

AN NHS WHITE ELEPHANT

So are the new NHS treatment centres actually working?

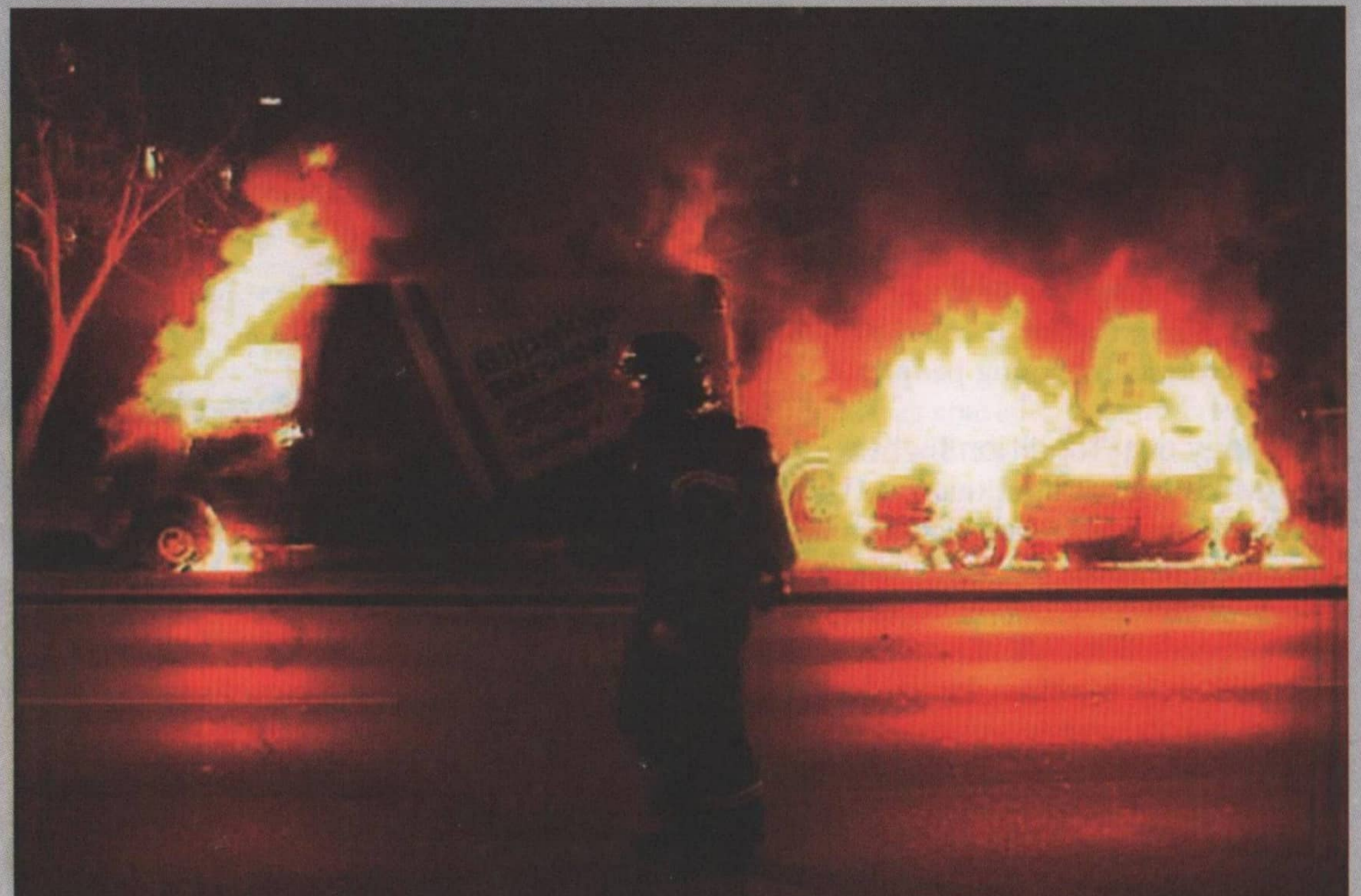
They were meant to prove that the private sector could deliver care better than the NHS. They were meant to increase the number of patients treated, slash waiting lists and save taxpayers' money. Moreover they were meant to lead the way in state of the art care. Instead Independent Sector Treatment Centres (ISTCs) have wasted millions of pounds of tax payers' money. So bad has the situation got that the government financial watchdog, the National Audit Office (NAO), has just launched a review of the £2 billion annual programme.

ISTCs would, Labour claimed, provide extra capacity to the NHS by carrying out straight forward day surgery and diagnostic tests. The reality has proved very different.

The 25 centres currently up and running are meant to treat 170,000 patients – most though are only seeing 84% of the patients they could. Four are seeing just half as many as they could. Incredibly ISTCs, which can be run by private sector companies, get paid regardless of how many people they see, at a cost of £1.45 billion last year. In 2006 ISTCs carried out 50,000 fewer operations than the Department of Health planned and paid

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LENS CAP DENMARK



The night air of Denmark's major cities has been full of smoke and fire for six consecutive nights. Immigrant youths are believed to be behind the destruction in response to racist police harassment. Police have long since enforced selective 'zero tolerance policies' in poor immigrant neighbourhoods and declared 'visitation zones' – special areas of cities where civil liberties are temporarily suspended. The police beating of an elderly immigrant man and his sons sparked the unrest. (See also page 7.)

NVDA 4 – AGREXCO 0

Israeli fruit importer Carmel Agrexco's UK headquarters has been blockaded again. Lorries from companies including Sainsbury's and Tesco's were stopped from entering the premises, in Hayes, Middlesex, to load up on flowers and vegetables grown in occupied Palestine.

The protest was part of a week of action against Carmel called for by the Boycott Israeli Goods campaign (bigcampaign.org). Because of flower imports, the run up to Valentines is one of the busiest periods of the year for the 50% Israeli State owned company. A Carmel depot in Belgium was also blockaded and local actions occurred around Britain.

Carmel-Agrexco have a poor record in trying to convict people who have taken

action against them. In September 2005, a Judge ruled that Agrexco (UK) must prove that their business is lawful. The acquittal of the seven activists before they were able to present their defence meant that the court did not have to rule on the legality of Agrexco-Carmel's involvement in the supply of produce from illegal settlements in the occupied territories.

In January 2006 seven people were acquitted of aggravated trespass for a blockade because Carmel – in an imitation of the Israeli State – annexed land it didn't own to build a security fence. At a demo in December 2006 police made no arrests – being unable to find any law they had broken. So far no-one has been convicted for actions at the HQ, although court cases are ongoing.

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NEWS

IN BRIEF

Union protests against fire cuts

The Fire Brigades' Union (FBU) is to begin a campaign against cuts to services. The Devon and Somerset Fire Authority voted to axe 24 full-time posts and allow dual-crewing of aerial platforms to deal with a £1.3m budget shortfall.

At a meeting on 20th February, the FBU described the cuts as "disgusting" and said they could cost lives.

ID cards

Thousands of airport workers will become the first British nationals to be issued with new biometric identity cards within the next two years in the latest government attempt to kick-start the controversial scheme.

After months of agonising over how to build public support for ID cards, home secretary Jacqui Smith has decided they should be used in the first instance to tackle terrorism or crime. Ministers are understood to have cooled on plans to issue ID cards to students in one of the first stages of the programme, fearing it could provoke a wave of protests by young people.

UK apology over rendition flights

David Miliband has admitted two US "extraordinary rendition" flights landed on UK territory in 2002. In a statement to MPs, the foreign secretary said in both cases, US planes stopped on the UK dependent territory of Diego Garcia to refuel. He said he was "very sorry" to have to say that previous denials made in "good faith" were now having to be corrected.

Former foreign secretary Jack Straw and former prime minister Tony Blair made statements in 2005, 2006 and 2007 saying there was no evidence that rendition flights had stopped on UK territory.

Tony Blair – President of Europe?

The *European Tribune* has set up a petition to try to stop Tony Blair from becoming the 'President of Europe'. This is on the grounds that he worked hard to divide Europe by joining the Iraq War and also that he has undermined civil liberties. Sign the petition at <http://stopblair.eu/indexen.html>

Dossier leak

A document leaked to the *Guardian* reveals how the Foreign Office successfully fought to keep secret any mention of Israel contained on the first draft of the discredited Iraq weapons dossier. The dossier was made public this week, but the Foreign Office succeeded before a tribunal in having the handwritten mention of Israel kept secret.

Along with unfavourable references to the US and Japan, the reference to Israel was written in the margin by someone commenting on the opening paragraph of the Williams draft. It was written against the claim that "no other country [apart from Iraq] has flouted the United Nations' authority so brazenly in pursuit of weapons of mass destruction".

LENS CAP DEAD PREZ RIOTS



Olympia, Washington, USA: A hip-hop concert featuring the revolutionary emcee duo Dead Prez ended in a riot that saw tens of thousands of dollars in damaged and stolen police property. The incident began when a campus police officer arrested a suspect on misdemeanour assault charges. The show had ended but the performers, still onstage, allegedly egged on the crowd saying, "They're taking one of our people. Go take care of it."

Can't Work, Won't Work?

The long-term jobless will be forced to work or lose their benefits under the toughest sanctions proposed so far to tackle long-term unemployment.

In his first big speech since the Prime Minister appointed him with a brief to step up the pace of welfare reform, James Purnell, Work and Pensions Secretary, suggested that all long-term unemployed claiming jobseeker's allowance will have to be offered, and complete, at least four weeks of work to carry on getting their benefits.

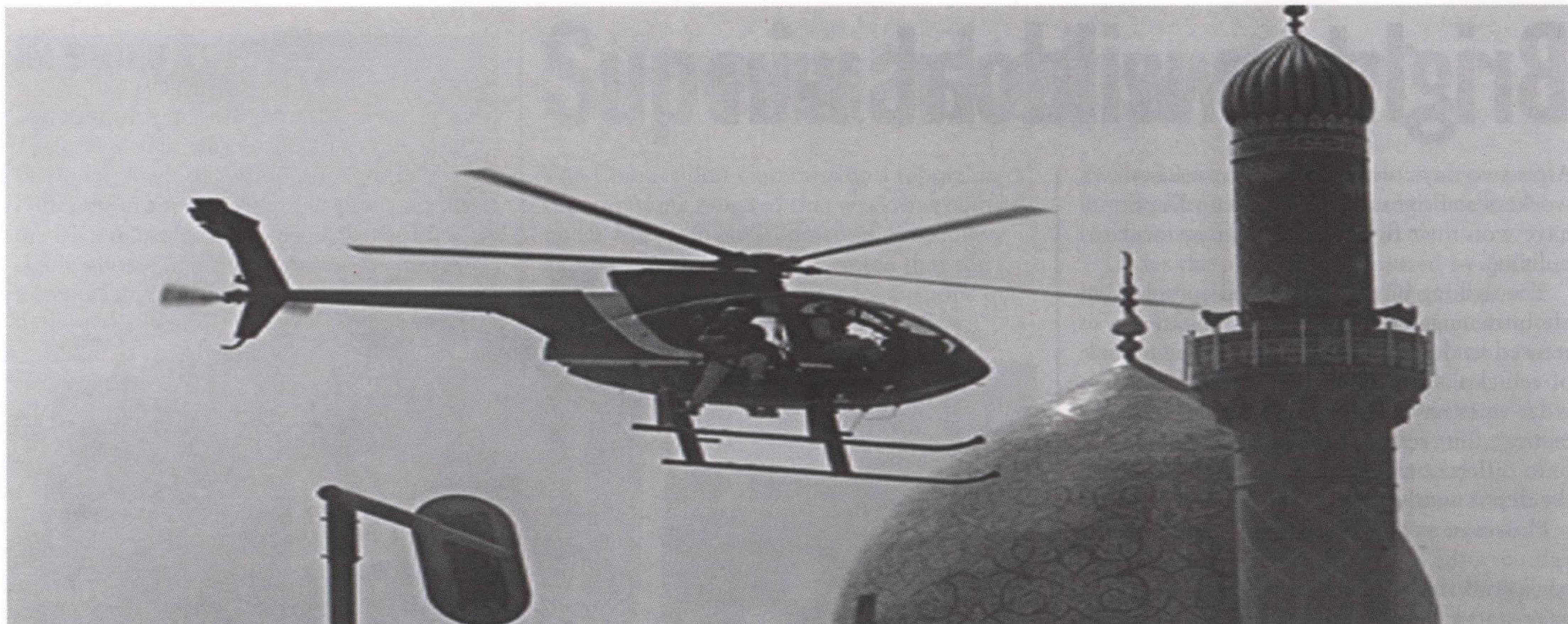
Mr Purnell said: "We are announcing a radical move to tackle worklessness. The message I want to send is clear – if you can work you should work and that will be a condition of getting benefits. Avoiding work is not an option."

