cut altogether, while others will find their budgets slashed.

CIVIL SERVICE: The PCS public sector union called for joint action over pay at a TUC meeting of the Public Services Liaison Group.

The move comes in response to government plans for three year pay deals across the public sector, which the union fears will result in below inflation settlements leading to pay cuts in real terms for millions of Britain's civil and public servants.

EDUCATION: The biggest teaching union described the recent three-year government pay offer as "in effect a pay cut" as unions across the public sector warned of "inevitable" industrial action if demands for an ambitious 6% rise this year were not met.

Teachers have been offered a 2.45% pay increase from September this year. Ed Balls, schools secretary, said the pay award in 2008, with future increases of 2.3% in each of the following two years, as recommended by an independent pay review, was in line with Gordon Brown's public pay policy.

EDUCATION: The fall in the number of first-year enrolments in England and Northern Ireland universities in 2006-2007, as tuition fees of £3,000 are levied on full-time undergraduates, was more than just a coincidence the further education union UCU say.

UCU have contrasted the situation with full-time first year enrolments at Scottish and Welsh institutions, where there are no top-up fees, which increased in 2006-07.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT: Town hall unions including Unison, GMB and TGWU-Unite have agreed a pay claim for this year that would give more than one million local government workers in England, Northern Ireland and Wales a payrise of 6% or 50p an hour – whichever is the greater.

The claim would take the wages of the lowest paid workers up to £6.50 an hour.

Unions said it was intended to be a "catch up and match up" claim, to recoup losses from below-inflation pay awards since 2004 and to keep up with inflation over the coming year.

LENS CAP ESPERANZA FORCED TO REFUEL



The Greenpeace ship Esperanza, which has been shadowing the Nisshin Maru whaling factory ship for more than two weeks, has been forced to abandon the chase to refuel. But the Greenpeace abandonment of chasing the whale fleet this season was heavily criticised by Captain Paul Watson from the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. "I really have to question just what is Greenpeace's motivation in coming down here year after year," he said. "Their campaigns are always more of the same, buzzing about in rubber boats, hanging banners and filming whales being killed. Things have changed dramatically since Sea Shepherd has been intervening. Whales don't die when we show up. They should get up to the nearest port, fill up their fuel tanks and get back down to the Southern Ocean and continue their campaign. But they won't do it."

Inequality rising

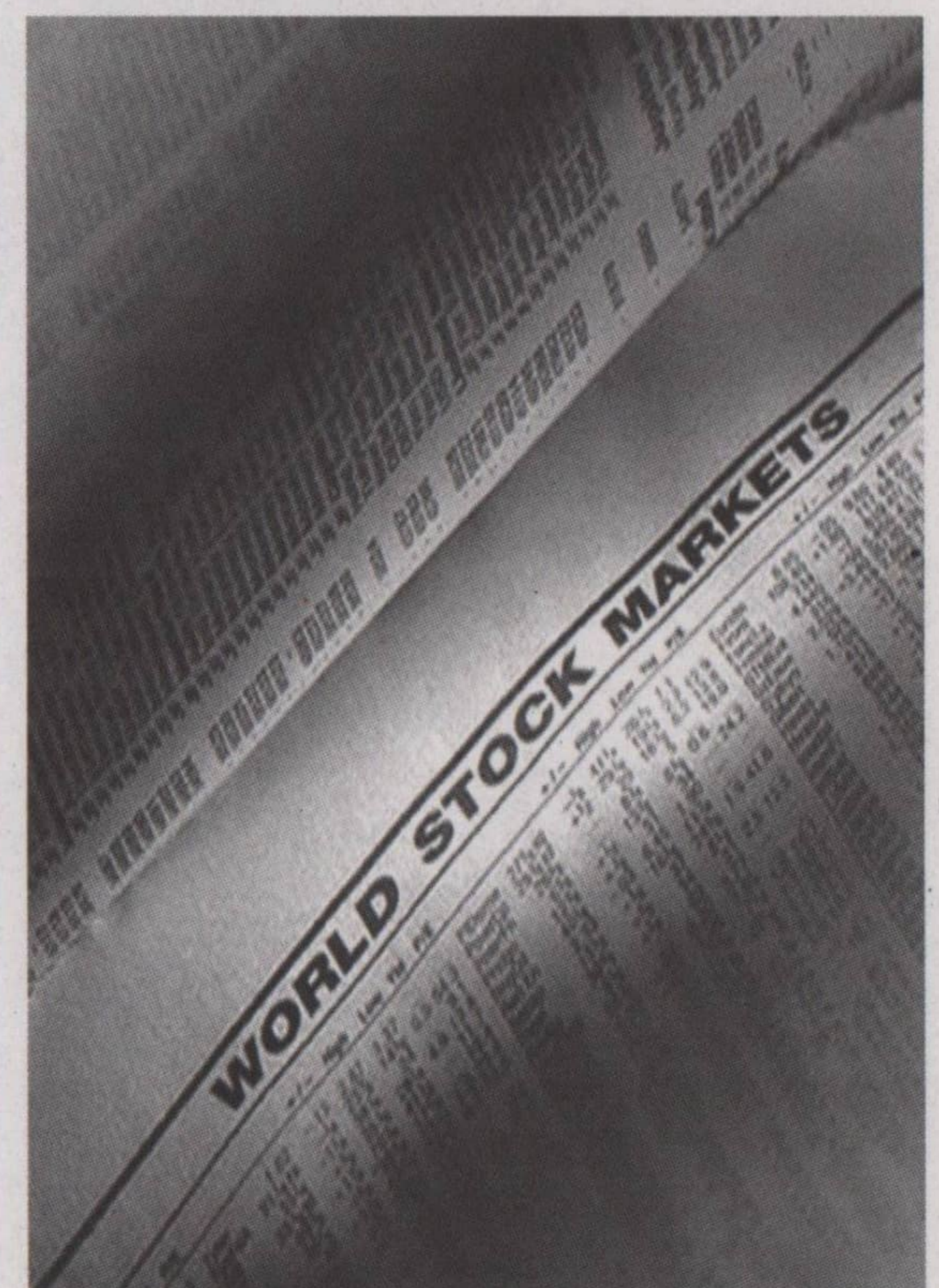
The very rich have grown richer at double the pace of most Britons under Labour, research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows.

The study suggests that inequality in Britain may depend more on the stock market than on Government tax and benefit policies. In recent years, it is only in the wake of extended falls in the stock market that the incomes of the richest have fallen.

Income growth since 2004-5 has tended to be faster for those with higher incomes: incomes amongst the poorest fifth of the UK fell by 0.4% and incomes of the richest fifth rose by 1.5%. According to the most commonly used measure, the Gini coefficient, inequality is has risen since 2001 and is not significantly higher than that which Labour inherited. Child poverty and the number of working-age adults in poverty have also risen since 2004-5. Poverty rates for working-age adults without dependent children rose to their highest levels since 1961 (the first year consistent estimates are available).

For the rich however, research shows a different picture. Using the most detailed analysis of tax return records to date, the think-tank showed that, in every thousand adults, the income of the very richest person

rose on average by four per cent above inflation every year between 1996-97 and 2004-05. This group are nine times more likely to be men than women.





Gaza border breach

Late at night on Friday 25th January the Palestinian resistance and civilians living in Gaza breached a section of the iron wall surrounding the Gaza Strip after Egyptian troops closed a previous breach in the wall on Friday afternoon.

The previous Wednesday at dawn the Palestinian resistance destroyed part of the wall at the southern part of the strip at the borders with Egypt using five home made bombs, shortly afterwards thousands of Palestinians rushed through to buy food and fuel supplies from Egypt to bring back to the isolated Gaza Strip.

For the days followed the Egyptian government allowed Palestinian to continue shopping in Egypt and come back to the Coastal Region.

The United States of America and Israeli slammed Egypt for the move and said that the

Palestinian resistance will enter Gaza from Egypt.

Israel threatened to step-up attacks on the coastal region and stop water from coming into Gaza. The Egyptian president said to reporters on Thursday that he will allow the Palestinians to get their supplies from Egypt as long as there is a humanitarian crisis in the region.

Two weeks ago the Israeli government decided to keep pressure on the Gaza Strip by further attacking Palestinian resistance groups. On Friday Israel declared all Gaza's crossings completely closed, with a total ban of fuel and supplies to the coastal region. By Sunday Gaza had no electricity as the Solo Gaza power plant depends on Israeli Fuel.

On Friday afternoon the Egyptian government announced it would close the crossing. Shortly after Egyptian troops sealed the

borders and attacked the Palestinians civilians their using riot shields, batons and water cannon – 22 Palestinians were injured, Palestinian sources reported, while Egyptian Media said that six policemen were hurt when angry civilians responded by throwing stones at the Egyptian troops.

Later in the evening Palestinian resistance fighters and civilians smashed a new hole in the Rafah Egypt border wall using a bulldozer, Egyptian troops pulled back and allowed Palestinian to inter Egypt again.

The Egyptian government decided to re-seal the borders after it had been heavily criticised by Western powers. The US congress suspended on Friday \$100 million worth of aid to Egypt for allowing the Palestinians to get into Egypt in order to get food to survive.

Investing in death

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the war has provided a bonanza for some contractors and may herald an ongoing rise in war spending, particularly from the US, which remains the single biggest buyer of armaments generating over half of all military spending.

One major industry player, Chemring, which specialises in countermeasures for the armed forces, noted that only 5% of its sales go in the two areas, and US defence spending is currently at a much lower percentage than Cold War levels, while Credit Suisse have predicted that revenues will continue to spike until at least 2010.

Even assuming a pullout from Iraq and Afghanistan over the next few years, which is

by no means certain, it is unlikely that military spending in the west will fall as funds will simply shift into research and development of new weaponry, and replacement of hardware.

In the UK, despite the imminent threat of a major reduction in tax revenues as companies and consumers reign in spending, the government is pressing on with a £13bn, 30-year PFI contract for tankers from a consortium led by European arms giant EADS.

BAE systems, the scandal-hit UK arms firm, is so confident in increased military spending during the economic downturn that it has recently sold its last fig leaf of civilian contracting, the simulator systems used in training airline pilots, and now operates solely as a

war company.

Credit Suisse have noted that as oil revenues and economic activity rise in several Balkan, Middle Eastern and Asian states, the military giants have begun to secure increasingly large contracts for weaponry.

In India for example, police communications will see a high-tech upgrade by EADS, while also buying 125 combat jets from French company Dassault. Controversially, the Czech Republic, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Tanzania and the Israeli army have recently committed or are being wooed for substantial programmes, with BAE systems under investigation in several cases for suspected corruption.

Rob Ray

PUBLIC SECTOR

Fit Watch delay police march

Fit Watch set out to turn the tables on the cops at the Police Federation march and give them a taste of their own medicine. It wasn't out most organised action by any stretch of the imagination, and there are many areas to improve, but we did manage to annoy a large number of cops with our prop and piss taking (as can be evidenced from the number of cops now responding to our blog at www.fitwatch.blogspot.com).

