

ICE IN THE BLOOD

Fuel poverty crisis grows through January

As the much-anticipated fall in gas prices stalls, and may even reverse following the international spat between Ukraine and Russia, increased fuel use in the UK during the cold snap has left fuel poverty looming ever larger this winter.

Fears have been voiced that the numbers dying this year from the cold could significantly outstrip the winter of 2007/8, with the recent cold snap, spiking gas prices and high inflation for basic foodstuffs all contributing to the problem.

Gas prices in particular have risen by 42% since this time in 2008, while bread is set to reach an average of £1 a loaf this month – around double the price it was in 2000.

Unlike petrol prices, which have fallen since the recession began, gas prices have remained relatively stable, and may still rise over the medium term – though Scottish Power are phasing in a 10% reduction over the next three months with some other energy companies possibly following suit if Russian supplies aren't interrupted. However even within this reduction, the poorest who are still on meter payments would continue to pay well above the odds.

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LENS CAP ATHENS



SOLIDARITY: Riot police line up in Athens before a 5,000-strong march against the conflict in Gaza. Despite arbitrary house searches, arrests, and widespread intimidation in the aftermath of the riots last month across Greece, time was made for to turn out for the event. For more, see pages 2 and 6.

ASYLUM REMOVALS TO SPEED UP

A new process is to begin at the end of this month which will see work on removing asylum seekers continue even as they go through the appeals process against deportation.

The new policy on handling judicial reviews will come into effect on January 30th, and will affect the cases of people who make another application for judicial review within three months of a judge refusing permission on a previous application, particularly where the first claim has been found to be clearly without merit or where a case has been withdrawn or otherwise concluded.

Under current policy, the process of removal stops while new applications are dealt with. However removal will no longer

be suspended where the claimant's grounds could reasonably have been raised previously at the judicial review or something similar had already been heard.

People affected by this policy will need to obtain an injunction to prevent removal taking place.

Potentially in cases where deportation is immanent, this could allow the government to deport asylum seekers where they were unable to before. In a recent example, Yarlís Wood detainee Priviledge Thulambo and her two daughters were able to hold off deportation with just hours to spare when they won a judicial review of their case. It is unclear whether they would still be in the UK had the new policy been in place.

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NEWS

IN BRIEF

AGRICULTURE: Agriculture remains one of Britain's most dangerous industries, according to the latest agricultural statistics report published by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). In 2007–08 another 39 workers died bringing the ten-year total death toll to 455.

EMPLOYMENT: Employers benefited from record levels of unpaid overtime provided by workers last year, according to the TUC's annual workplace analysis.

More than five million people gave free overtime worth £26.9bn by staying at work longer than their contracted hours – the highest number since records began in 1992.

POLICING: Police forces across England and Wales are being offered millions in proceeds from items seized in the course of criminal investigations as a supplementary source of funding.

Around a sixth of the £33.5m seized last year will be allocated to the police, in a move which has sparked concerns over conflicts of interest, with police able to effectively directly profit from seizures.

POLICING: The Metropolitan Police have been accused of shielding officers against accusations of rape after it emerged that dozens of complaints had not resulted in a single conviction over the past five years.

The figures also show that since 2000 only 1% of all public complaints of rape and sexual assault against Met staff were upheld by an internal police investigation. Even then, a quarter of those who faced a disciplinary board were allowed to resign before any hearing and with police pension intact.

RESEARCH: Workers at Camden Council services have not been told of the plans to build a deadly 'Super Virus Lab' on their doorstep. The deadly virus containment facility would be across the road from Camden Town Hall. The lab will test on animals. Members of Stop Camden Animal Lab went into the Camden Council Library and offices and found staff were not aware of the lab or protests.

SURVEILLANCE: The Home Office has adopted a new plan to allow police across Britain routinely to hack into people's personal computers without a warrant.

The move follows a decision by the European Union's council of ministers in Brussels.

TAXATION: The Duke of Beaufort has been paid more than £280,000 of taxpayers' money for allowing a footbridge to be built across a Welsh river.

The duke's ancestors were granted ownership of the bed of the River Tawe as well as fishing rights by Charles II more than 400 years ago. He is entitled to the money as 'easement' for the bridge. The duke has a fortune estimated at £130 million.

LENS CAP LONDON



Photo by rakan on flickr.com

MAJOR DEMO: Crowds at the London demonstration against Israel's attack on Gaza, on 10th January. Around 75–100,000 people attended the protests, which were marred by police attacks which injured around 75 people and led to three arrests. Charges launched in the afternoon crushed children as young as ten up against railings.