The public, private and voluntary providers who are being contracted by the Government to bring down the long-term jobless figure by offering them new skills and training programmes will have to insist on all claimants doing the month's work or 'work-related activity'.

From October next year, the Flexible New Deal programme will mean that those who refuse point-blank to take the activities they are offered will face big cuts in their benefits or will have to do full-time community work to continue receiving them.

Mr Purnell's speech follows a suggestion from Caroline Flint, the new Housing Minister, that people in social housing should be expected to actively seek work as a condition of their tenancy.





Corporate killings

Legal challenge to British mercenary firms

Campaigners are taking the foreign secretary David Miliband, to court over the government's failure to regulate private military and security firms operating overseas. The challenge follows an increasing number of reports of abuse by employees of foreign companies in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Private military and security contractors (PMSCs) are now the second largest occupying force in Iraq behind the US. These companies reap huge profits from war. Iraqi contracts boosted the annual revenue of British PMSCs alone from £320 million in 2003 to more than £1.8 billion in 2004. In the same year income for the private military and security industry worldwide reached \$100 billion.

There are hundreds of reports of human rights abuses by PMSC employees, including

incidents of contractors firing indiscriminately at civilians. In one incident in September 2007, 17 Iraqi civilians were killed by American PMSC Blackwater. Just weeks later employees of British security company Erinys International opened fire on a taxi near Kirkuk in Iraq, wounding three civilians, including two women.

A 'trophy video' shows employees of British company Aegis Defence Services randomly shooting automatic weapons at civilian cars in Baghdad. Aegis coordinates the operations of all PMSCs working in Iraq. At Abu Ghraib prison, employees of two PMSCs were implicated in the abuse-of-prisoners scandal including allegedly raping a male juvenile detainee and directing the use of dogs and other forms of torture during interrogations.

Despite these cases and many more, no private military contractor has been prosecuted for actions in Iraq. The pattern is similar in conflicts around the world.

The use of private security companies in

war zones has soared since the Foreign Office published a green paper in 2002 on how they could be regulated. The government has since avoided the issue despite a subsequent call for action by the Commons foreign affairs committee.

The UN and Red Cross have repeatedly called on governments to introduce legislation to regulate the sector and guard against the "inherent dangers" of privatising the use of violence in war zones.

The killing of 17 Iraqi civilians by the US firm Blackwater last year prompted the Iraqi government and US Congress to draw up laws designed to bring the companies under control. The Afghan government is also cracking down on the activities of foreign security companies.

Leigh Day, the legal firm representing War on Want, who are bringing the challenge, has told Miliband that there is "no reasonable explanation" for his delay in light of the mounting calls for regulation of the companies.

An NHS white elephant

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them for. Critics also point out that ISTC treatments cost more than the NHS – 11% more last year. A report by the House of Commons Health Select Committee also found that the centres made no dent in NHS waiting lists and actually reduced choice. Rather than helping the NHS out with its work loads treatment centres have taken core work affecting staff training and contributing to a number of trust's financial deficits.

As well as the cost effectiveness of ISTCs, the NAO will also be looking closely at the section of the Department of Health (DH) that was charged with negotiating the deals. Of the DH's commercial directorate's 190 staff only eight were civil servants. The rest

were management consultants who were costing £100,000 a day!

The introduction of ISTCs into the NHS by New Labour was purely ideological – an unfounded belief in the private sector rather than the public sector. Treatment centres have proved a disaster, so much so that the current Health Minister Alan Johnson has cut most of the second wave of ISTCs – although the companies that bid for these contracts are set to win millions of pounds (of tax payers' money) in compensation.

When Freedom recently checked the DoH's website it found that the government were still claiming that ISTCs (or 'Treatment Centres') "will be crucial in bringing down waiting times and giving patients more

choice about when and where they are treated" despite the fact that there is no evidence for this. The website also claims that ISTCs are a source of innovation in the delivery of care. Wrong again. An independent study by the University of Edinburgh found no evidence that treatment centres resulted in better care.

Labour is now back-tracking on treatment centres as the full extent of the disaster is revealed. The government owes health workers, tax payers and patients a big apology. Instead they cling to their claims that the private sector can teach the NHS. The only lesson from ISTCs is how to make a profit at the expense of people who are ill.

Richard Griffin

PUBLIC SECTOR

Brighton wildcat win

After two days on wildcat strike, refuse workers at Brighton's Hollingdean Depot have won their fight against management bullying.

The striking bin staff had been complaining about management bullying after staff refused to double their workload due to lack of vehicles and under-staffing. As part of what workers called management's 'bully tactics', four refuse workers had been moved onto different crews sparking anger amongst the depot and leading to the wildcat action.

However, as of the morning of Friday 15th February, the four workers have been allowed back onto their old crews and management have started negotiations over staffing levels and vehicle numbers. As one worker put it: "Management folded like a pack of cards. They didn't know what was going on. This sort of treatment had been going on far too long and its about time they learnt that they cannot treat us this way".

The staff at the Hollingdean Depot downed tools on Tuesday in retaliation to having tightly-knit crews broken up by managers. Another worker said his cousin, who also works at the depot, had been 'punished' for having time off sick by being put onto another shift. Although some bin collections went ahead, a majority of residents who were due to have their bins emptied were left without a service.

Thursday morning's 6am rounds were carried out as normal but the second shift, starting at 6.50am, refused to go to out. Talks between the council and the GMB union took place in a bid to resolve the issue. At the time, neither side was able to offer a firm indication on when the strike would be over though the strikers stated they would strike for days or weeks until their demands were met.

Refuse workers at the Hollingdean Depot undertook a four day strike and occupation



in 2001, which forced the change of management from private company SITA to Brighton and Hove council.

On the 11th June 2001, SITA imposed new impossible working routines, which were completely impossible to achieve, such as cleaning a 17 mile stretch in eight hours with a broom. On hearing these new measures, twelve workers refused to carry them out and were immediately suspended. When this happened, the twelve called in their fellow workers who had already left

the depot and explained the situation. In response, they all returned and blockaded the entrances of the depot, refusing the management's action and demanding their immediate re-instatement. SITA management responded by sacking them all. As a consequence the workers occupied their workplace, demanding their reinstatement, the termination of the contract with SITA, and the formation of a worker's co-operative. For a full account of the 2001 battle and other breaking news see libcom.org

Council staff reject pay deal

Unions representing more than 100,000 council staff have rejected a new three-year pay deal. Talks between the council group Cosla, the local government employers, and Unison broke down last week. Unite and GMB unions are also thought to have rejected the offer.

The unions had submitted a pay claim looking for a rise of £1,000 or 5% in 2008 last November. Cosla responded last week with an offer of less than half of that, spanning three years. The meeting didn't agree any improvements to the offer despite its rejection by the unions. Negotiations are now set to resume next month.

Under the deal proposed by Cosla, workers would have received a 2.2% rise this year, 2.3% in 2009 and a further 2.2% in 2010.

Unison said that was unacceptable as it was below the rate of inflation, and would increase the gap between high and low earners.

Valued workforce?

Cosla said it was extremely disappointed at the union's decision to go public with the pay dispute and hoped to reach a deal when discussions resumed.

Joe Di Paolo, head of the employers organisation at Cosla, said: "Our trade union colleagues are obviously trying to apply a bit of pressure but it is not our practice to negotiate through the media.

"We met earlier this week and we meet again on 3rd March – when we will pick up the discussions. We value our workforce and

remain hopeful of reaching a similar three-year deal to the one we recently secured with our teachers."

Stephanie Herd, chairwoman of Unison's Scottish local government committee, said: "We now need to bring home to councillors that our members are serious about this offer being unacceptable.

"If you want first-class public services, if you want the sick and elderly cared for, your children well educated and protected and your streets clean and safe, cutting the pay of public sector workers is the wrong way to go about it."

Unison is now calling on its members in Local Government to put pressure on their employers to increase the offer at the next negotiating meeting on 3rd March.

IN BRIEF

Tesco biofuels involvement

Tesco Norwich was targetted as part of a National Week of Action on Agrofuels. Different groups and organisations across the UK are protesting to highlight the human rights abuses, high food prices, deforestation and increased climate change caused by biofuels from large scale monocultures

Tescos is the UK's largest supermarket retailer of such agro-biofuels and Tesco have a 25% stake in the UK's largest biofuel supplier, Greenergy Fuels. Tesco say that Greenergy buys rapeseed for biodiesel from UK farmers. They make no reference to bioethanol and other biodiesel sources palm and soya from the tropics. Greenergy freely admit that they also use sugar cane (for bioethanol), soy and palm oil.

In the UK, mandatory blending of petrol and diesel with 2.5% biofuels will be introduced on 15th April, under the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation. Tesco boast that they use twice this percentage at over 300 petrol stations. Tesco market increased use of biofuels as a 'green choice'.

Over 200 organisations have called for an EU moratorium on agrofuels from large-scale monocultures, and there have been many similar calls, including from a large number of civil society organisations in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Right of Food has described current biofuel production "a crime against humanity" and demands a five-year moratorium. The UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee also supports a moratorium on biofuel targets and warns that current 'sustainability standards' will not prevent serious negative impacts from biofuels. Friends of the Earth Europe also call for a moratorium of on EU biofuel targets and subsidies.

Local Authority investments

The London Borough of Lambeth has been forced to reveal its main pension fund investments by a request under Freedom of Information (FoI) rules by campaigner Michael Johnson. He is planning to reveal details of all London Borough's pension fund investments in the near future.