Whilst some members took photos, others handed out leaflets explaining that there was a Section 14 in place and they should be sensible and move into a pen. However, we ran out of leaflets within minutes due to the blind obedience of cops who saw the Met police logo and took them without question.

The flyer, however, was wrong. We meant to impose conditions on the march under Section 12, not 14 of the Public Order Act. But like any good police direction, we were making it up as we went along.

Making it up was certainly what the cops who arrested the two Fit Watchers were doing. Whilst we were originally arrested for breaching the commissioner's regulations for standing at the front of the march, it took an hour of discussions at West End Central, (including a few huddles outside of the CCTVed custody suite), and a promise from the custody sergeant that they "would find something", before they came up with the heinous crime of highway obstruction.

After ten and a half hours in custody, an interview which included statements from fifteen cops (not including the ever present FIT team, whom we'd of course want to give evidence in court), we have been bailed to return to West End Central in March. We are challenging the police to prosecute us. They may not like us, but is it worth the expense of getting fifteen cops (including



the Chief Inspector) into court for highway obstruction?

Furthermore, the original confrontation arose because a Fit Watcher wanted to join the march and the police stopped her. They claimed (and this is reiterated in their notebooks) that the march was a closed event and was only open to members of the police federation, their families and friends. This contradicts the statements from the police federation who claimed "we didn't ask him to

leave because, whether we like it or not, we live in a democracy", when challenged about the presence of a BNP leader at the front of their march.

The growth of Fit Watch is giving a clear message that people are no longer prepared to tolerate repressive policing.

Get involved with Fit Watch, join the mailing list by sending a blank email to fitwatch-subscribe@lists.riseup.net

Darzi report an 'expensive shambles'

Campaigners London Health Emergency (LHE) have blasted the current consultation over the long term future of NHS services in London as "an expensive shambles which is failing miserably to engage Londoners in a proper debate over the future of health care services in the capital".

NHS London embarked on a public consultation over the future of London's NHS – known as the Darzi Review and drawn up by government minister Lord Darzi – at the back end of last year and the consultation is due to conclude in early March.

Originally the Darzi report was hailed as a possible step forward for the NHS by LHE, which broadly welcomed the idea while criticising significant shortcomings, including poor costings and a major lack of detail, saying in their analysis: "There is a real danger that whatever its merits the Darzi Report and

discussions about it will be utilised primarily as a smokescreen behind which local NHS managers will press through unpopular cutbacks in services".

Darzi's plan would see the replacement of London's current network of district general hospitals with a combination of relatively few new centres of specialist excellence coupled with an undefined number of major acute hospitals, local hospitals and elective centres.

Many traditional A&E services would be replaced with a combination of improved out-of-hours services, and a number of urgent care centres, some of which may be downsized A&E units, others based in new 'Polyclinics'. Around 150 polyclinics are proposed, at an estimated annual cost of £3.1 billion.

Yet despite the enormity of the changes being proposed, £15 million of taxpayers money has now been thrown at a consultation

exercise which LHE says has completely failed to engage Londoners even though there has is a high level of public interest in the future of the NHS.

Geoff Martin, LHE Head of Campaigns, said: "The public consultation over the Darzi review of London's NHS has been a total failure. Despite chucking £15 million at private companies and pollsters to conduct this exercise it has failed to hit the radar and most Londoners have no idea it's going on.

"The £15 million being spent on this glorious failure to engage Londoners in a debate about an issue that's close to their hearts, the future of the NHS, would have been far better spent on taking some of the pressure off patient care budgets. It would have injected nearly half a million pounds into each of London's 31 Primary Care Trusts – easing the pressure on front-line services."

IN BRIEF

CARE: Workers for Excel Care Homes in Essex have found out from planning notices on lampposts that Winfred Dell home in Brentwood is to be demolished. The GMB union is pursuing more than 50 employment tribunal cases on behalf of employees at five other Excel Care Homes where staff have had their pay and conditions slashed by the company, since they acquired the ten homes from Essex county council. The Care Home workers will march from Winfred Dell home to Brentwood Council on Tuesday 29th January at 10am to hand in a petition.

INCINERATION: Around 50 demonstrators have protested against the proposed building of a new coal-fired power station at Kingsnorth on the Medway estuary in north Kent, outside the offices of E-on UK in Pall Mall on Friday afternoon. Medway Council have given their approval to the plan, but it has still to get the go-ahead from the government.

Incinerator building has been revitalised across the UK as EU taxes designed to reduce the use of landfill sites to dispose of waste come into force in the next few years.

INSURANCE: Marsh, the world's largest insurance broker, was criticised by union leaders after it demanded the suspension of 12 contract cleaners employed at its headquarters in the City of London for holding a protest over pay and working conditions.

The cleaners, most of whom are Polish and have worked in the Marsh offices for more than a year, held a demonstration last week after finishing a 12-hour night shift. When the company heard about the action, it demanded that the workers, who are employed by the facilities contractor ISS, be stopped from working at Marsh with immediate effect.

Paul Davies, the campaign manager for the trade union Unite, which organised the demonstration, said: "People should be allowed to say 'I've been wronged' and not be punished for it."

PRIVATE INVESTMENT: Private investors are making a run for it as recession fears mount, with December figures showing hundreds of millions of pounds being withdrawn from the market in advance of the main predicted fall in share values. Net outflows from retail funds reach £377.4m in December, turning the last quarter of 2007 into the investment industry's worst on record.

RAIL: Commuters have taken part in a fare strike in protest at overcrowding, high prices and unreliable First Great Western (FGW) trains. Bristol-based passenger group, More Train Less Strain (MTLS), organised the day of action on Monday.

FGW said fewer than 100 people had refused to pay, but MTLS said the protest had been to make a point. FGW blamed ageing rolling stock and staff shortages for many problems, but said it was also investing £200 million.

ID card delays

Companies pull out of ID card project

Two major companies have pulled out of the procurement for the multi-billion pound identity card programme amid signs that the government is planning to delay the roll-out of the project.

The *Financial Times* reported that BAE Systems, the defence company, and IT services company Accenture have decided not to pursue contracts linked to the biometric identity card system.

The Home Office played down the withdrawals as part of a "competitive dialogue process" with potential suppliers. Accenture said a "mixture of political and commercial reasons" had led to its decision not to bid.

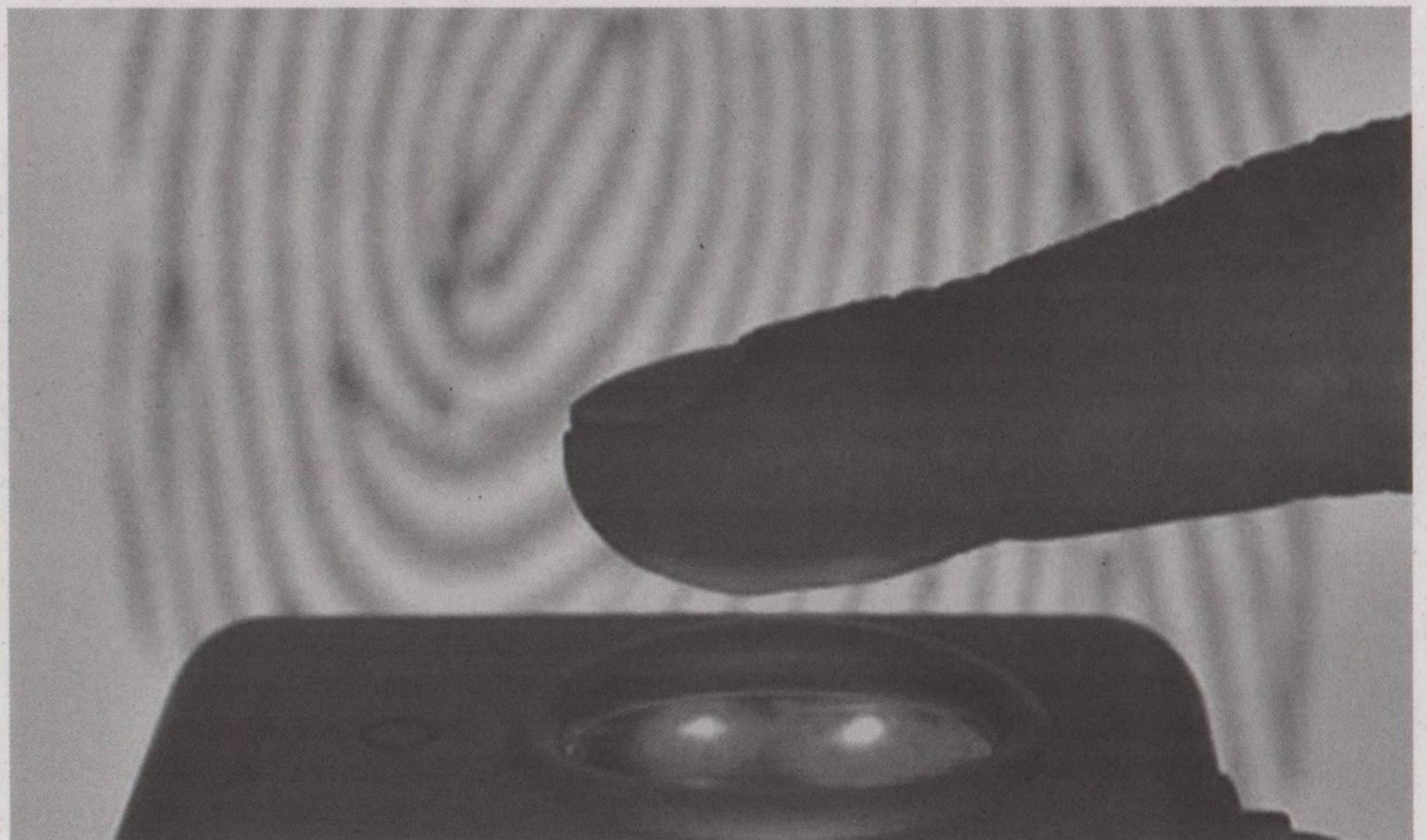
The Home Office has confirmed that the government is considering a delay in the roll-out of ID cards to British citizens. Leaked Home Office documents show a revised strategy in which the issuing of significant

volumes of ID cards alongside a new generation of passports will begin in 2012, two years later than planned.

Last night the Home Office confirmed a further leak suggesting that smaller volumes of ID cards should first be issued from 2010 onwards to young people to "assist" them in opening up their first bank accounts as well as to individuals employed in "positions of trust", such as teachers and social workers. Biometric ARC 'smart cards' are already required for asylum seekers.

In a further sign of reduced ambitions for the project, the plan for a new National Identity Register has now been dropped in favour of combining three existing databases. This will combine The Home Office asylum-seeker database, The Identity and Passport Service database, and The Department of Work and Pensions 'National Insurance' database. Again, asylum seekers and other foreign nationals are first in line.

For more information see defy-id.org.uk and noborders.org.uk



Journos in pay dispute

Production staff at the *Milton Keynes Citizen* took their second week of strike action at the end of last month over a below-inflation pay offer and concerns about increasing cuts to journalism in the sector.