Lambeth's attitude towards pension investments seems to be focused simply towards making the biggest possible return on their money. The borough's meagre gestures towards an ethical investment policy merely states that 'engagement' with corporations (i.e. giving them money and possibly writing the odd letter as well) holds "the potential to benefit society and the environment, as well as in assisting in poverty reduction". Quite how British American Tobacco can assist in poverty reduction remains unclear, unless Lambeth's financial controllers think that working on a tobacco plantation is a good job.

See www.corporatewatch.org.uk for more. Also see www.yrtek.org – and many thanks to Michael Johnson for his trailblazing work.

Supermarket sweep

The Competition Commission's report on supermarkets released this week has come under fire from environmental, consumer, and citizen's groups. They argue that the Commission fails to protect local shops or retail diversity and will only introduce greater competition between major food retailers.

The Commission has been criticised by environmental and consumer groups for failing to curb supermarket expansion. This is despite the fact that the report found that two new supermarkets open every week causing the closure of independent businesses.

Asda, Britain's third-biggest supermarket chain, has been lobbying the Commission for planning rules to be suspended in so-called 'Tesco towns', a move which would allow the Wal-Mart-owned retailer to build giant out-of-town superstores on greenfield sites.

Details of Asda's proposals were exposed by the Competition Commission ahead of the publication of the Commission's long-

awaited remedies statement - as a two-year inquiry into the £120bn grocery market reaches its climax.

Under the proposals submitted by Asda, local authorities would be given the power to suspend or vary key planning rules in areas where Tesco was deemed to have "too many stores". The planning rules in question include those known as the sequential test, needs test and retail impact assessment. All three form a crucial component of the planning system and have been designed to protect town centres and avoid over-development.

Asda's submission also calls for the 'needs test' to be scrapped across the country – arguing that it has stymied Asda's expansion.

The Planning Reform Bill currently going through Parliament includes a proposal to remove the 'needs test' for new retail developments. The Competition Commission has proposed a competition test. In other words we can look forward to a choice between Tesco and Sainsbury's...



Union temping investigation

Agency working is being used to undercut permanent workers terms of employment and causing desperate insecurity in the workplace say Unite.

There are currently around 1.4 million agency workers in the UK. Many are hired on lower hourly rates and worse terms and conditions than their directly employed colleagues, despite doing the same job.

Ahead of the second reading of a bill that would give agency workers equal rights to permanently and directly employed staff, a Unite member has been working 'undercover' to see and experience the plight of agency working.

His time as an agency worker revealed a shadowy and insecure world of work where no national insurance was paid, contracts of work did not exist and promises of

permanent employment from agency positions also failed to materialise, contradicting the government's arguments that agency working provides a gateway into direct employment.

Mystery agency worker, Simon, who spent six weeks working on agency contracts in the Midlands, said: "Even as a skilled manufacturing worker I barely earned above the minimum wage, I had illegal deductions taken from my pay, I had to work dangerous machinery without any training and without the legally required protective equipment and these jobs came via so-called 'legitimate' agencies. For other agency workers the experience was even worse. Their contract-to-contract existence means a life of hardship, desperation and a weekly struggle to make ends meet."

INTERNATIONAL

IN BRIEF

BURMA: The overall situation in Burma has deteriorated significantly since the protests three months ago, with 80% of the leadership of the monk and student networks that led them caught and jailed, reports the international public opinion campaigning organisation, Avaaz. The remaining 20% are on the run, hiding in safe houses and constantly at risk, a circular email from the group says.

FRANCE: Restaurant and tyre workers have won their recent strikes. Workers at the Michelin factory in Toul (Meurthe et Moselle) began strike action after plans were announced to close it down.

As well as occupying and blockading the plant with pickets of burning tyres the 826 workers also confined two managers to their offices during the four-day strike. They agreed to end the action after Michelin and the unions agreed a deal which would add a payment of 2,400 euros for each year of service and that each worker would be offered at least two jobs at other Michelin sites with a further promise of travel allowances.

At La Grande Armée, nine undocumented workers appear to have won the right to stay in France after a five-night strike and occupation of the restaurant in Paris's 16th district. The workers have been employed on permanent contracts by the restaurant for between two and nine years.

GERMANY: Thousands of workers have participated in short nationwide strikes called by services union ver.di; described as 'token' or 'warning' strikes, they are in response to a deadlock in pay negotiations.

With inflation at close to 3%, ver.di is demanding an 8% hike or a minimum increase of 200 euros (\$290) per month over the next 12 months. Employers have offered a five percent raise, with the increase to be implemented in three stages, and are insisting that a new contract run for two years. They also want to increase the working week from 38.5 to 40 hours.

GREECE: Public service workers in Greece have gone on strike, for the second time in two months, to defend their pensions.

The strikes have virtually paralysed the country as workers nation-wide seek to defend their pensions and protest against a government that has broken its promises. The strikers mounted large demonstrations in at least eight cities across the country including Thessaloniki and Athens, where tens of thousands marched with banners reading 'hands off our pension funds' and 'the future belongs to the workers'.

Disturbances have been reported in Athens, where tear gas was fired into the crowd as minor skirmishes with police broke out.

Striking workers have paralysed ports and the country's transport system. With dock, ferry, rail, metro and bus workers all joining the strikes.

LENS CAP MUMIA'S APPEAL REJECTED



On 19th February, The Pennsylvania Supreme Court rejected another death row appeal by renowned journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal of a 2005 ruling which denied Abu-Jamal's Post Conviction Relief Act (PCRA) petition, on grounds that it was not "timely". Mumia has been on death row since 1983 for the shooting of a police officer, in what is widely regarded as one of the most unjust and politically motivated imprisonments of recent times.

Indian airport dispute grows

Workers at airports across India are set to begin an indefinite strike following solid support for their relay-hunger strike of mid-February.

All 135 Indian airports would be affected by the strike, which is being held in protest against plans to privatise the sector by the Airports Authority of India and could involve up to 18,000 airport employees.

"At Delhi and Mumbai, where government has privatised the airports, the employees are being compelled to join the consortium of private companies which are managing them (airports) now. This is not acceptable to us," Dilip Gujjar of the Airport Authority Employees' Union said.

Unionists are also outraged at continued rebuffs to their demands for better working conditions and pay. Airports at Bangalore and

Hyderabad are also set to close, a decision workers want to see re-opened.

Earlier, on 12th February, the union went on a nationwide daylong relay 'hunger strike' for similar demands, which over 2,200 people took part in. Starting at the Indira Gandhi International Airport, the action shifted to Rajiv Gandhi Bhavan near INA Market for most of the rest of the day.

The action was followed by an indefinite hunger strike which was launched by employees of Indian Airlines and which had reached its fourth day as *Freedom* went to press.

The hunger strikers are asking for medical benefits, holidays, and improved working conditions for the workforce, after their demands for such basic rights were not met despite an order from India's Supreme Court.

Notes from the United States

In mid-February the US government sought the death penalty for six people accused of involvement in the attacks of 11th September 2001. The six are detained in Guantanamo Bay, where a fair trial and appeal will be impossible. Even Colonel Morris Davis, the former chief prosecutor for Guantanamo's military commissions admitted in late February that the process has been manipulated by Bush appointees to make sure there is no acquittal.

Now it has come to light that a programme run by the FBI which began in 1996 links 23,000 business-people to its law enforce-

ment mandate. Members of the semi-secret InfraGard receive notifications of terrorist threats before the public and press do. In turn InfraGard participants provide details of dissidence to the FBI ... disgruntled employees, union activity, anti-establishment talk, etc.

Originating in Cleveland, InfraGard now comprises 86 chapters drawn from over 350 of the top Fortune 500 companies across the United States. It was recently exposed by an InfraGard whistle-blower.

Israel to kick out Asians

The trade ministry says curry cooks should be Israelis

A second strike has taken place in Israel against an extraordinary Trade Ministry plan to kick all asian restaurant workers out of the country by 2009.

The policy, which is to see a gradual removal of visas in the highly-profitable sushi industry, has been condemned as outright racist by many commentators, as it pushes Israel's tough border policies to new levels – asians are already all but denied permanent residence as they cannot trace Jewish ancestry.

Asian restaurants have grown quickly in recent years to snatch up to 10% of the Israeli dining industry with a total turnover of £140m, employing 900 foreign-born chefs and kitchen workers. All of these are to be banned, with only expert consultants allowed entry from next January to train Israeli chefs.

A ministry official in charge of permits said: "We feel an Israeli can hold a wok as well as a Thai or a Chinese person".

However, lack of interest in cooking the cuisine from Israelis, even with cooking classes being put on offer, is hampering attempts to turn asian cooking into an Asian-free zone.

Asians in Israel are well-known for taking some of the dirtiest jobs in the region as poorly-paid migrant labour, filling roles which had been held by Palestinians who are no longer allowed through Israel's border wall.

This year, the government has limited the number of visas for foreign restaurant workers to 500. The restaurant association has appealed to the Supreme Court, but unless the bar is overturned visas will be cut to zero



The kitchens at Chiang Rai, a kosher Thai restaurant on HaYarkon street in Tel Aviv

as of next year.

Last month, Asian restaurants went on a one-day strike in protest at the threat. In response to the furor, a spokesperson tried to justify the move by accusing Asian restaurants of exploiting their workers by paying less than minimum wage, saying the situation creates some 'humanitarian issues'. She did not comment on whether these low wage levels or poor working practices were being investigated by the Trade Ministry, or on whether giving more rights to the migrant workforce would be a better means of helping them than deportation.

Meanwhile, Israel has been also been criticised by humanitarian organisation Amnesty International for plans to destroy the West Bank villages of Humsa and Hadidiya. The Israeli army has declared most of the

Jordan Valley, where the villages are situated, as a 'closed military area' from which the local Palestinian population is barred.

The local Palestinian population – which has been there since long before Israeli forces occupied the area four decades ago – is being put under increasing pressure to leave the area.

On the morning of 6th February, Israeli army bulldozers destroyed the homes and livelihoods of four Palestinian families in Hadidiya.

In the past year, several other Palestinian families in the area have suffered the same fate. The Israeli army served demolition orders on all the residents of Hadidiya in April 2007, giving them ten days to leave their homes. Most of the villagers moved to nearby Humsa, about a kilometre away.

Notes from the Unites States

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Working closely with the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI is telling InfraGard participants what their responsibilities would be if martial law were declared. Such a declaration is widely thought likely were there ever to be an attack on American soil approaching the scale of that of 11th September 2001.

Alarmingly, these responsibilities include the 'right' to shoot to kill. In at least one meeting, members were apparently told that if there is a national emergency, they would have the duty to protect utilities, computer systems and other 'sensitive and essential installations' using lethal force.

This is justified by the assertion that the majority of the country's infrastructure is privately owned; so the responsibility to keep capital afloat is that of private forces.

Such an initiative has to be taken in tandem with rights which Bush arrogated to himself

in a security directive of 9th May 2007: to control the whole government and oversee the Constitution. In that document, Bush outlined the need to work with 'private-sector actors' in times of an emergency. And here is that co-operation – hidden in plain sight.

InfraGard's website sets it all out, although InfraGard members are instructed not to talk to the press. InfraGard's membership has grown dramatically from 1,700 at the end of 2001 to 23,000 by early 2008 – or an average of ten new participants each day.