The dispute between NUJ members and the Johnston-Press-owned company was called by Mother of the Chapel Karen Jeffery. She said: "Despite the cold weather, the mood is upbeat and cars have been tooting all day in support. We're taking a stand for journalists all over the country who aren't getting the investment needed in their newsrooms."

The union is on strike in protest against a 3% pay offer and a 10% rise for new trainees joining the paper.

Under the proposals set out by management, salary in the second and third year of the deal would be linked to the retail price index unless this exceeds 3.5%.

Johnston Press said in a statement: "The overall company offer is generous given the current economic climate. It combines a fair basic increase with significant improvements in the existing salary structure."

The union said members were also angry that wages had failed to keep up with inflation, which currently stands at 4.3%, as well as the high cost of living locally.

Wages have been falling across the industry, as have job numbers, as companies looking for short-term profits make cuts to offset a long-term decline in readership.

INTERNATIONAL

IN BRIEF

FRANCE: Fourteen, mostly female, striking workers required treatment after police charged their blockades. The striking workers were injured at the Miko factory in Saint-Dizier on Tuesday. Police were sent in after workers had confined the manager, Prakash Patel, to his office the previous day and occupied the site. The ice cream manufacturer recently announced a restructuring plan which will see 254 of the 493 employees lose their jobs.

Police denied the use of excessive force, claiming that only ten officers were sent in against 40–60 strikers and that they were unarmed, not even carrying *matraques* (batons). According to the spokesman police were ‘only’ carrying tonfas.

Management has since offered redundancy packages of one month’s salary for each year of service. The unions have rejected this offer as unsatisfactory. Hervé Mazelin, CGT shop steward at Miko, said “between Kléber at Toul and Arcelor at Gandrange, over 2,000 jobs are going in a 200 km radius. Most of these workers are 45–50 year old women. Where will they find new jobs?”

GAZA: Tens of thousands of Gazans streamed into southern Egypt on Wednesday after Hamas militants blew up the border fence in numerous locations, trying to force an end to the closing of Gaza that followed Hamas’s takeover of the territory in June. On foot, bicycle, donkey cart and pick-up truck, Gazans went on a buying spree of the basic supplies that have been cut off during days of blockade by Israel and are either unavailable or far more expensive in Gaza.

From the breach of the border wall before dawn until well into the evening, Palestinians crossed from Rafah in Gaza to Rafah in Egypt – a city divided by the border after Israel returned Sinai to Egypt in 1979 and President Anwar Sadat refused an offer by Menachem Begin, then prime minister of Israel, to take back Gaza as well.

CAR: The Central African Republic’s prime minister and his government have resigned amid a general strike. Elie Dote, who became prime minister in 2005, announced his resignation on Friday as parliament prepared to vote on a censure motion against him.

The Central African Republic’s main trade unions launched a general strike on 2nd January to demand that the government pay seven months of arrears in salaries to civil servants and teachers. The stoppage has provoked demonstrations in the streets of the capital, Bangui, by students angry about not being able to attend classes. A meeting between Bozize and union leaders has failed to reach a settlement.

“This resignation does not concern the unions. It does not change any of our demands,” said labour leader Sabin Kpokolo after a union meeting to discuss Dote’s departure. “Our struggle will continue whatever the make-up of the new government until we obtain a satisfactory outcome for all workers.”

LENS CAP BUDRYK MINERS CONTINUE STRIKE



Budryk coal miners, who have been on strike since 17th December 2007, are appealing for international solidarity. The miners are fighting to bring their pay up to local industry standards. The state-owned mine is going to be merged with a larger state-owned group, JSW (pl), one of the largest coal producers in Europe. Despite the fact that the Budryk workers are extremely efficient, they found out their salaries would be up to 200 euros less per month than their colleagues at JSW.

To support the families of striking miners, payments can be made to the Ornotowice branch of the Oresko-Knurowski Bank Spółdzielczy. The IBAN account number (konto) is IBAN: PL23 8454 1053 2001 0041 5426 0001. Write that it is for the Fund for the Families of Budryk Miners (in Polish: Fundusz pomocy dla rodzin strajkujących górników Budryka). You can also write letters of protest to Waldemar Pawlak, Minister of Economy, pl. Trzech Krzyży 3/5, 00-507 Warszawa, POLAND, email mail@pawlak.pl (copies to kp-psl@sejm.pl)

CNT stay strong in Madrid

Early January 2008 saw the end of a CNT Metro cleaning workers’ strike in Madrid. The Sindicato de Oficios Varios,* the general membership branch of the Madrid anarcho-syndicalist union CNT, after a long struggle which relied on direct action, demonstrations and the strike itself, views the result of the action as only a partial success.

While those sacked and on disciplinary got their jobs back and while management stood down, the workers eventually signed an agreement with Metro bosses that would stop any mobilizations and strikes until 2012.

The CNT refused to sign the agreement with management, a stance that was not taken by most other unions in the dispute. The communist CCOO did not even back the strike, letting its members go in to work, and the socialist UGT and the syndicalist CGT held meeting with bosses behind the backs of the Strike Committee and reported agreements made at workers’ assemblies.

The CNT fought for the workers’ assembly to be the decision-making body in this and other disputes. Instead, many workers’ assemblies were conducted like political meetings with parties and other unions telling workers what to do.

On the one hand, as the CNT is one of many unions organising in the Madrid Metro, this shows its weakness. But, on the other hand, the fact that the CNT was often the only union to go on demos, to picket and inform workers and the public of what was happening, together with its arguments in favour of horizontal decision-making shows how power-

ful a workplace-based union can be that is not dependent on massive state subsidies (such as the UGT, CCOO and CGT receive).

The Madrid Metro workers’ strike shows how unions that accept positions on Workplace Committees and monies from the state for their participation in union elections can never reflect their members’ views and needs. Only a union that is fully controlled and accountable to its membership can produce the goods.

Elsewhere, in Seville, the CNT’s membership has been steadily growing to five times its size five years ago. Uncompromising, directly controlled unions that are independent of the state show the way forward.

* See cnt.es/sovmadrid/comunicamos4.htm
#tomapazymoja



Striking Metro workers in October last year

Bangladeshi industrial unrest

Trouble in the garment industry has continued in Dhaka

On Tuesday 22nd January several thousand workers again fought cops in the Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ). Workers gathered at 8am outside MBM Garments factory to continue pressing their demands for improved pay and conditions. They also called for the release of a worker, Shakhawat, arrested yesterday, who was prominent in drawing up the eight-point list of demands presented to the MBM bosses. Other workers nearby also clashed with police at around the same time when they arrived to find themselves locked out of their workplace.

Fearing further unrest and possible attacks on their properties, 350 factories closed for the day, swelling numbers of workers on the streets. As workers from 100s of factories converged, electric poles were used as barricades. Workers then split into groups to further spread the agitation. The disturbances spread over a wide area; several factories were looted as security forces struggled to regain control. Police baton charged and used tear gas; workers responded with missiles, burning tyres and blockades of main highways. The city's garment industry, hub of the national economy, was again completely paralysed.

Two battalions of Bangladeshi Rifles troops were dispatched to the disturbances. This, along with the release of the arrested worker restored some calm; the day ended with a



final mass demonstration outside the MBM factory to remind bosses of the workers' unfulfilled demands.

Demonstrators are demanding pay rises, holidays, medical facilities and immediate payment of arrears. Rampant inflation has constantly reduced real incomes and the grudging concessions won from reluctant employers have not come close to taking inflation into account.

All of these events are occurring in complete disregard of the 'Emergency Power Rules' brought in by the military caretaker government when they took power a year ago. The emergency powers ban all public demonstrations.

Anwar Hossain, deputy commissioner of police (Mirpur Zone), told The Daily Star newspaper, "We have been trying our best to keep the situation under control. We believe it is very much their [workers'] right to press

home their demands. But they must do so peacefully and remember that unruliness is not to be put up with."

The security and political forces remain wary of the clear potential of worker unrest to destabilise and damage the country's main economic sector and to quickly spread disturbances among the wider poor. Their choice to tolerate such disturbances perhaps expresses both fear of the consequences of greater repression; but also the recognition that long term economic interests will benefit from certain legal rights being granted to workers.

The garment bosses are currently reluctant to concede such rights to workers and existing labour laws are regularly flouted. Initial capital investment is so low and wages so cheap that their profits so far remain high, even with competition from countries with higher productivity.

Notes from the United States

Prime time: Louis Further on credit

The year has begun in the United States - as in the UK - with a great deal of talk about economic recession.

As with attention to the 'race' for the 2008 presidency, the analysis and talk in the mainstream propaganda outlets is superficial and largely unhelpful. It scarcely supposes that capitalism, greed and inequality could have caused an economic downturn; let alone the astronomical spending on acts of terrorism and aggression by the US and its allies in Afghanistan and Iraq. It's actually quite obvious that - in particular - 30 years of fiercely right wing economic policies have built an inflated and highly unstable house of cards ready to collapse at any moment.

Chief among such strategies to allow corporations to derive maximum profit at the

expense of people has been the deregulation of most sectors of public spending, begun not by Reagan but Carter. Robert Kuttner is founder and co-editor of 'American Prospect' magazine and a former investigator for the Senate Banking Committee. In a reference to a bipartisan effort to secure the economy, Kuttner explains that things are more serious: "This recession is different from all other recessions. This began and is continuing with a collapse in credit markets - it's a repeat of a lot of things that happened in the 1920s, where there was too much speculation with too much borrowed money and a complete lack of transparency. The regulators [and] the public had no idea of what these bonds that had been created out of subprime mortgages really contained, what they were worth. The people who packaged them were not subject to any kind of regulatory scrutiny. And when it turned out that a lot of these loans were never going to be paid back, [there was] layer upon layer upon layer of

bonds and then securities based on the bonds. And when you have a credit contraction, it means that banks have less capital against which to make loans, and lowering interest rates doesn't fix that."

Key among the indicators of an out-of-control credit market is the state of the mortgage industry. And 'subprime' mortgages in particular - although commentators on the left have been warning for a couple of years that no good will come of this particular tactic. Subprime mortgages are sold to homeowners borrowing at an apparently attractive low rate (that is, below the US equivalent of the Bank Of England 'bank rate'); but at a rate that's variable and almost inevitably lures would-be property owners with little disposable income; soon those rates rise; borrowers find themselves unable to pay; the original lenders are unable to collect the debt; so they sell the debt on to another lender who believes they can recover it. And everybody loses.

RESPECT, find out what it means to me

Trotwatch looks into the disintegration of the latest left electoral project

The left-wing electoral coalition Respect, which has for several years touted itself as the saviour of the British far left, disintegrated at the end of 2007 following a faction fight within the party's leadership group that ripped the organisation apart.

Over the weekend of 17–18th November, two rival Respect conferences (each of which claimed itself as the legitimate gathering of the party and denounced the group gathered in the other hall as wreckers and enemies of British socialism) met in London to claim ownership of what remains of the failed party's threadbare assets.

The struggle to control Respect, which had pitted the leading cadre of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) against the coalition's solitary MP George Galloway and his cabal of acolytes, had been simmering within the party for many weeks. Despite the protestations of the participants, the Respect schism has less to do with politics and more to do with disagreements over who should control the organisation.

During the summer months, hidden tensions between Galloway and SWP apparatchik John Rees (the party's national secretary) had begun to surface publicly. The SWP's makeshift alliance with Galloway had stood on brittle foundations from the beginning, and was always premised on the SWP acquiescing to Gorgeous George's numerous vanity projects, 'sure-fire' schemes and assorted political eccentricities.

To keep their one parliamentary asset on-side (if not always on-message), the SWP were willing to tolerate almost everything that Galloway put them through. The SWP's hope was that the expected rapid growth of Respect would soon provide them with sufficient political counter-weight to curb Galloway's excesses.

Galloway had signed up to Respect on the assurance that successes for the party were imminent. However, with the long-promised breakthrough of Respect showing no sign of materialising, Galloway (whose political attention span is often as short as the SWP's own) became increasingly disenchanted with his Trotskyite bedfellows.

Galloway's restlessness was first expressed in a plan to extend Respect's



George Galloway, John Rees and Lindsey German

operation into Scotland, muscling in on the territory of the declining and fractured Scottish Socialist Party and its Tommy Sheridan-fronted rival, Solidarity (see *Freedom*, 11th August 2007). But with the SWP determined to quietly bin the plan, a frustrated Galloway concluded that the time had come to confront the SWP's stranglehold on Respect.

His aim was to orchestrate a putsch that would oust the leading members of the SWP from office and dilute their ability to influence Respect politically. In late August, Galloway published a critique of the 'failings' of Respect, in which he implicitly pointed the finger of blame at the SWP.

In it he insisted that Respect was not "punching its weight in British politics" and had "not fulfilled its potential", conceding that in many areas membership had "gone into a steep decline" leaving "whole areas of the country ... effectively moribund". To solve a range of

problems that were the party's own making, Galloway proposed a new 'empowering' structure for the organisation – one that would circumvent the SWP and propel his allies and supporters into positions of power and influence.

Rees and his SWP comrades were stung by the directness of Galloway's assault. Until its publication, they had hoped to hide the struggle going on within the party from the eyes and ears of Respect's own members, but Galloway's grandstanding forced their hand.

In an attempted rebuttal, they launched a counter-attack of their own – asserting the 'integrity' of Rees's leadership; defending the 'successes' of the party; and rejecting Galloway's attempts to subvert the sovereignty of the party's leadership structures with what they claimed was a mixture of crude patronage and cronyism.

Relations worsened during a series of bad-tempered national council meetings in September in which the two increasingly polarised sides clashed continually. The proposal for a new post of National Organiser became the proxy for the wider conflict in the party (Galloway wanted it, as a means to circumvent Rees; the SWP were determined to stop him).

Last-ditch attempts to heal the divide failed and, as the atmosphere became increasingly poisonous, relations broke down irreparably. With Respect's conference scheduled to take place in a few weeks time, a single question loomed large: which faction could rally a majority of delegates sufficient to win the key votes over the party's future?

As the lobbying and horse-trading got underway, the protagonists became less concerned with matters of 'principle' and more worried about getting their hands on the bank details, membership lists, and website and blog account details of the organisation.

Galloway's fixers changed the locks on the entrance doors to the party headquarters, locking the SWP's officers out (figuratively as well as literally). After bitter meetings in the Tower Hamlets ward, where the largest group of Respect councillors was based, the group split into pro-SWP and pro-Galloway factions. Similar scenes were repeated in Birmingham and elsewhere as former

party officials who had sided with Galloway in the split.

Once the novelty of the split has passed the pressures to deliver will intensify. Within the SWP, the theorists who convinced the central committee to back Respect are certain to be called to account for their error of judgement. Efforts by those theorists to exonerate themselves in print are already underway.

Likewise, Galloway will need to prove to his circle of supporters that this new electoral vehicle is viable. Galloway's line is that it is the SWP that held Respect back from electoral triumph. When Respect Renewal itself fails to deliver at the ballot box, that excuse collapses. In any case, what kept Galloway's ramshackle alliance together was a growing mutual loathing of the SWP. Without that to bind them, the likelihood is that this new coalition will in turn start to unravel.

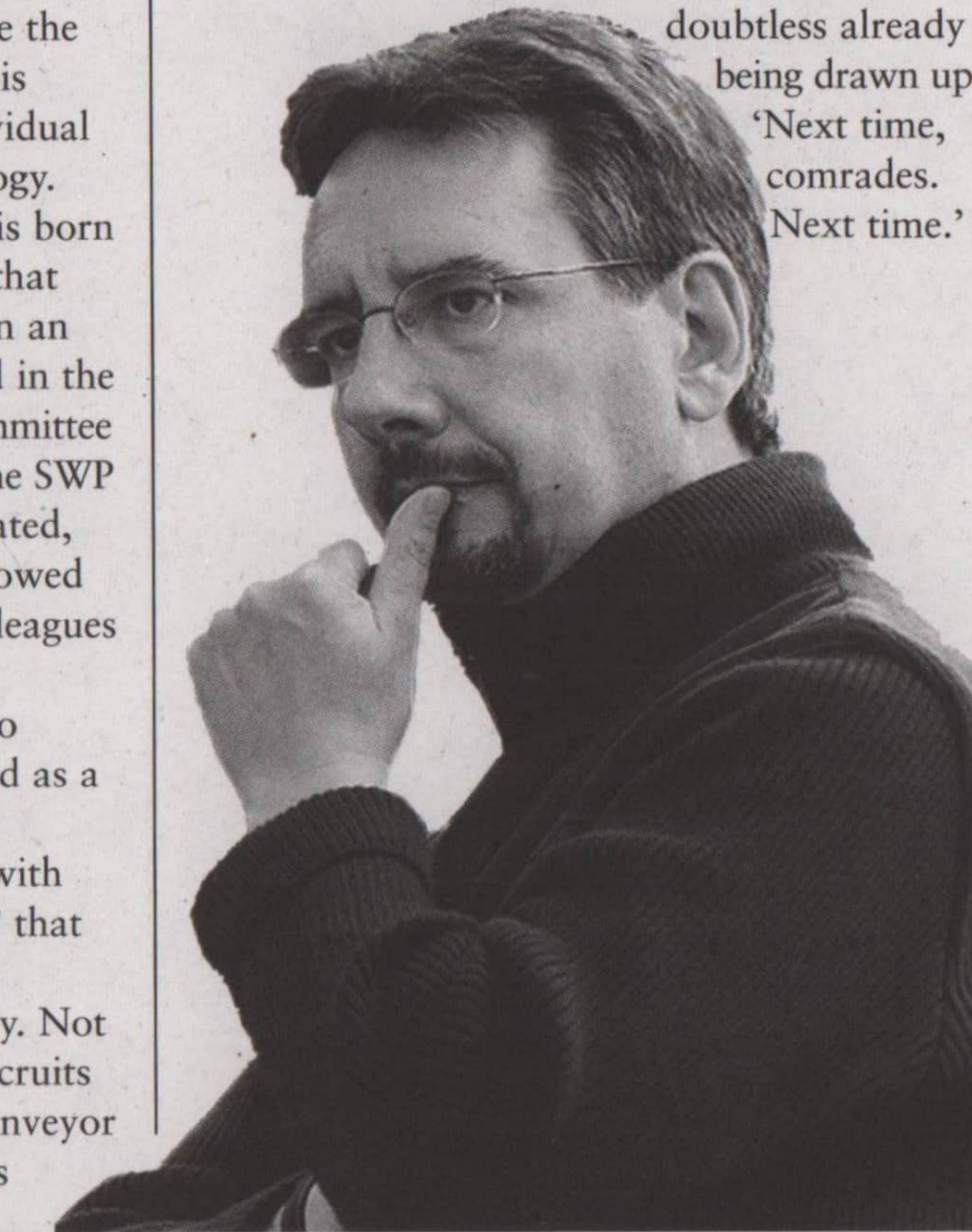
Without the foot soldiers and organisational clout that the SWP can provide, Galloway will struggle to function on the ground. Without Galloway and the cabal around him, an SWP-only Respect is really just a watered-down version of the SWP itself; which delivers no obvious benefit to SWP bosses.

Unless they quickly find new partners, the SWP will now be looking for a face-saving exit-strategy and the mercy killing of Respect. Similarly, the shameless Galloway is likely to find some pretext for leaving Respect Renewal behind sooner rather than later.

In the weeks since the split, both sides have spent more energy in trying to shore up their respective rump organisations rather than in campaigning.

The latest 'last, best hope' for British socialism has again ended in ignominy, schism and collapse. The left will, of course, learn nothing from this litany of failure. Plans for the next alliance, pact or dubious deal are

doubtless already being drawn up. 'Next time, comrades. Next time.'



comrades squared up for the showdown.

Galloway charged that the SWP had lied, gerrymandered, broken rules, and set aside any political conviction that got in the way of its leaders imposing their will on the party. As one seasoned observer of the left commented: "That's as may be, but what have they done that might annoy George Galloway?" The SWP countered that an ill-disciplined maverick was now hell bent on building a personal fiefdom by any means necessary.

In the time-honoured traditions of the British left, the outcome was all but inevitable – with each side arranging a rival conference, controlled by its own supporters, stage-managed to claim a pyrrhic victory over its former comrades.

On 17th November, Galloway's breakaway 'Respect Renewal' party was launched at the Bishopsgate Institute, while a few miles across London the SWP's rump 'Respect' assembled at the Old Cinema of the University of Westminster. Both gatherings mustered a few hundred attendees, and in an atmosphere of wholly spurious official 'optimism' heard speaker after speaker insist that their party's best days were yet to come.

Behind the scenes, the leaders of both Respect fragments recognise that the split has been an unmitigated disaster for all concerned.

Galloway and Rees assert that the divide is fundamentally about politics. The SWP protest that Galloway has become the figurehead for the party's 'right-wing' – soft on socialist principle; preoccupied with courting 'community leaders'; neglectful of the need to appeal to working class electors from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

The SWP now characterise him personally as self-obsessed, undependable and hostile to any notion of accountability. Galloway responds that the SWP are control-freaks; obsessed by party self-interest and the need to be in charge; willing to sacrifice the chance for electoral advance to protect their position; and out to vilify and condemn any who challenge their authority.

Effectively Galloway tries to characterise the SWP's top brass as machine-minders, preoccupied by factional and organisational manoeuvring. (Of course, they're both partly right about the other side – although for all the wrong reasons.) However, much like the schism in the Scottish Socialist Party, this particular split is more about ego (individual and institutional) than it is about ideology.

In large part, Galloway's frustration is born of petty, personal resentment. He feels that the SWP promised him a starring role in an organisation that would see him bathed in the glow of publicity and courted in the committee rooms of the labour movement. What the SWP delivered instead was an under-appreciated, overlooked, fringe organisation that showed little sign of moving up into the major leagues of the left.

For the SWP, Respect was intended to function both as a recruitment front and as a means of extending the party's political leverage. Rees was willing to dispense with any of the party's political 'shibboleths' that put these objectives in jeopardy.