Also in the middle of February, officials at the White House declared the torture technique, waterboarding, to be legal. This is the practice which involves strapping a prisoner down, placing a cloth over their face and dousing them with water to simulate the sensation of drowning in order to extract often fabricated 'information'. Such information is usually legally inadmissible.

Copenhagen riot

Rioting has finally died down in Denmark after eight days of unrest centred in the capital of Copenhagen.

The fighting, which took place between the 10th and 18th of February, saw dozens arrested after burning barricades were set up and cars burned in ten cities across the country.

The riots were sparked after Danish police were alleged to have beaten an elderly immigrant man earlier in the month, although police sources have attributed the unrest to 'boredom' on the part of the rioters.

Witnesses have said that the 65-year-old was beaten during a stop and search in what is widely regarded as a racist assault, followed by beatings of bystanders who tried to stop the violence, including a 13-year-old boy.

Immigrant and anti-racist groups were heavily involved in the rioting, which concentrated on mobility and quick strikes, avoiding direct confrontation with police forces.

FEATURE

A success story in community s

Now a year old, LCAP are still expanding

The London Coalition Against Poverty (LCAP), based mainly in Hackney and Haringey, has just passed its first anniversary, and the mood is upbeat.

Not only have LCAP continued to attract members and support from around the inner-city area for their campaigns, but as of 2nd March, Edinburgh is setting up its own parallel initiative – ECAP.

Alongside this expansion the group, which has a dozen core members and claims several times that in active supporters, is instigating training days in its methods for anyone who wants to get active.

The training days are the result of a long and arduous process for the group, which spent nearly six months in the planning stages and has seen members effectively training themselves and each other in the six months since.

LCAP, which is organised on libertarian lines, focuses on using direct action to back up vulnerable people who are being let down by the state, taking on case work primarily from the London boroughs' homeless population.

Jane, an activist with the group, said: "We've concentrated on Hackney, leafleting outside the homeless person's unit and offering help. The borough hasn't provided enough space and people are being turned away, even though they have a right to be housed, so the department can meet their targets.

"Direct action tactics are what we are about and the cases we take on tend to reflect that. At the minute tactics might begin with writing letters, demanding to see their manager and generally pressuring people to adhere to their responsibilities.

"It's not a revolution but it's a growing campaign and we think it's working well for the homeless, empowering people to assert their rights."

LCAP has taken a strongly consultative approach to its activities, asking homeless people not just for their stories but their suggestions. Matt, an LCAP member, said: "The nature of the ideas and needs of the people we have come into contact with has definitely helped to shape our development - it's all very well us sitting in meetings and coming up with ideas based on our politics, but once you actually talk to people about what they want you are bound to come to some different conclusions.

"We believe in self organisation by the people directly affected by poverty, and direct action backed up by demands based on people's real needs. Direct action casework is an important part of this – it's one of the things that separates us from both



SHADOW OF THE CITY: Looking down Kingsland High Street towards 'The Gherkin'

mainstream advice agencies and leftie campaign groups."

LCAP are looking towards widening their scope as their size grows, with both lobbying work and training on the agenda.

"Recently we have been going to the soup kitchens, asking people about their experiences in conjunction with North London Action For The Homeless," Jane explained.

"One of the ideas is to get the council to pass a motion accepting that 'gatekeeping' (the practice of knocking people off the homeless register to meet targets) is unlawful and that they won't do it.

"We don't think that will change things, but we do think we can then use that motion as a weapon, both to publicise the issue and when pressuring them in future."

Matt also listed some of the other issues LCAP have recently been involved in: "Like all activist groups we are limited by our numbers and resources, so we can't get involved in everything we'd like to. Also I can't talk about all our upcoming projects because we don't want to tip our targets off too early.

"However some of us who live in Haringey are involved in a local project with

Self-defence for London

Haringey Solidarity Group to provide support around debt issues, this has included a debt advice surgery and leafleting.

"LCAP has also made links with a broad-based grouping called London Citizens (including trade unions, and church groups) that is campaigning for genuinely affordable housing, and we have supported the 'Justice for Cleaners' campaign.

"We were also involved in a last minute mobilisation to prevent Westminster council proposing making the distribution of free food [soup kitchens, etc.] illegal – they seem to have dropped that threat for now, following an extensive letter writing campaign, and a demo outside the meeting that discussed it."

Using the skills built up over the last few months, LCAP are also starting to do outreach work in the form of training days, helping people to learn about the complex issues surrounding homelessness and poverty.

Some of the lessons they are now passing on are more than just legal, they include a social element – for example when it was suggested by a homeless person that meetings and even fundraisers be held in 'dry' venues, to help any recovering alcoholics who are involved to stay on the wagon.

Training days are though going to encompass a wider remit, as LCAP activists reach out to a wider audience where possible.

Jane said: "We do want to break out of the activist community. Our meetings have been getting new people in and people still seem enthusiastic. While some London groups seem to be having trouble with membership numbers we are doing quite well at the moment.

"We had a training day in Stepney recently which 25 people showed up for, and we had someone from the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty [OCAP, whose highly successful methods in the Canadian city were a strong basis for LCAP] and a person from LCAP talked there.

"Workplace organising is coming up in May, that's part of a programme of training sessions, including for people who want to help us once they've been housed, etc., with things like translations and interpreting.

"We are also trying to campaign over debt problems at Brighthouse [a hire purchase company which is very aggressive about repayment], which has been very difficult.

"We feel it's exciting but it does take a long time to build up a new organisation and we still need to build up more capacity. Even though OCAP have done very well already their legal issues are different to ours, it's much less down to individual workers in the UK how people are treated.

"Our main thing is getting more people to identify areas in which our tactics can work and we want it to work in Hackney before trying it anywhere else."

Matt agrees: "We have concentrated on Hackney homeless person's unit, and temporary housing in the same borough – while also being involved with various campaigns and support work, but if we don't have the manpower to get involved in broad campaigns with long term and frankly hard to achieve goals, and it would mean we had to reduce our practical work, then we prioritise."

LCAP's focus on practice first has brought it to the attention of activists in Edinburgh, who are having a launch meeting for a similar initiative at 7.30pm on 2nd March at the Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh, 17 West Montgomery Place (call 01315 576 242 for more information).

In a statement, organisers of the event said: "The tabloids and some politicians try to divert attention away from the system which is really responsible for our problems. They go on about asylum seekers, dole scroungers, immigrants from Eastern Europe, and so on. This is just divide and rule.

"All over the world governments are privatising essential services and attacking hard-won rights. Organised struggle won these concessions in the first place, and only organised struggle can defend them and extend them, and put profiteers in their place. Society should be organised for the greatest happiness of everyone, not for private profit."

Ellen, from LCAP, will be there to talk about the group's experiences thus far. She

said: "I'm in touch with the Edinburgh Claimants Union (who are helping to organise ECAP) and they've been really enthusiastic, they have been looking at how LCAP are doing this sort of organising and they want to start doing more action.

"We're not the first people to be doing this. I think there has been a bit of a lull in the last few years in this sort of activity and when we first started a lot of people who had been active in this sort of stuff in the 1970s and '80s wanted to get involved."

Both Jane and Ellen were keen to stress that LCAP has not been a lightning fast process. Before they were able to build a reservoir of support (which now counts in the low hundreds), they had to do a lot of preliminary strategising and buildup work. Ellen remarked: "I think it's been a slow process, which is a good thing because we are building up in a strong way. The first steps have been made and we have learned a lot from that, we basically trained ourselves and now we are trying to train others, which means more people will be able to take on the case work."

To get in touch with LCAP, contact: 07932 241 737 or email londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com. They are also online at lcap.org.uk

All of the people interviewed by *Freedom* spoke in a personal capacity and do not represent the views of all members.



HACKTIVITY: LCAP are focussing on Hackney and Haringey, to help the homeless in areas like Arden, pictured above.

COMMENT

ABOUT FREEDOM

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.

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Enquiries: info@freedompress.org.uk

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 16th March 2008 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 7th March.

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

Because of a few peculiarities of my job, I'm a member of Unison. For the expensive subs that I pay, I get a magazine every three or so months, telling me what the union has been doing and trying to sell me things; mainly insurance and other financial products.

Included in the mailing comes the Unison *Labour Link* magazine. Unison has two political funds, a general one, and an affiliated one which channels money to the Labour Party. I'm in the general one, because I can see who has been doing all the privatisation and cuts in public services and I don't think they should be rewarded for it with my money, nor indeed any of my workmates. I queried why I got this Labour magazine, chiefly because I was worried that the union was giving my subs to my political enemies. It turned out that the union as a whole supports sending this pro-Labour propaganda to all members, regardless of whether they pay for it.

Issue after issue it has ever more desperate articles on why public service workers need to support the Labour Party. I'm sure this desperation is in part a healthy sign. The union are finding it harder to get anyone to swallow the idea that Labour is somehow in favour of working class interests. They are left with ever more shrill denunciations of the alternative as their only strategy.

What particularly annoyed me in the latest issue was an article by Richard Howitt, Unison-funded Labour MEP, who claimed that the Labour Party was doing its bit in Europe to protect agency workers.

Blog Bites

(davidosler.com)

Former Labour leader Neil Kinnock – in one of his better speeches – famously asked why he was the first Kinnock in a thousand generations of Kinnocks to get to university.

That's a sentiment with which a certain layer of middle class people from working class backgrounds can strongly identify. Unlike my parents and grandparents, I was never a seafarer or a steelworker, didn't work the land or swing the pick maintaining railways tracks, and never had to scrub church floors or nurse the sick.

Higher education – to use a class-laden expression that I suspect will still be current in some quarters – eventually allowed me to 'better myself' as a mature student, even after school at sixteen and having done factory and routine clerical jobs for several years.

Precisely for that reason, I thought that New Labour's decision to scrap student grants – taken by an administration more than somewhat over-endowed with Oxbridge public schoolies – was the single most socially regressive step taken by any post-war government of either party. Not even the subsequent partial retreat will ever salvage that action in my eyes.

One of the fruits of that policy can be seen in a recent report from the Commons public accounts

committee, which reveals that one in five of the 230,000 students currently entering university drop out before the end of their course. As some newspapers take glee in pointing out, these people are largely young Neil Kinnocks and Dave Oslers.

To hear the *Daily Telegraph* tell it, the government have "wasted" almost £1bn on "a failed programme to stop mainly working-class students dropping out". Think about the wording of that proposition for a minute; even if the programme is unsuccessful, does it logically follow that such outlay is 'wasted'?

How many working class students were enabled to stay on at university as a result of that outlay? The question isn't even asked, let alone answered.

Forget the nonsense in the PAC report; the reality is that New Labour isn't doing nearly enough to help working class students. If the government wants more of them to graduate, it should provide sufficient financial support to enable them to live, study – and even enjoy three years of taxpayer-funded sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll, like those sitting around the cabinet table once did – without having to spend half the week in part-time work.

History

The piece (19th January), by a person too timid to put their name to it, is backward looking, as are many pieces in *Freedom*. Such pieces appear to yearn for the glory days of anarchism and fail to deal with the present. Anarchism will not move forward this way.