It was a gamble that went badly awry. Not only did Respect draw very few new recruits into the SWP, it also functioned as a conveyor belt out of the party for some of the SWP's senior cadre. The SWP expelled three

COMMENT

ABOUT FREEDOM

ANGEL ALLEY

One way or another, this issue was a bit of a nightmare. We appear to have lost our newest recruit Scott (which has to be one of our quickest turnovers ever), the news section was away late and Matt has been severely hampered by our online access failing upstairs. Which means this will almost certainly be late again. Sorry about that.

So, looking at what we're in need of, we're back to needing a reviews editor, a features editor, and really another news editor as well if one can be found. C'est la vie.

On the plus side, we now have a bit of a backlog of letters and reviews (okay that's not good news for the writers, who may have to wait an issue or so to get published, sorry folks) which should help reduce the workload for now, thank you to all who have written in.

On that subject, there have been a fair number of comments, both good and bad, about the paper, which hopefully will be discussed and acted on for the next issue as we had no time to implement much for this one. This was due to the lateness of our early January edition, which was incredibly frustrating, as editorial, production and the printers all worked like clockwork, being let down by the folding and collating. There are still a couple of possibilities on this score which we're now looking into. We'll keep you informed through these pages.



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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 16th February 2008 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 7th February. You can send your articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post addressed to The Editors, Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

A sideways look

by SVARTFROSK

In January, the National Audit Office issued a highly critical report on the Private Finance Initiative, or PFI, the government's preferred method of funding public services. It should be no surprise that the PFI represents a chance for companies to fleece the taxpayer, and this is one of the elements that the NAO report criticises most.

In the Wirral, it cost £302.30 to fit a plug socket in a school under a PFI contract. The cheapest price for the same job, in Huddersfield, was just over £30. The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors suggested such a job should cost no more than £103. The cost of locks quoted in the report ranged from £15.09 to £486.54, the cost of cutting a key was as high as £47.48. Meanwhile the Home Office spent £300,000 for 300 new desks under a PFI scheme.

The NAO said that the authorities involved had not got value for money. Edward Leigh, the chairman of the Commons Public Accounts Committee, said that the public sector "has allowed itself to be taken for a ride" by managers with "insufficient commercial experience". A similar line was taken by most of the media and commentators. While there's certainly something in this, it's a bit too simple an explanation. It ignores the political drivers behind the whole PFI process.

PFI was originally conceived as a way of fixing the under-investment in public services during the Thatcher and Major years, but without it showing up on the public sector borrowing requirement. The risk is largely transferred to the taxpayer in these schemes, while the companies involved get much better profits than they would normally expect on similar work.

Blog Bites

(jimjay.blogspot.com)

One of the things that is bound to put me off anything is if I find out it's the 'ethical alternative' to something or other. Don't get me wrong – it doesn't mean I don't do ethics, it's just when I do I feel terribly, terribly ashamed of myself. It's an Essex thing I guess and something I feel perversely proud of. This probably makes me a despicable person, sorry.

Ethical tourism comes under the heading 'things I have a gut reaction against'. Branding itself as the right-on way to spend your hard earned cash you can fly to poor places, have an "authentic" experience and come home with the healthy glow of the ethically pure. Yuk. No. Scrub that, double yuk with cream on top.

I'm not saying that organisations like tourism concern don't have interesting things to say, nor that they are necessarily the demon child of Clarkson. I wouldn't go that far. What I will say is that not only is Ethical Tourism creepy it is also a bad thing for the places that the relatively rich Westerners end up going to visit.

For instance, the distortion of the local economy can be considerable. If people in the local area see that they can, potentially, make five times as much

The prime driver behind the PFI has been Gordon Brown, sitting in the Treasury worrying about 'prudence' while approving vastly over-inflated prices for everything. In government, the attitude of those holding the purse strings and power influences decisions about capital spending throughout the public sector. A few authorities have tried fighting against it, most famously Ken Livingstone's opposition to the now-collapsed Public Private Partnership on the Tube. But they have been the exception to the rule.

Some seven years ago, my local council announced that it was going to use a PFI to invest in council housing in the Brockley area. Every six months or so, I would hear snippets of information about how this PFI was going. Initially the council had hoped that the housing would be brought up to the government's Decent Homes standard and would get further investment. Gradually, the consortia interested in the project got whittled down to one. More and more things got left out of the PFI. The old folks' block and difficult leaseholders and any former tenants' debts were removed. The timescales for getting the homes up to the Decent Homes standards slipped.

At any point, the council could have pulled the plug – it took six years after all! To do so, however, would have meant going against Labour's 'private is best' dogma, handed down from Brown. The council officers knew what to do to further their careers; so did the councillors. The deal they signed might be poor value, but it wasn't ignorance or inexperience that led to it, it was political pressure. I have no reason to imagine that the PFIs in education, health or transport are any different.

engaging in tourism rather than, say, agriculture or manufacturing the simple truth is that you are encouraging that area to develop the least sustainable, least useful part of their economy.

A less frequent criticism of ethical tourism is flying, but it's one I do think we should consider for a moment. It is without exception an industry that relies upon aviation in order to exist. Taking tourists thousands of miles to spend their pocket money seems a frivolous use of greenhouse gas emissions to me.

Climate change disproportionately affects those who live in the poorest nations, despite the fact that these are the very people who have done the least to contribute to its existence. I think there is an irony in the idea that we can be nice to someone today whilst contributing to their demise tomorrow.

It seems to me that ethical tourism isn't actually that ethical. In fact it is an ethical veneer to something quite, quite wrong. To affirm the rights of the prosperous Westerners to cheap holidays over the rights of the poorest and most vulnerable peoples of the world to a safe and clean environment seems to me to be an odd sort of internationalism.

Freedom must change

In answer to the Questionnaire (*Freedom*, 15th December), I suggest, as I have before, that the editors put their names in *Freedom* – a fairly normal thing to do. As it is at present the editors look secretive, as I think they are. They determine the way *Freedom* progresses (or rather does not) so let them take responsibility for it. *Freedom* appears to like to present a no messing straight talking image but this seriously conflicts with its secretive approach.

I would like to see *Freedom* change. I have always said anarchism is going nowhere because it has nowhere to go. The unnamed editors' understanding of anarchism is stuck in the eighteenth century as shown by all this Bakunophilia. It needs to move on and embrace new ideas and approaches. Possibly the reason for this conservatism is fear of appearing to be seen as 'loony anarchists'. *Freedom* appears to be concerned with respectability within the anarchist sphere. New ideas are invigorating and challenge the failure of anarchism. If the editors cannot handle new ideas then they should move aside and allow others to consider future possibilities for anarchism.

Peter Gibson

Editor's comment: Peter, I'm not sure if you're reading the same paper as we're writing here. Over the last year, the vast majority of what we have published has been news and the number of times Bakunin or any other dead historical figure has been in there can be counted on one hand – the mainstream press are actually far worse for dragging historical events up in every issue.

On this note though, we're kind of going the other way at the moment, in that our theory and history section is the first time in a while that we're looking to regularly publish work designed to give readers a better grounding in the basics, should they need it. However, that will be simply an extra, we're not planning to reverse our general policy of looking forward, rather than back.

We are not particularly more secretive than anyone else. While I use a pseudonym and Matt only his first name, we are contactable

should anyone wish to do so through letter, email or phone message to the Press, and if anyone has a serious problem with our handling of the paper, they are welcome to bring this to the Freedom Press collective, who we are ultimately accountable to.

We, and anyone else using a pseudonym, have good reasons for doing so, and we are not going to try and force people to use real names which almost certainly have little meaning to readers but which may lead to trouble for them or their friends/family.

In my own case, I have been doing this for nearly three and a half years now, entirely under one name (if there's a byline on there, sometimes there's not – an accepted practice across the media for smaller stories).

If you have any queries as to my political outlook, you merely have to look back through the archives and you will know as much about how I think as you ever will about mainstream writers like Matthew Parris, George Monbiot or George Orwell (aka Eric Blair).

Rob Ray

And some working class people still vote for them...

The US economy is sliding into recession. Never fear, for the Republicans have the answer. In Minnesota, they are trying to introduce something called the 'Middle Class Job Protection Act'. Representative Michele Bachmann said this in support of the proposal: "I am so proud to be from the state of Minnesota. We're the workingest state in the country, and the reason why we are, we have more people that are working longer hours, we have people that are working two jobs."

It is a bit like when Bush responded to women in a news conference who stated "I work three jobs" with the gem, "You work three jobs? Uniquely American, isn't it, I mean that is fantastic." Fantastic that someone has to work three jobs to make ends meet? Who said compassionate conservatism was dead?

And how does this act work? It 'protects' the middle class by giving corporations a 25% tax cut that will, it is claimed, eventually trickle down to the workers who still have jobs. In other words, a massive corporate tax cut. They seem silent on who will pay to make up the difference in tax revenue but we can guess.

Times are bad. Real wages for American workers are around the same as they were in the 1970s. During that time, the number of families and individual workers with multiple jobs has increased. It should also be noted that this gives yet more evidence of the poverty of the standard labour market analysis of capitalist economics which drives government policy. In that ideology, labour is like any other commodity so if you cut the price you increase demand and reduce the supply.

Yet, of course, 'labour' is not a commodity, it is actual people who, unlike a commodity, need to live. Cutting the price, therefore, will increase the supply of labour and, by reducing

effective demand, decrease the demand for it. It does not take too much analysis to work out why this happens. People are desperate to pay the rent and keep food on the table. This forces more people into the job market, to work harder and longer. It may be a fantastic opportunity to achieve prosperity for the few (as exploding inequality since the 1970s in America shows) but not for the working class (the so-called 'middle class'). Combine this with the mainstream downplaying, or denial, of economic power and the obvious asymmetry of need between an individual worker and a company and we see the flaws of the neo-classical model – not to mention the pressing need for workers to organise and show solidarity.

One of the attacks made against 'socialism' is that it is based on altruism and that it would result in everyone being miserable because we would all be thinking and acting for others. That this is a caricature of both altruism and (libertarian) socialism goes without saying. Capitalism, somewhat ironically, has its own version of this in that by making people atomised individuals it results in the situation where everyone is miserable pursuing their own 'self-interest' because the collective results of their actions are irrational and so forces them to make decisions which they would prefer not to. Well, not everyone – the capitalist elite is doing very well promoting such self-defeating 'individualism'.

The capitalist vision of the American Dream is someone working two full-time jobs and struggling to get by while corporations and elites get tax cuts. That they publically get excited about it may be sickening, but not unexpected. This arrogance will only be ended when working class people collectively stand up for their own interests and fight back.

Back in the 1880s, four anarchists were hanged in Chicago for their key role in the labour movement's fight for the 40-hour week but the strike wave they helped organise did achieve reductions in hours for many workers. One hundred and twenty years later, most American workers still do not have it. Union organising in the 1930s also achieved significant gains only for us to see them undermined from the 1970s onwards.

The Chicago anarchists would not have been surprised as they knew that the only way to secure improvements was to abolish capitalism itself. They also knew that only direct action can get results. Waiting for it to 'trickle down' from the corporate elite will be as worthless as hoping that politicians will act. That organising and resisting is no easy answer is clear from the hardships involved in any attempt made by the oppressed to increase their freedom. However, it is clear that keeping quiet and hoping for the best from our rulers does not work – and never has.

So the question is, will the American workers continue to tolerate their situation or will they act for themselves? And if they do, will anarchists be organised enough to help influence that struggle towards revolutionary unions like the IWW and libertarian goals, namely the abolition of hierarchy, capitalism and the state?

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GETTING ACTIVE

PRISONS

Prison social worker officially discredited on Bowden

In late December 2007, following a lengthy investigation by Perth and Kinross Council into my complaint that Matt Stillman, a social worker employed by them and temporarily seconded to Castle Huntly jail last year, had deliberately lied in a critically important parole report about my involvement with what he had claimed was a 'terrorist organisation', the Council has issued the following:

Statement 1: That Brighton Anarchist Black Cross website was a website for eco-terrorists or paramilitaries, and that you were involved with this organisation. On investigation, there is no evidence to substantiate the claims made in the report to the Parole Board.

Statement 2: That the prisoner (John Bowden) whilst in Edinburgh Prison received visits from terrorists. On investigation the officer could find no evidence to support this allegation in either Social Work or Prison files.

When Stillman's report was submitted last April, the consequences were extreme and brutal. Just a month before a crucial parole tribunal to decide my suitability for release after 25 years in prison, I was suddenly thrown into solitary confinement and then transferred from Castle Huntly Open Prison to Maximum-Security Glenochil Prison.

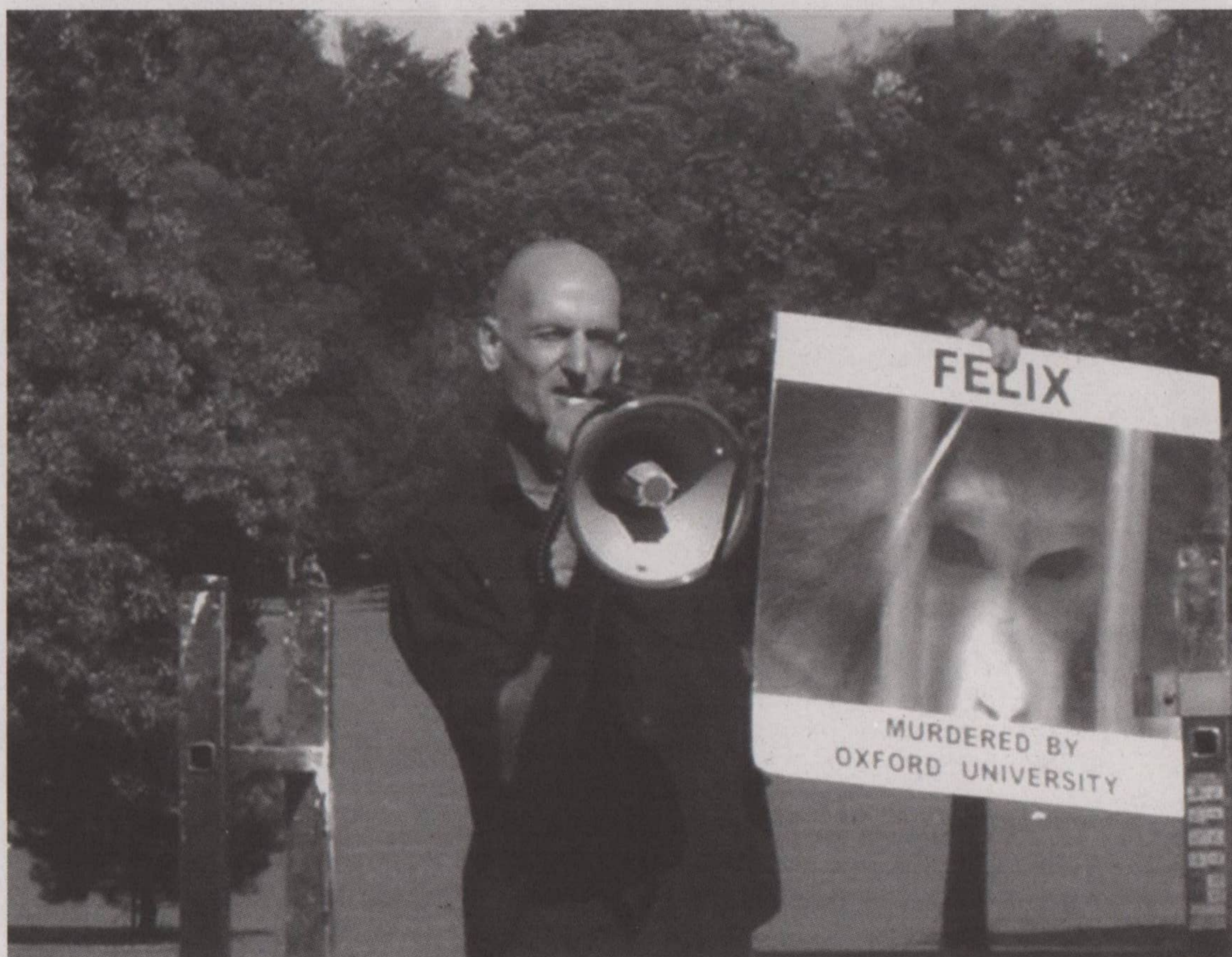
The only thing I was able to marshal in my defence was the support of ABC friends and comrades on the outside. Their efforts alone forced the Scottish Prison system to take a more defensive position and distance themselves from Stillman's ridiculous claims. Finally in October last year, following the completion of an 'updated psychological risk-assessment' report, Stillman was investigated by Perth and Kinross Council, who provide the social work team at Castle Huntly Prison, and when initially questioned he claimed that he had been 'advised' by others about the nature of the ABC organisation. When questioned further about the source of his information on ABC, he changed his story and claimed that he had seen a reference to it in an existing prison file on me. The investigation revealed this to be a lie.

They conclude the report of their investigation with the following: "As a result of this investigation we have looked at our procedures when producing parole reports and will consider how we can ensure that proper stands are met." Translated, this means that no concrete action will be taken against Stillman or his line-manager, Christina Brown.

I intend to pursue legal actions against both Stillman's social work employers and the Scottish Prison Service and ask all supporters to write letters of complaint to the following:

- Dave Roberts, Executive Director of Perth and Kinross Council, 5 Whitefriars Crescent, Perth PH2 0PA (demand that proper disciplinary action be taken against Stillman and Christina Brown).
- Stephen Moore, Head of Social work at the Social Work Office, South Street, Glenrothes, Fife, KY7 5NL (demand that he explains why Stillman continues to be employed at Fife Social Services).
- Scottish Prison Service HQ, Communications Branch, Room 338, Calton House, 5 Redheugh Rigg, Edinburgh, EH12 9HW (demand that Christina Brown be dismissed).

Adapted from a piece by John Bowden for Leeds ABC



● The SOCPA could affect *you*: The screws have been tightened on the animal rights (AR) movement yet again. Mel Broughton (pictured above, from Brighton animal action website), the main spokesman for SPEAK, was arrested in his home at 5.30am on 12th December – and he's been held on remand ever since on charges of arson and 'conspiracy to blackmail'.

The reason the state is using conspiracy charges is they like their all encompassing vagueness. Rather than having to prove specific criminal activities, a huge quantity of evidence can be produced from which 'inferences' can be drawn.

"The danger of this sort of accusation is that simply running a campaign could be described as blackmail. Obviously a blackmailer's threats do not have to be illegal, simply the suggestion that if you don't do X we will do Y could be construed as blackmail" (AR legal advisor) – i.e. the very act of organising demos could become a very serious criminal offence, punishable by years inside.

Alarming section 149 of SOCPA allows the secretary of state to declare any business to be the equivalent of an animal research establishment without going back to Parliament.

● Programmers on the London Indymedia website are working on a new calendar system to potentially draw together all the city's events into a single system with an easily navigable setup, allowing people to filter through events for campaigns they are directly involved in.

The test-site allows video and article publishing, and while there is no concrete plan to go live at present, the network is interested in what users would like to see in future as the experimental work is part a general project to try and design a next-generation site for London (email imc-london@lists.indymedia.org).

Globally, the Indymedia network continues to move towards building a new Content Management System (CMS) via the annual Techmeets, which in 2006 stressed the need

for greater user-influence over moderation, protection of identities, and resilience in the server system.

● The clowns are back in town in Aberdeen having just completed a workshop in early February and with another planned for the 3rd June. The workshops aim to train people for the world of protest clowning, where squads from the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (Circa) attempt to defuse tense situations at campaigning demonstrations. To book for the June workshop, call 01224 337658.

Anti-fascist campaigners from Brinsley and Notts successfully leafletted Brinsley recently after a previous attempt was marred by alleged threats from BNP activists.

The leaflets made clear to the residents of Brinsley what kind of character their councillor, Sadie Graham is, and what kind of regressive politics she represents.

Graham was recently thrown out of the BNP after an operation from the top of the organisation which saw the rising far-right star's phone bugged, computer stolen and web-usage monitored.

The split in the BNP prompted by Graham's expulsion has seen a great deal of mud slinging both from her supporters and others concerned at chairman Nick Griffin's hold on the party, and Griffin loyalists.

Brinsley and Notts campaigners are asking i'Whilst Graham has been spending so much of her time involved in a thwarted attempt at a coup in her party, what has she been doing for the people of Brinsley? Not a lot it would seem. She's too busy furthering her own career in the fascist movement to pay attention to local issues.'

The last time anti-fascists leafletted Brinsley they were told they had ten minutes to leave Brinsley by BNP activists. However, the split seems to have affected the party at a grassroots level in the area, as this time, none were to be found.

Anarchism in China

Throughout many parts of Asia, anarchism was the primary radical left movement in the first quarter of the twentieth century. This should be considered significant to the anarchist project because within the global context China is by far the most populated country with a population of over 1.2 billion people.

There were multiple locally specific reasons why anarchism gained such widespread popularity in China. Many have pointed out the 'limited government' (*wuwei*) element in traditional Chinese thought, ranging the gamut from Taoism to Buddhism to Confucianism. In line with this view, historian Peter Zarrow claims in *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture* that anarchism was "created out of the ruins of Neo-Confucian discourse". Building on this belief, he goes on to trace the connections between Taoist ideas of 'order without coercion' and the later emergence of anarchism.

While there certainly is some truth to Zarrow's claims, what must be deliberately avoided is any over-focusing on the 'anarchistic' elements contained within Chinese traditional thought to the detriment of an understanding of the important role played by global migration and by colonialism itself. As Arif Dirlik, a Turkish expert in Chinese history has remarked, an over-focussing on traditional thought can also be said to be somewhat Orientalist, as it attributes "everything new in China to Chinese tradition ... another way of saying that there is never anything significantly new in China".

Alternatively, Dirlik posits that "the Chinese past is being read in new ways with the help of anarchism, and conversely there is a re-reading of anarchism through Taoist and Buddhist ideas". In other words the development and spread of ideas is never a completely one-way process, it is always an exchange.