Anarcho-syndicalism, the secretive author says, is concerned with the control of unions. That is, unions of so called works mostly in heavy industry – coal mining, steel, ship building and so on. They used to produce much of the wealth of Britain but now these industries barely exist. The romance of virtuous grubby toil has been lost. With its demise went the powerful unions. Work and workers have not become redundant. The nature of works has simply changed. The workers have turned capitalist and buy their own coal mines.

In the struggle for power (and anarchists are in this game) land owners created parliament to control the sovereign, the bourgeois created the State to control land owners, the unions attempted to control the State and the anarcho-syndicalists attempted to control the unions. This is history and we have gained nothing from it. History is moribund and simply describes the way we behave under certain conditions (agrarian, industrial, etc). If it shows anything it is that we have little control over our behaviour which is controlled by our biology. We are driven by self interest and attempt to exploit other people through government, the State, unions and anarchism. Anarchists have a political agenda and want control. It is shit to say they do not. The problem is that they cannot find a means for doing it. Ultimately control (advocated by Stirner) can only be

through individuals acting for themselves.

The problem with anarchism is that there appears to be little profit in it. Profit is the preserve of capitalism. The only profit in anarchism is through cooperation (used in capitalism). However, history tells that cooperation is a matter of controlling the behaviour of others (exploitation) though power exerted by government, the State, unions and anarchism. (Revolutionaries and anarchists wish to shift the control of power.) When power is limited to the individual (anarchism) we find we are up shit creek. Anarchism is a form of castration. However, this is only so because we see our behaviour in terms of history. If we abandoned this blinkered view and saw our behaviour for what it is, our biology, we would be in a far stronger position to bring about anarchism. We need to abandon our view of history.

Peter Gibson

Krishnamurti and anarchism

I appreciated Francis Ellingham's reflections (Letters, 15th December) on my review of Karen Armstrong's book (*The Great Transformation*, reviewed in *Freedom* on 20th October). May I clarify some of his confusion. He asks: if ordinary people stress the importance of mutual aid and compassion why then is the world in such a sorry mess and why do we have all those dreadful weapons of mass destruction?

The reason, of course, is not because humans are by nature benighted souls and thus in need of spiritual redemption (as Armstrong suggests); it has rather everything to do with the rise of hierarchical forms of domination, of state power, and in the modern context, of the capitalist system.

What is therefore needed is a social transformation, which implies, of course, a change also in social consciousness. This does not imply engaging in esoteric mysticism, as Armstrong advocates, and to equate spiritualism (esoteric mysticism) with consciousness, as Francis appears to do, is obfuscating.

Anarchists, from the time of Reclus, Kropotkin and Goldman, have always emphasised the need for the transformation of consciousness, advocating the need to develop an ecological sensibility, putting an emphasis of the "consciousness of humanity" (as Krishnamurti himself expressed it), and suggesting the formation of a socialist ethic and outlook which foregrounds mutual aid, reciprocity and co-operation, thereby repudiating narrow egoism and possessive individualism.

Although Jesus, as both Kropotkin and Tolstoy emphasised, was essentially a moral teacher, who preached equality and a communistic ethic, Christianity as it developed was in flagrant contradiction to his teachings. Thus the Christian missionaries in Africa denigrated the culture of African peoples, preached the importance

LETTERS AND COMMENT

of private property and the work ethic, promoted bourgeois individualism, and advocated a subservient attitude towards authority. This is the reason that Christianity has been interpreted by anthropologists as an ideological precursor of colonisation and capitalism.

Francis advises me to read Krishnamurti and mentions Lao Tzu. I've been reading Krishnamurti off and on for the past forty years and wrote an article on 'Lao Tzu and Anarchism' way back in 1981 (published in *Freedom* and reprinted in my *Ecology and Anarchism*). Although Krishnamurti often wrote in a rather sanctimonious style, and filched ideas right, left and centre from anarchism, Buddhism and existentialism (without any acknowledgement or reference) he would undoubtedly have been critical of Armstrong's esoteric mysticism (spiritualism).

For like anarchists Krishnamurti repudiated all forms of organised religion and all guru-worship. In fact, he renounced his own guru status, and severed all connections with theosophy – the esoteric cult par excellence. Krishnamurti, following in the footsteps of the anarchists, repudiated the state and all forms of nationalism, and thus, like Bertrand Russell, emphasised the importance of developing a consciousness of humanity.

He also emphasised, like Reclus and Kropotkin, an ecological sensibility, expressed as a communion with Nature – not communion or identity with some deity, god or world spirit (as in Armstrong's esotericism) which Krishnamurti explicitly repudiated.

Anarchists, as with Krishnamurti, have always acknowledged the need for the transformation of consciousness – but not spiritualism or the recourse to some deity or world spirit. However, unlike Krishnamurti, anarchists have also expressed the need for social or direct action, the importance of class struggle, and the need to be socially-engaged in order to create a better world

Brian Morris

Picture confused

I know I have written before and you simply, royally go on as before. But the 15th December edition of *Freedom* really takes the biscuit.

Almost house style, whenever you print a picture you provide No, none, zilch, zero caption. The Chaplin photo (illustrating the feature) will suffice, although the Spine shot on page seven takes some beating.

Surely the readership is entitled to some meager information about the pictures you print. Here's a Kipling list: Where? When? Who? Why?

With how and what you paid for it as close runners-up. The Chaplin photo could have had several leads attached to get your readers more engaged with the issue.

Come on, to the barricades with your pen!

Rufus Segar

ZAPATA OF MEXICO

by
PETER E. NEWELL

Zapata was the leading figure of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. He fought for the rights of local communities against greedy landlords, treacherous politicians and foreign-owned companies. Under the slogan 'Land and Liberty!' he became the purest embodiment of the Mexican Revolution. Zapata's memory, like his ghost, rides on in Mexico.

£9.50 from Freedom Press

GETTING ACTIVE

PRISON NEWS

Antifascists jailed in Italy

Three antifa activists have been jailed in Italy. It appears that a group of far-right extremists were taking a train to attend a Lega Nord (a far right political group) demonstration. The three expressed their opposition to the police about these far-right protesters and somehow a fight broke out between the antifa activists and the police. It is unclear how the fight broke out.

Send letters of support to: Monica Nattavia Pianezza, Fabio Milanvia Pianezza and Luca Boninovia Pianezza, all at 30010151 Torino Le Vallette (TO) Italy

Prison activist arrested again

A Prison-death demonstration took place on 5th February 2008 to protest against the death of Lisa Marley, aged 32, who died on 23rd January 2008 while on 'suicide watch' and on remand at HMP Styal, Cheshire.

Protesters blocked the road outside the prison to stop the entry of prison vans, until Cheshire Constabulary officers from Wilmslow and Macclesfield arrived on the scene. It was explained to both the police and the prison van drivers that in view of the recent death at Styal, protesters considered the jail to be unsafe, and a request was made for the women to be taken to a place of safety. The police intervened to clear the protestors and Pauline Campbell was arrested and taken into custody.

The protesters came from Shropshire, Cheshire and Greater Manchester, and included representatives from FRFI (Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!) Manchester.

To contact Pauline Campbell, email paulinecampbell1@tiscali.co.uk

APEC arrest solidarity call

Using unnecessary force and intimidation, police arrested peaceful protesters at the end of the rally at the APEC summit in Sydney in September 2007.

While filming these police actions, Melbourne-based independent filmmaker Marcela Olea was arrested and her gear destroyed. She now faces two charges of assaulting police and one charge of resisting arrest.

Expenses for travel, court, counseling and equipment replacement have and will take an immense toll both on Marcela and on her family.

These types of police and government actions not only highlight the inappropriate use of anti-terror laws, but also show the alarming trend of erosion of civil liberties in many walks of life.

Send a message to the current government that this misuse of power is unacceptable and the APEC arrestees' charges should be dropped.

Marcela was last in Court on 20th December and, as *Freedom* goes to press, is due to appear again soon.



● The Hackney Social Centre (pictured above), which opened on 14th February, is a new place for meetings of local groups which includes a donations-only café, art space, discussions, community forums, free language lessons, and much more. It is a non-commercial space for activists, community organisers, and members of the public.

In spite of difficult early challenges, which included three weeks of violent attacks and attempted illegal evictions, the Hackney Social Centre is now stable and has a growing calendar of events lined up. The building collective has open General Meetings every Sunday at 3pm, and is inviting anyone interested to get involved with the project.

It is located at 231 Lower Clapton Road in Hackney. To contact the collective, email hackneysocialcentre@yahoo.co.uk or telephone 07958 283676

● 5th March will see the Next to Nowhere book store in Liverpool play host to an activist's introduction to the work of hackers and the world of 'hactivism'.

The event will be hosted by the Liverpool Social Forum, who recently moved into the basement of Next To Nowhere after helping them to revamp the space for regular use. Kicking off at 7pm and finishing at around 10pm, an expert hacker will be explaining the basics of hacking and technological self-defence.

No illegal activities will be taking place at the event, which will be an informational workshop only. One speaker said: "It's essential that people understand how and why third party's snoop on things, otherwise you have no hope of protecting yourself and your right to privacy. It frightens me that there is such an apathy towards it, a kind of 'it won't happen to us, we're just a small group not doing anything' attitude. This is a very naive attitude, there are many reasons why they should be bothered."

● On Friday 15th February, London Catholic Workers Zelda Jeffers and Fr. Martin Newell appeared before Stratford Magistrates for pouring fake blood on the Excel Centre in East London the first morning of the DSEi Arms Fair 12th September 2008. Although admitting that they poured fake blood, both denied that it was criminal damage. Both Zelda and Martin refused to accept that their acts amounted to criminality. Martin mentioned the Nuremberg Trials which established the principle that to prevent a greater crime from being carried out it was the duty of a citizen to cause damage to prevent greater crime.

After consideration Zelda was given twelve month conditional discharge with £175 costs and £50 compensation. Martin, who has a previous record of nonviolent direct action for peace, was fined £200, £175 costs and £50 compensation. A further £15 was added to the bill for each as a surcharge for victim support. Both were told that if they did not pay they would have to return to the court on the 18th March.

56a Infoshop

Was opened in 1991 by a small group of local people in the back room of Fareshares Food Co-op in Walworth. Since that time we have maintained our radical presence locally through bookselling, publishing, actions and socialising.

★

We come from that old tradition that inspires people to do things for themselves without waiting or expecting those above us to do it for them. So here we are - independent, free thinking and open to ideas and collaboration.

★

It's not just our space, it's a place open to anyone who wants to change things for the better. Read this as your invitation to 56a Infoshop and beyond!! Another world is desirable!!