In any case, this is just one part; another major reason was that practically no Marxist theoretical works had been translated into Chinese until around 1921, and even then a movement based around it failed to materialise until around the end of the decade. As a result, anarchism enjoyed a nearly universal hegemony over the movement from 1905, thereby serving as a sort of filter for developments in the worldwide radical movements. Even Russia's October Revolution of 1918 was claimed as an 'anarchist revolution' as a result, though this distortion did not last.

So, unlike in the rest of the world, initially the anarchist movement in China did not fall with the rise of the Bolshevik victory in Russia, but instead rose in popularity along with it.

Initially on the mainland, Chinese anarchist activity was concentrated in the Guangzhou region of southern China, as well as in Beijing. In Guangzhou, the important thinker Shifu was the most active and influential of



PERSECUTION: Killings of Chinese anarchists became common as the Bolsheviks and Nationalists rose to power. This photo shows a Chinese anarchist being beheaded, sometime in the 1920s

the anarchists, helping to organise some of the first unions in the country. Students from Guangzhou formed the Truth Society, the first anarchist organisation in Beijing, amongst many other projects.

Like other nation-states around the world at this time, China was quickly becoming a more dynamic, diverse nation marked deeply by the repeated invasions of foreign powers as well as by the global migrations of its own peoples.

In China, anarchism arrived at the apex of its popularity during the 'Chinese Enlightenment', also known as the New Culture Movement, which saw students embrace a nationalist outlook alongside a philosophy of rationalism.

It was through the conduit of influential Western ideas of liberalism, scientism and progress that anarchism was able to gain its strongest foothold. And ironically, it was from the new realisation of China as a nation-state in a decentred, cosmopolitan world of nation-states, rather than as the centre of all culture, that brought about the rise of an ideology that called for its abolition.

Anarchists lived and organised in Chinese communities the world over, including Japan, France, the Philippines, Singapore, Canada and the United States; of these, the two most significant locations were the diaspora communities in Tokyo and Paris.

The concept of 'cultural revolution', which is the very definition of variance between Chinese socialism and that of the rest of the socialist movement, can be traced directly back to this heavily anarchistic 'New Culture' period when Mao himself was a member of

the anarchist People's Voice Society and enthusiastically endorsed the thinking of Shifu amongst others.

Of course, the anarchist conception of cultural revolution varied greatly from the Cultural Revolution which Mao actually put into practice, as by then he had been thoroughly convinced of the need for centralised, absolute authority after extensive contact with the Comintern.

In 1921, with the establishing of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the anarchist movement, which had brought in the Bolsheviks as allies, began to lose ground, as it became clear Marxists were in charge in Russia, rather than anarchists, and were promising aid and success in an immediate revolution.

This argument for quick results, very different from the slow evolutionary approach the anarchist movement was preaching, was persuasive, and it is from the anarchist movement of the 1910s that most of the early leaders of the Chinese Communist Party would later emerge.

With the growth of the Marxists throughout the 1920s, and strong support in the labour force, the later part of that decade saw them begin to attack anarchist groups across the country. By the 1930s, the movement had been decimated by its inability to tackle the better-organised Bolsheviks and Nationalists, who despite their own rivalries simultaneously launched successful pogroms to isolate and persecute influential anarchists.

(Adapted from *Non-Western Anarchisms: Rethinking the Global Context* by Jason Adams)

REVIEWS

WHAT'S ON
FEBRUARY

8th South Wales Anarchists benefit gig for Cardiff Prisoner Support, with Inner Terrestrials and KilnAboy, see <http://news.southwalesanarchists.org> for details

9th and 10th National Squatters Meeting in Leeds to discuss the squatting situation and build stronger networks between squats and autonomous spaces throughout the UK, email squatmeetup@googlemail.com

11th Benefit gig for the London Zine Symposium, with Belligerent Declaration, Moral Dilemma and The Skints at The Cross Kings, 126 York Way, London N1 0AX, see lasthours.org.uk



15th Subhumanz with Active Slaughter and The Skints at Chat's Palace, Booksby's Walk, Hackney, London, 020 8533 0227

17th Southampton's Third Seed Swap from 10am to 4pm at Woolston Community Centre, Woolston, Southampton, for more details see octoberbooka.org/seedswap.

MARCH

Smash EDO Tour 2008 – for almost four years the Smash EDO campaign have been demonstrating outside EDO/MBM, the US arms manufacturers in Brighton, and the campaign will be touring the UK (or beyond) showing the new full length film *On The Verge*. Initially the campaign is looking for dates in March/April, the tour will allow those involved in the campaign to discuss tactics, get feedback, and organise for the future, so if you want the tour to visit your area email on-the-verge@hotmail.com or you can see the *On The Verge* trailer at smashedo.org.uk

APRIL

1st Fossil Fools Day, a day of action against the fossil fuel industry called by Rising Tide International, see fossilfuelsday.org or risingtide.org.uk for more.

MAY

17th Anarchist Bookfair hosted by the 1 in 12 Club, 21–23 Albion Street, Bradford, West Yorkshire BD1 2LY, from 12 noon until 6pm (stalls at £5 a table) followed by a Social in the evening.

18th Anarchist Writers, Publishers and Design, a seminar for those who write for and/or publish anarchist publications, hosted by the 1 in 12 Club, 21–23 Albion Street, Bradford, from 10am until 4pm, tickets £5, contact sam@samjackson6.orangehome.co.uk or call 0777 914 7005

FILM

Sicko

directed by Michael Moore

The most effective and affecting sequences in this documentary about the US healthcare (dis-)service – where even middle-class people bankrupt themselves paying for treatment – show ordinary Americans recounting abject experiences at the hands of callous insurance companies and profiteering medical institutions.

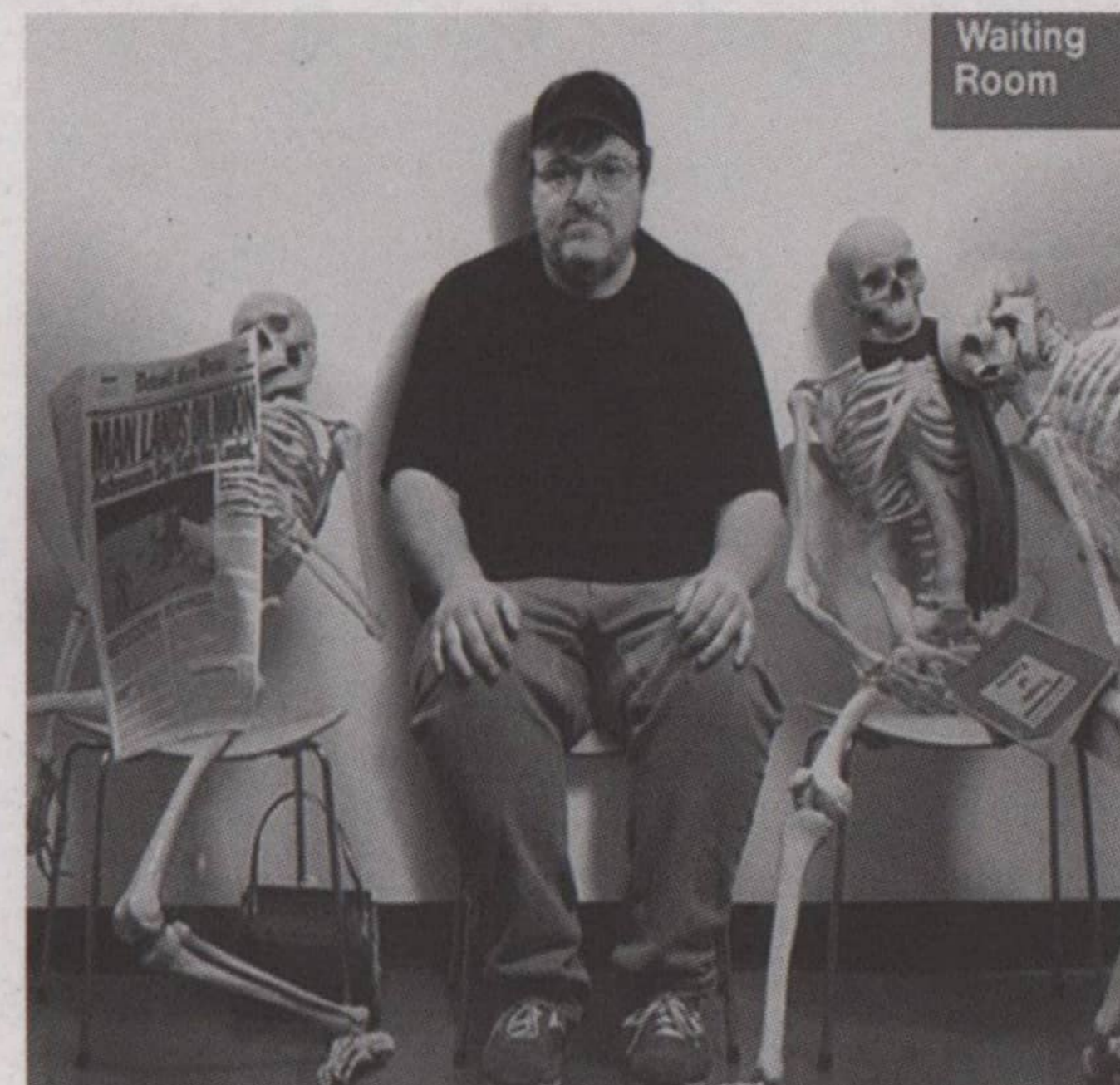
Michael Moore wisely holds ego in abeyance whereupon his subjects' intelligence and resilience in the face of personal tragedy make his arguments for socialised medicine for him.

As in previous films like *Roger & Me*, *Bowling For Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11*, this grass-roots approach to delineating his themes pays dividends because the subsequent commonsense basis for political debate undercuts the high-minded pomposity and venal dishonesty of the Great and Good bolstering the greed of their elite constituencies in the name of freedom.

Having established sympathy for the victims of such a corrupt and malicious system without rendering them passive, Moore wastes no time detailing, with great satirical flourish, the deliberate design and assiduous maintenance of this appalling state of affairs by successive generations of Republicans and Democrats from Nixon to Bush.

The archival detective work again produces gems, such as Tricky Dicky in the 1971 White House Tapes rubberstamping the insurance sector's rip-off masterminded by John Erlichman.

The clincher? "All the incentives run the right way: the less care they give ... the more money they make". Then there's Reagan telling his public that a proper national service was not only against their interests, but 'anti-American' to boot. Most tellingly, the roster of corporate lickspittles includes both Clintons – Bill's healthcare reform ticket abandoned upon becoming president, and



Hilary's commitment to universal provision doubtful given her lobby funding by Big Pharma.

Body Politics

Of course, the populist demagogue persona inevitably surfaces at some point, and in *Sicko* it arrives in spades. Freed from demands of electoral name-calling, we instead get sickening paeans to Castro's Cuba and Tony Benn proclaiming that killing the NHS would prompt revolution here, alongside similarly ridiculously idealised descriptions of the Canadian and French systems – with attention to neither the fatal inadequacies of their massive hierarchical bureaucracies nor the present insidious drip of privatisation by the back door.