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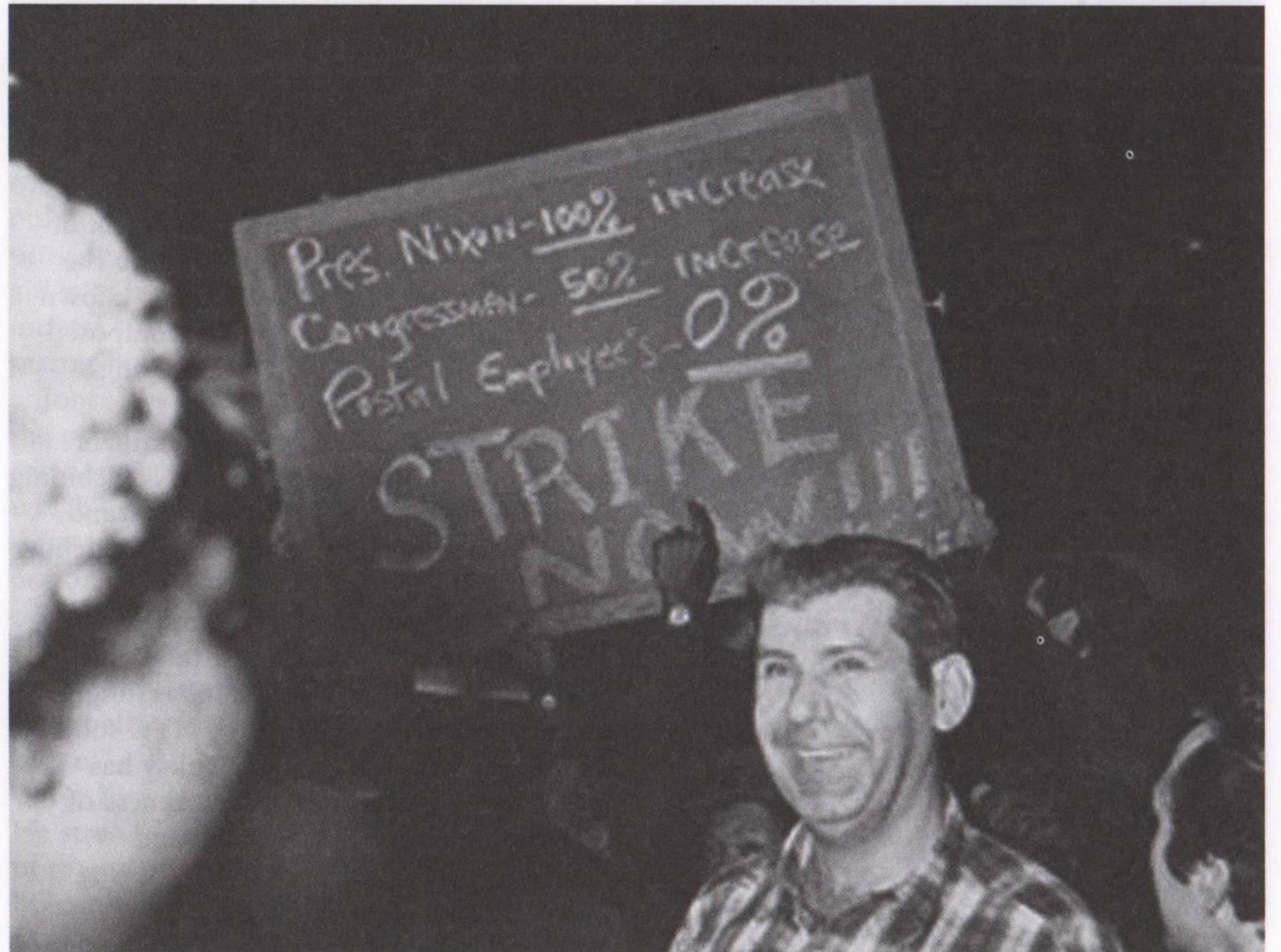
1970 US national postal strike

A short account by Alex Aspden of the illegal nationwide postal strikes that spread across America in 1970. After two weeks, during which time the army was called out to break the strike, workers eventually won increases in pay and the right to negotiate on contracts with bosses.

Beginning on the morning of 18th March, the strike had been precipitated by months of stalling by union leaders and government officials. With no rights to collective bargaining, and having not seen wages increase between 1967 and 1969, anger amongst postal workers had been simmering for years. The Kappel Commission, a panel set up by congress to review the current state of the postal service, had recommended in 1968 that postal workers be given the same right as private sector workers to collective bargaining. The recommendation was rejected by Congress, and responded to largely with inaction by union leaders. Coupled with the subsistence level pay that most postal workers were surviving on, these factors made a strike seem inevitable by the end of 1969.

Rank and file postal workers became increasingly vocal in early 1970, and the call for a strike was being taken up across the country. New York union leaders who were becoming fearful of what was unfolding travelled to Washington DC to impress upon Congress the gravity of the situation. Offered a promise to put forward a bill recommending a 5.4% wage increase (not to be enacted for several weeks), they returned to their members, who flatly rejected it. Union members began to call for a ballot on strike action. Declaring an immediate ballot unconstitutional, union officials managed to stall a vote until 17th March.

The majority of workers voted to strike, and the next day saw thousands of postal workers walk out across the city. Union locals who voted to strike often did so against the wishes of their union officials, many of whom tried, mostly in vain, to prevent a vote from taking place. Members of the Manhattan-Bronx Postal Union even chased their president off the platform when



he refused to allow them an immediate vote. Nevertheless, thousands of postal workers were on picket lines by the end of the day.

Citing the illegality of the strike, President Nixon quickly made an address on national television ordering the strikers to return to work, saying that the government would not negotiate under the pressure of a strike. Faced with the option of returning to work defeated or putting themselves into a position of direct confrontation with the government, the strikers of New York voted to stay out, and were joined by many others in the coming days. Postal workers across the country began to follow their lead and within days up to 200,000 were on strike in 30 major cities. Workers on strike in Los Angeles, Boston, Pittsburgh, Minneapolis and Chicago numbered into the thousands. Again coming up against stiff opposition from their leaders to even get a proposal for a strike ballot heard in many cities, it was reported in Chicago that 3,000 union members shouted down union officials who urged them to stay at work.

With picket lines still growing a week after the initial walkout, the government began to consider legal action. With the entire postal system ground to a halt, a court order was taken out ordering the strikers back to work. The order was ignored, and despite the threat of jail for many workers, the walkouts continued. The injunction even threatened to extend the strikes outside the postal service, as many government employees vowed to walk out if legal action was continued against strikers.

Nixon made another television appearance on 25th March, confirming that he had ordered thousands of army and National Guard personnel into New York to begin distributing mail. New York was singled out as being the centre of the strike, but the possibility of troops being sent into other affected cities was left open. While claiming to recognise the underpaid state of many postal workers, Nixon's attempt to use troops as strikebreakers did nothing but stiffen the resolve of many strikers, who saw in the troops a force that had the potential to bring violence to the peaceful strike.

The army soon proved itself incompetent at the task and failed to get the mail moving again. Becoming desperate and with few options left open, the government began to negotiate. Within a week after Nixon's last television address, the strike had been resolved, and the government agreed to most of the striker's demands. Postal workers won an 8% wage increase, and importantly, the right for postal unions to negotiate on wages and working conditions.

Lasting just two weeks, the strike had been short, peaceful and successful. Often bypassing or completely ignoring a union apparatus that had actively tried to prevent a walkout, and that many knew was not acting in their best interests (even Nixon commented in his second address the extent to which the strike had gone against the 'recommendation' of union leaders), the strikers had shown what mass action on the initiative of a militant rank-and-file can accomplish.

REVIEWS

WHAT'S ON

MARCH

2nd Sunday picnic to campaign against anti-protest exclusion zone around Parliament, meet at 1.30pm on the green at Parliament Square, Westminster, London and bring food to share, games to play and good ideas.

2nd Oxford Seedy Sunday seed swap from 2pm to 3.30pm at Fusion Arts at the back of East Oxford Community Centre,

Princess Street, off Cowley Road, Oxford.

5th Southampton No2ID group meeting from 8pm to 9pm at the Dolphin public house, Osbourne Street South, SO17 2EZ.

10th Film showing of *Behind the Mask* followed by a question and answer session with Keith Mann (author of *From Dusk til Dawn* and long term animal rights activist, to put it mildly) at The Pogo Café, 76 Clarence Road, London E5 8HB, film starts at 7.30pm, for details phone 0208533 1214 or see pogocafe.co.uk

15th Dublin Anarchist Bookfair at the Teachers Club, Parnell Square, see www.wsm.ie/bookfair for details.

22nd Tongues on Fire!! at the Hackney Social Centre, 231 Lower Clapton Road, London E5, with café and open mike, bring poetry, instruments and friends, from 7.30pm till midnight, call 07958 283 676 for directions.

24th Aldermaston 2008 'The Bomb Stops Here' – celebrate 50 years of protest since the first Aldermaston march in 1958, see cnduk.org/aldermaston for details.

24th Film showing of *Riff-Raff* by Ken Loach, at The Pogo Café, 76 Clarence Road, London E5 8HB, film starts at 7.30pm, for details phone 0208533 1214 or see pogocafe.co.uk

28th Critical Mass London, meet at 6pm on the South Bank under Waterloo Bridge by the National Film Theatre, see criticalmasslondon.org.uk

31st Film showing of *Animal Farm* at The Pogo Café, 76 Clarence Road, London E5, film starts at 7.30pm, for details phone 0208533 1214 or see pogocafe.co.uk

APRIL

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

7th Film showing of *That Obscure Object of Desire* by Luis Buñuel, at The Pogo Café, 76 Clarence Road, London E5 8HB, film starts at 7.30pm, for details phone 0208533 1214 or see pogocafe.co.uk

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.

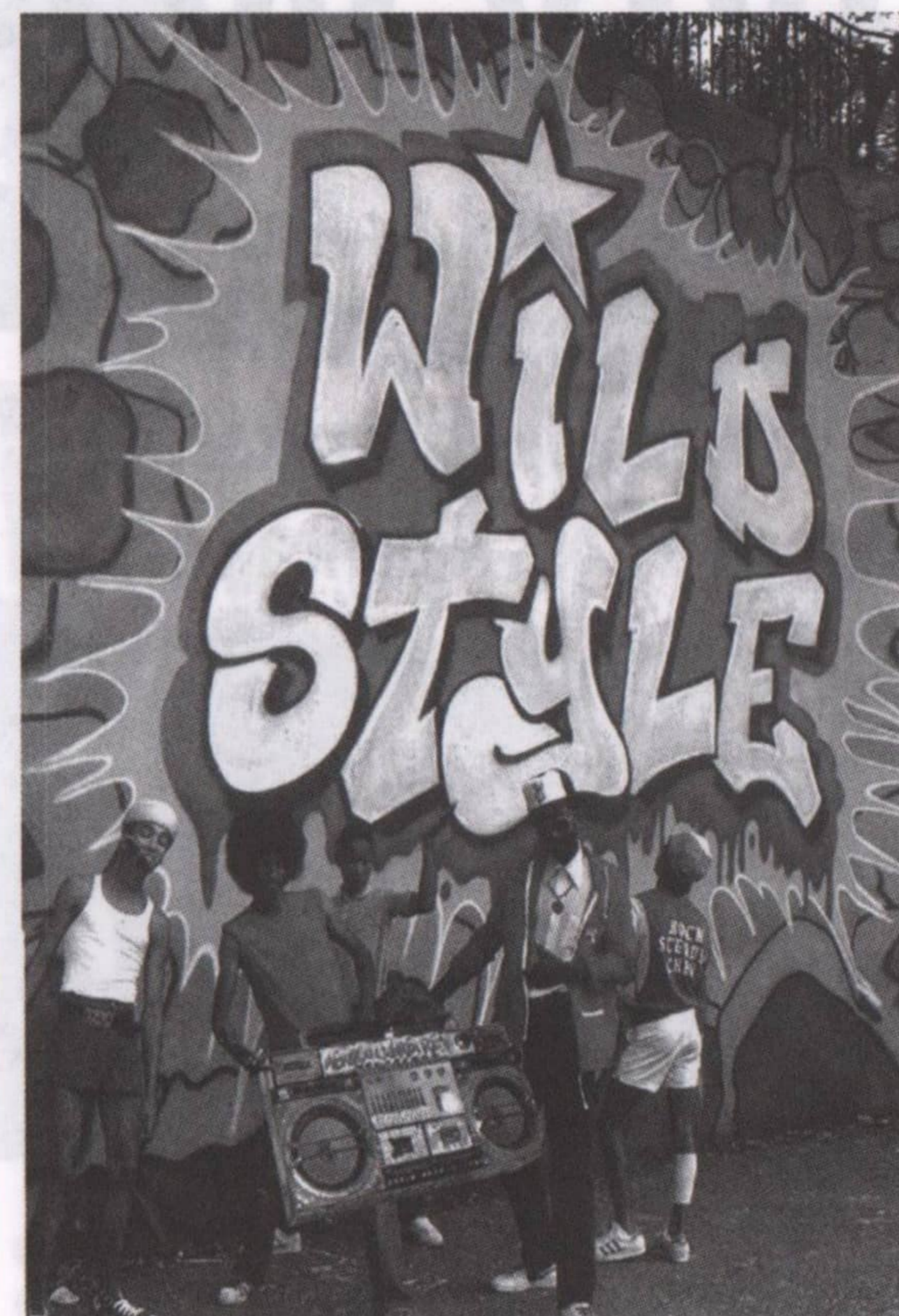
18th Anarchist Writers, Publishers and Design at 1 in 12 Club, 21–23 Albion Street, Bradford, from 10am until 4pm, tickets £5, contact sam@samjackson6.orangehome.co.uk or call 0777 914 7005

CD REVIEW

Wild Style Original Soundtrack
Various Artists
on Mr Bongo label

I first purchased this album on the antiquated and obsolete cassette tape format with my pocket (or hard earned) moolah around 20 years ago from my local Our Price (a good chain record store back in the day). The 1983 soundtrack of arguably the most 'authentic' film on the New York City folk art world now known as 'hip hop' comprises specially composed beats by a band of musicians including Chris Stein of Blondie fame with raps and scratches on top from many fathers (and mothers) of the hip hop styles including Double Trouble, Rammellzee and Grand Wizard Theodore (the inventor of scratching as we know it).

My promo has an inferior variation on the original cover's graffiti art (arguably a classic album cover which is interestingly not in the 'wild style' genre of NYC subway art) which even the likes of Banksy has paid tribute to, and this is a weakness of this as a package (in the broadband downloading age we are arguably buying just the packaging). It is a short album (65 mins approx for a double CD album – which easily fits on one CD) and quite a



few of the 'previously unreleased' songs are near as identical to other versions of the same songs on the album. A single CD / DVD package might have been less of a rip off, but this is Britain...

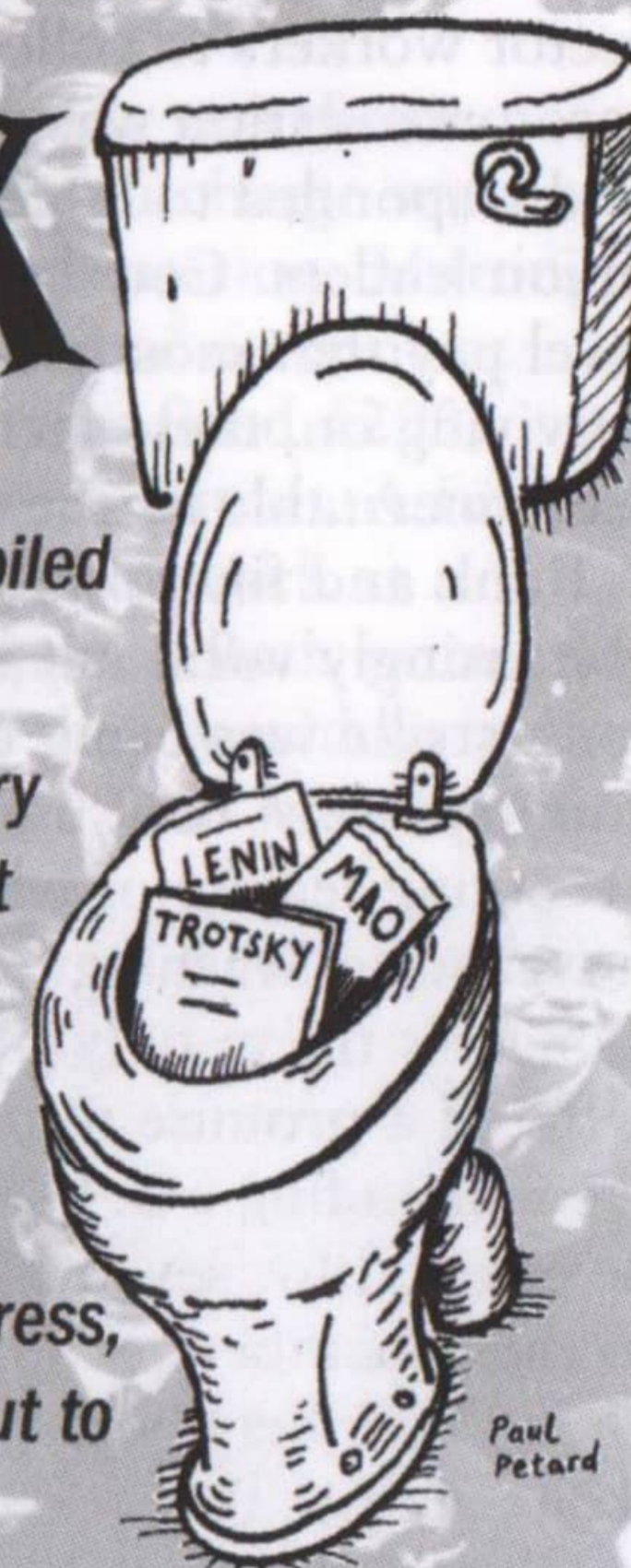
C Byrne

The Anarchist Quiz Book

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

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QUIZ ANSWERS

1. 'The Great Commotion' – a rebellion against tyrannical government and landowners led by Robert Kett in Norfolk in 1549.
2. It is Gaelic for Black Flag.
3. Pierre Besnard in the *Encyclopedie Anarchiste*, 1933.
4. The short-lived Anarchist Workers Group (AWG) supported Saddam Hussein on 'anti-imperialist grounds' during the 1990 Gulf War. The AWG collapsed shortly afterwards with its leading lights joining several Trotskyist parties.

A pessimist in paradise

Iain McKay marvels at the level of inaccuracy in the latest book by geneticist Steve Jones

I am not sure why, but there seems to be a tendency by academics to discuss anarchism without actually bothering to find out much, if anything, about. George Monbiot does this quite regularly, with equally regular amusement for those who have even a basic understanding of libertarian theory. The latest is Steve Jones, Professor of Genetics at UCL, in his new book *Coral: A Pessimist in Paradise*.

The anarchist in question is Kropotkin, specifically his ideas on 'mutual aid'. However, it is clear that Jones is hardly knowledgeable on the subject. The basic mistakes are staggering. The Jura Federation was not founded in 1871. Kropotkin did not battle Marx in the First International (that was another bearded Russian, Bakunin).

Kropotkin did not return to 'Bolshevik' Russia nor did he die three years later in 1920. He returned after the February revolution in 1917 and, consequently, before the Bolshevik revolution and died in 1921, nearly four years later after seeing his predictions on the poverty of state communism fulfilled by Lenin's regime.

Somewhat bizarrely, Jones talks of Soviet Russia's experiment in 'mutualism' so it seems that not only Trotskyists are ignorant of Lenin's stated desire to create state capitalism in Russia and his systematic campaign against co-operation in the workplace in favour of one-man management (as documented by Maurice Brinton's classic *Bolshevism and Workers' Control*).

The usual anarchist bogeymen are raised, with the assassinations of various heads of states mentioned but, of course, not the state violence which provoked these acts of revenge. Apparently the death of one King of Italy is worth mentioning but not the peasants killed by his troops.

Strangely, Jones said these acts prefigured the worse slaughters of the twentieth century. While propaganda by the deed was a flawed tactic used by anarchists, it was hardly invented by us (Russian Populists killed Tsar Alexander II, for example) nor can it be equated to the systematic state terrorism of the subsequent century or, for that matter, the nineteenth – over 20,000 Communards were slaughtered in reprisals after the Paris Commune.

It is always amazing how killing members of the ruling class is never forgotten yet mass murder by it can slip through the pages of the history books...

Even in the area where you think Jones would be knowledgeable, namely evolutionary

theory, he simply repeats the standard misrepresentation of Kropotkin's ideas on *Mutual Aid*.

Kropotkin is always raised by those seeking to attack the notion that co-operation and other forms of ethical behaviour can be routed in nature. Socio-biology, it appears, is only for the right and those who seek to provide evidence from nature that mutual aid is as much a factor of evolution as mutual struggle must be denounced – no matter how inaccurately.

Jones obviously considers Kropotkin as the perfect example of a proponent of romantic co-operation, praising a mutual aid which does not exist. "Symbiosis marks each stage in evolution", writes Jones, "but the notion of mutual aid, a joint effort to a common end, has been superseded by a sterner view: that such arrangements began with simple exploitation. Disease, parasitism and cannibalism have been around since life began."

Yet Kropotkin would not have disagreed. He stressed that mutual aid "represents one of the factors of evolution", another being "the self-assertion of the individual, not only to attain personal or caste superiority, economical, political, and spiritual, but also in its much more important although less evident function of breaking through the bonds, always prone to become crystallised, which the tribe, the village community, the city, and the State impose upon the individual."