The paradox once again is that success as a media brand requires sensational self-aggrandisement, with corresponding cynical levels of manipulation both of the audience and the material to guarantee access to the big screen.

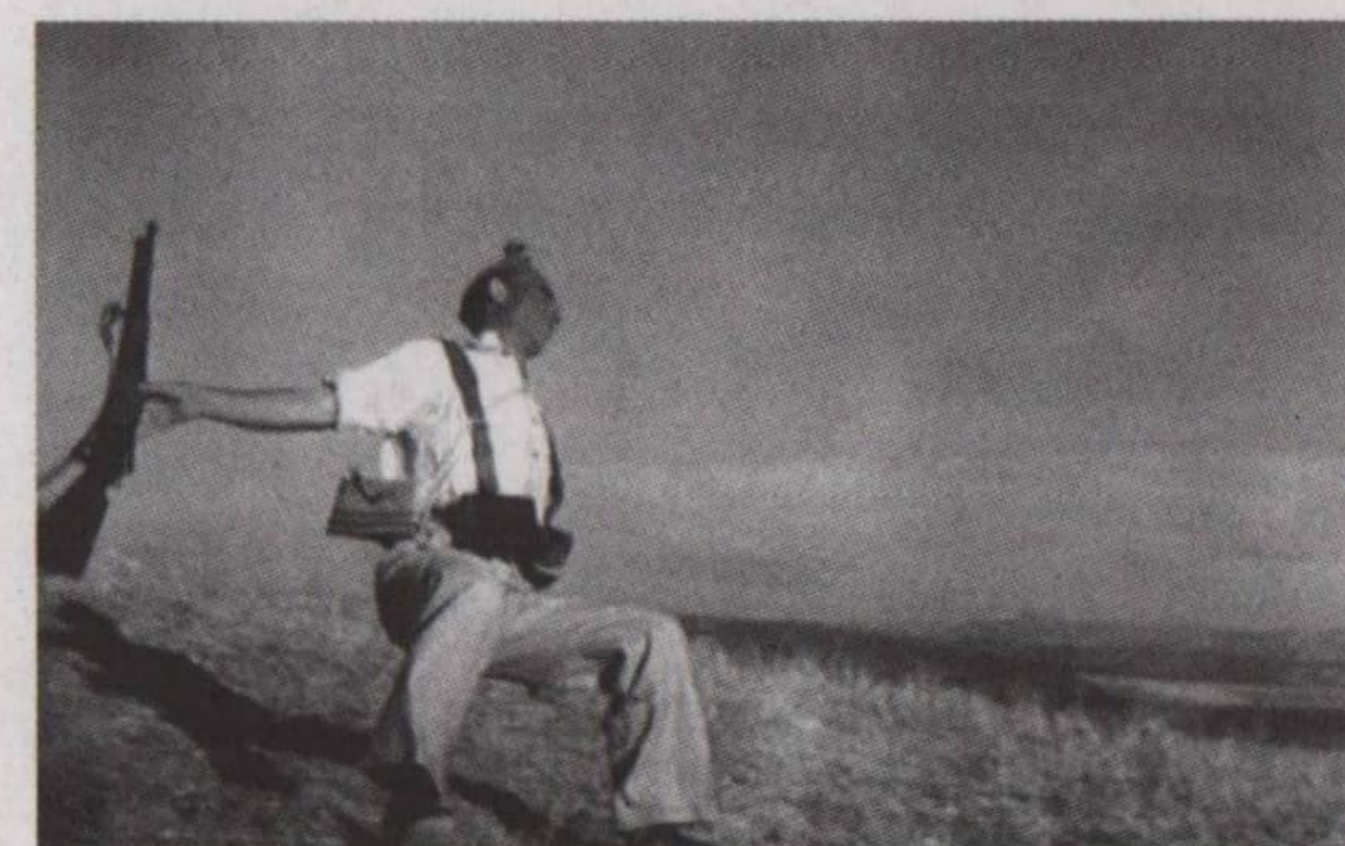
The result – here fetishising big government – is as frustrating as ever: at least airing so many dimensions of the problem, but obstinately oblivious to the obvious necessity of real, not token, people power if it's ever to be solved.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Jeremy Clarkson published his bank account details in his newspaper column and suggested that nothing would happen. Someone then set up a £500 standing order to a charity. Clarkson was forced to admit he was wrong, possibly a world first.
2. Los Angeles. The street is Wilshire Boulevard, the man was Henry Gaylord Wilshire, who made a fortune in property, and regularly ran for office as a socialist. As he got older he became more libertarian and edited the paper of the Syndicalist League.
3. The Progressive Policies Forum, which appears to have done nothing except channel significant sums of money to the failed Labour Deputy Leadership campaign of Peter Hain. Hain has finally resigned.

4. He was a mill worker from Alcoi in Alicante and a militant in the Libertarian Youth. He was killed in fighting at Cerro Muriano in Andalusia in 1936. His death was captured on camera by Robert Capa, and is known as the 'Falling Soldier'.



The battle within

Juggling simplistic stereotypes, Channel 4's *Britz* illuminates neither the attitudes of UK Muslims nor the motivations of home-grown jihadists, concludes Tom Jennings

Peter Kosminsky's television docudramas have tackled themes such as the Falklands War, child abuse and North of Ireland policy; recently criticising UN peacekeeping in Bosnia (*Warriors*, 1999), the creation of New Labour (*The Project*, 2002), and the hounding of Dr David Kelly over Saddam's WMDs (*The Government Inspector*, 2005).

Now with *Britz* he abandons 'faction' (combining fictional speculation with supposedly factual material) altogether, seeking to explain why the 7th July 2005 London bombers, "second-generation Pakistani-Muslim Britons ... blew themselves to bits, taking with them as many of their fellow citizens as they could".

Aiming to flesh out the precursors of extreme choices and facilitate understanding how intelligent and caring individuals come to commit horrific acts, consecutive episodes depict the experiences and life choices of two closely-linked characters, which result in vastly divergent trajectories fatefully colliding in a tragic denouement.

Sohail (Riz Ahmed) and his sister Nasima (Manjinder Virk) from Bradford are studying law and medicine respectively and, fully integrated into student life, tolerate their parents' traditionalism without applying it to themselves. He sneers at peers taking prayers seriously, and to fulfil what he sees as a debt of honour to Britain (plus envisaging an exciting career), enlists with MI5 to combat terrorism – with his commitment steadfast despite falling foul of anti-terror policing and taking part in persecution and torture.

Naz, conversely, responds deeply to such phenomena and is politically active but, frustrated with liberal protest and traumatised by the suicide of a friend unjustly placed under a Control Order, opts to train for armed jihad. Both detach themselves entirely from friends and family in following their secret courses – but (despite superb acting) we never learn why on earth they embarked on them, leaving gaping chasms in the narrative arcs botched together with clumsy melodrama, action and suspense into a fatally-flawed and utterly unbelievable story.

For a while, the translation of government measures into local intimidation and racist



police practice, and resulting outrage among Muslim youth, are convincingly conveyed (thanks to scrupulous research) – as is the co-existence in everyday life of religiosity and secularism and traditional and modern behaviour patterns.

But the demands of the thriller format transform accurate representations of grievance, by default, into simple determinants of extreme responses – validating rather than undermining the state's hysterical repression of symptoms mistaken for causes. *Britz* cannot distinguish between a majority who feel strongly and a tiny minority prepared to contemplate indiscriminate malice and murder on behalf of either Crown or Caliphate – equally unlikely alternatives which obliterate the myriad of real-world compromise belief formations and stances we all routinely assume.

There is no sense of those from Muslim backgrounds reassessing this part of their heritage (irrespective of spiritual or political motivations) as a means to reaffirm family and social allegiance in the face of such immediate threat – whereas a contribution to genuine debate would show the spectrum of expression among ordinary people leading to neither regressive cataclysm or Hollywood action heroism. Unfortunately, media business-as-usual combines genre convention with promotional hype, artistic arrogance and political cluelessness to render such modestly worthwhile aims inconceivable.

Bipolar Disorders

Kosminsky drew on childhood imaginings of a rebellious sister alter-ego for his conformist self. After his immigrant European parents escaped the Nazis, he had an "almost visceral

desire to dig into the host society – but part of me was ashamed of that ... I still feel the battle inside".

Yet while class mobility has similar effects, and despite racial exclusion precluding 'passing', *Britz* acknowledges only upwardly-mobile, establishment views (in liberal multicultural guise) of integration and assimilation – marking as suspect more downmarket British tendencies towards irreverence, disrespect for and distrust of authority, horizontal loyalty and solidarity.

So not only are the cultural and class foundations of both religious and political beliefs and practices underplayed, but questions of how and in what spheres these are put into action remain unasked. Disillusionment and anger with and alienation from, as well as affiliation and loyalty to, official political discourses and institutions manifest themselves multifariously, not as the Manichean opposites shown here. And, sure enough, the researchers found widespread fury and frustration but no-one remotely like Sohail or Naz.

Arising from the writer's projection of his own conflicts into others – with subsequent misattributions of motives – this bipolar exposition on a cultural level requires wholesale repression of ambiguous and conflictual feelings and perceptions in drawing conclusions conducive to judgements of ineffable 'otherness' (and yields factual blunders too numerous to list).

As in other mainstream fictional representations of British Muslims in recent years (see my discussion in 'Same Difference?' in *Variant* 23, 2005), *Britz* sacrifices an exploration of complicated biographies and social spheres in favour of individualised oversimplifications.



Reviews

➔ page 15

Once stripped of social immersion, shallow sensationalised attributes chime with press headlines and political platitudes masquerading as objective criteria of liberal 'balance'.

Contradictory evidence is conveniently ignored – as with the recent Home Office Survey showing that UK Muslims identify significantly more strongly with 'Britishness' than any other ethnic group (with remedial citizenship classes therefore another alibi for officially disavowed Islamophobia).

More generally, New Labour's onslaught on civil liberties, in the wider project to criminalise dissent, spuriously associates individual experimentation with thoughts, words, images, ideas and lifestyles at odds with bourgeois norms as potential terrorism – conflating 'anti-social' behaviour with

ultimate threats to society in legitimising ruthless monitoring and control. Parasitising this context in its purported realism, *Britz* perfectly fits the agenda of the 'loyal opposition' necessary for the manufacture of middle-class consent – which, incidentally, explains why MI5 (exemplars of the technocratic 'intelligence' fix) were so supportive during Kosminsky's research.

But interpreted as rhetorical fantasy more insidious than the BBC's laughable *Spooks* (with Sohail, perhaps, like 24's Jack Bauer), the writer-director's spectacular smugness

and pathetic pretence of critique are exposed – just as the fashionable rash of drama-docs he's spearheaded specialise in substituting shallow simulation for serious analysis.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

Britz was shown on Channel 4 on 31st October 31st and 1st November 2007

THE QUIZ

1. Which right-wing commentator had egg on his face after ridiculing identity theft?
2. Which city's main street is named for a revolutionary socialist and later editor of *The Syndicalist*?
3. Which think tank did no thinking?
4. Many people have seen a photograph of Federico Borrell García, but who was he?

Answers on page 14

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