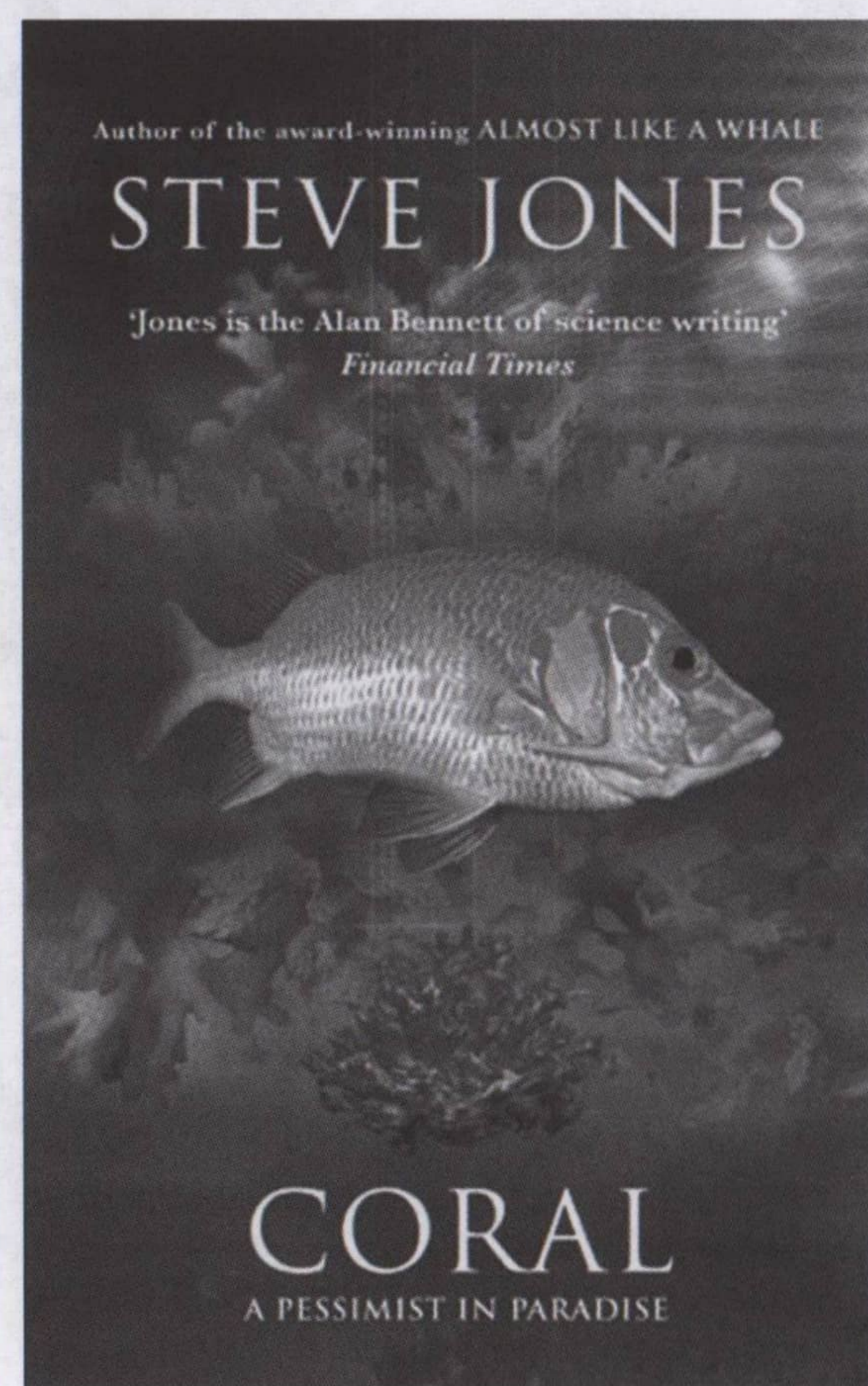
Thus Kropotkin recognised that there is class struggle within society as well as "the self-assertion of the individual taken as a progressive element" (i.e. struggle against forms of social association which now hinder individual freedom and development).

At no time did he deny the role of struggle, in fact the opposite as he stressed that the book's examples concentrated on mutual aid simply because mutual struggle (between individuals of the same species) had "already been analysed, described, and glorified from time immemorial" and, as such, he felt no need to illustrate it.

He did note that it "was necessary to show, first of all, the immense part which this factor plays in the evolution of both the animal world and human societies. Only after this has been fully recognised will it be possible to proceed to a comparison between the two factors."

So at no stage did Kropotkin deny either factor (unlike the bourgeois apologists he was refuting). He recognised the importance of struggle or competition as a means of survival but also argued that co-operation within a species was the best means for it to survive in a hostile environment (i.e. mutual aid is an expression of, not an alternative to, self-interest as should be obvious from the term).

This applied to life under capitalism. In the hostile environment of class society, then the only way in which working class people could



survive would be to practice mutual aid (in other words, solidarity). Little wonder, then, that Kropotkin listed strikes and unions as expressions of mutual aid in capitalist society. He was, after all, a revolutionary.

It should also be noted that *Mutual Aid* is primarily a work of popular science and not a work on revolutionary anarchist theory like, say, *The Conquest of Bread* or *Words of a Rebel*. As such, it does not present a full example of Kropotkin's revolutionary ideas and how mutual aid fits into them.

He was well aware that mutual aid (or solidarity) could not be applied between classes in a class society. Indeed, his chapters on mutual aid under capitalism contain the strike and union and as he put it in an earlier work: "What solidarity can exist between the capitalist and the worker he exploits? Between the head of an army and the soldier? Between the governing and the governed?"

For Jones, the anarchists have wrongly drawn lessons from nature and are now consigned to the fringes of politics, "sidelined by the iron rules of greed that rule the globe". Of course, the fact that the major anarchist movements in the world were crushed by the iron rule of fascism and communism goes unmentioned. Nor is the fact that anarchism is growing as more and more people are becoming aware that co-operation by the many against the greed of the few is in their self-interest.

But this is beside the point, given the massive contradiction this exposes in Jones' argument. Earlier in *Coral*, he had warned against drawing political or ethical lessons from biology, stating that "to scientists

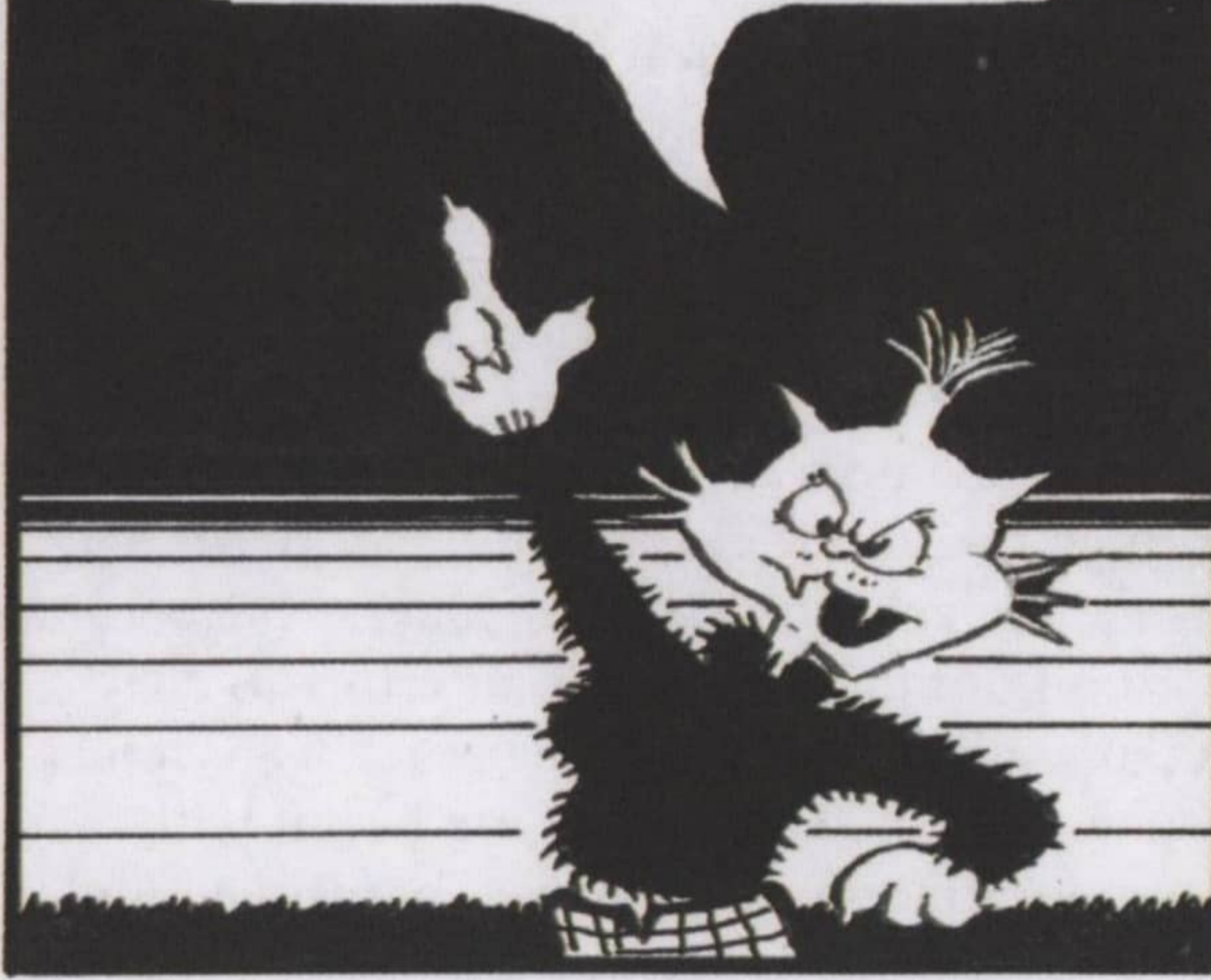
*Absolute monarchies;
limited monarchies;
oligarchies; police states;
military governments;
revolutionary governments;
gangsters in power;
aristocracies; kleptocracies;
guided democracies;
liberal democracies;
colonial governments.*

*Coercive institutions are
all essentially the same.*



*Slave owners; employers;
landowners; robbers;
international financiers;
company directors;
global retail chains;
national retail chains;
independent traders
moneylenders; bankers;
shareholders; rentiers;
peanut vendors.*

*All getting rich by making
poor people poorer.*



Reviews

➔ page 15

neither symbiosis nor the struggle for existence has much of a message for human affairs”.

He attacks philosophers like Nietzsche and political thinkers like Marx for drawing lessons for human society from nature. This is forgotten when he turns to Kropotkin. Then we have an assertion that the “iron rule of greed” is a universal law of nature. Apparently nature does have a message for human affairs after all and it just happens to coincidence with the dominant economic system and the interests of its ruling elite.

Significantly, Kropotkin considered *Mutual Aid* as an attempt to write a history of evolution from below, from the perspective of the oppressed. As he put it, history, “such as it has hitherto been written, is almost

entirely a description of the ways and means by which theocracy, military power, autocracy and, later on, the richer classes’ rule have been promoted, established, and maintained.” The “mutual aid factor has been hitherto totally lost sight of; it was simply denied, or even scoffed at.”

Sadly, Jones seems to have contributed to this denial and scoffing and, in the process, exposed his ignorance of the subject he is attacking. Surely the job of editors is to pick up such elementary errors? Stephen J. Gould’s ‘Kropotkin was no crackpot’ (in his *Bully for Brontosaurus*) covers this ground more accurately and more sympathetically. Or, then again, you could read Kropotkin’s book or, if that is too much work, consult its sub-title: *A factor of evolution*.

Coral: A Pessimist in Paradise by Steve Jones, published by Little, Brown, £15.99

THE QUIZ

1. Which sixteenth century rebellion was used as a name for a Norwich anarchist free sheet?
2. Bratach Dubh was an anarchist publisher from the 1970s and ’80s, specialising in Italian insurrectionist Alfredo Bonanno. Where does its name come from?
3. Who wrote “Like federalism itself, of which it is one of its principal elements, collective responsibility exercises itself in two ways – upwards and downwards. It obliges the individual to explain their actions to the collective, and for the latter to explain their actions before the individual ... collective responsibility consecrates and clarifies individual responsibility”?
4. Which ‘anarchists’ supported Saddam Hussein and when?

Answers on page 14

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