Activism in the courts

Court cases over Christmas and the New Year have meant a hectic start for the green and animal rights movements.

On Wednesday 7th January, 22 of the 49 Plane Stupid members arrested for last month's blockade of Stansted appeared at Harlow Magistrates Court, charged with aggravated trespass. All pleaded guilty to the charge.

Eighteen were ordered to complete community service orders of between 50 and 90 hours. Two must pay fines of £130 and £160 each; one – a 17-year-old who cannot be named – was given a three month referral order and an 18-year-old was given a three month conditional discharge.

All 22 were ordered to pay £60 compensation each towards the £3,000 damage caused.

It is expected the remainder of those arrested will be dealt with later this month.

More than 50 Plane Stupid activists now face being sued for damages by Ryanair who have begun a £2.7 million compensation claim. At the moment the claim is against Stansted operators BAA but the airline has refused to rule out suing individual protesters in the civil courts at a later date.

On 23rd December, four out of five activists on trial at Winchester Crown Court were found guilty of 'conspiracy to blackmail' Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS) after a three-and-a-half month long trial.

Direct action against the company, not linked to those convicted, such as arson attacks, hoax bombs, letters alleging paedophilia,

and threats were pointed to as evidence of the defendants' extremism.

The trial was the second large animal rights conspiracy trial of last year following the imprisonment of Sean Kirtley, an activist involved with Stop Sequani Animal Torture (SSAT). Sean was sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison for updating a website with news about a legal, nonviolent campaign to close down Sequani laboratories in Ledbury.

Adapted from Indymedia

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An ALMO with a twist

More than 1,200 council tenants in north Bristol are to be balloted on whether they want a new company, controlled by tenants, to manage their estates.

The proposed Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) would take over the running of council properties in the area, rather than seeing control turned over to large housing associations or retained in council hands.

While TMOs have been in operation since 1994, primarily seeing interest from major urban areas such as London, this is the first time the area around Bristol has seen a campaign for them.

The move is fuelled by anger at what tenants say are inadequate services and an inability to influence how rent money is spent.

“We believe we can do a lot better job for tenants than the council does,” says leading campaigner Tony Lewis.

Tenants often complain of botched repair work by the council, inefficient responses to calls and failure to tackle reported problems, says the campaign.

TMOs have proven controversial in the past, with warnings being sounded about the potential for community activists to get sucked into administrating ever-diminishing funds and acting as council enforcers rather than being able to pressure independently for improvements.

In early 2007 for example, TMOs were given the power to impose Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, effectively placing them into the role of an auxiliary police force and potentially severely undermining their

ability to integrate with the community.

In the case of Bristol, the TMO, with a budget of around £1.5 million annually, would be expected to not only deal with house repairs and maintenance, but also enforce rent collection.

The current newly-forming TMOs have been verbally supported by the Liberal Democrats in the city, and as many as four could be launched over the next few years, affecting many of the city's 28,000 council tenants.

The first TMO would be based on the Horfield and Lockleaze areas if tenants give the go-ahead in a poll.

Others could follow in St Paul's and Easton (around 3,000 tenants), in Bedminster (for a similar number) and at Barton Hill, say leaders of the City of Bristol Tenants' Federation.

Ice in the blood

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The industry is also set to take home £9bn in windfall payments from changes to the EU Emissions trading Scheme, which at present are unlikely to be passed on.

Despite such significant difficulties, one-off ‘cold snap’ payments, given out after the seven-day freeze earlier this month, are only available to people drawing the Pensions Credit, leaving some 1.8 million of the worst-affected out of the loop.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics revealed 23,740 pensioners died from a cold-related illness between December 2007 and March 2008 last year – that's 281 a day or 12 an hour.

Of the 5.7 million homes in fuel poverty – representing around one quarter of the population – around half are pensioners, effectively those who are most vulnerable.

Fuel poverty is defined as a household having to spend more than one tenth of its annual budget on fuel. The average bill is currently around £1,300.

Amongst the worst hit are those living in remote areas of the UK, where LPG tanks, used to heat houses which aren't connected to the mainline network, have spiralled in cost. In Scotland alone, the number of households in fuel poverty has risen by 26,000 in the last year.

Around one million rural households in the UK live below the poverty line, lacking not only the ability to heat themselves but easy transport to and from home, community support and in many cases, the ability to make themselves heard.

Joe Harris, NPC general secretary, said: “Since 1997, we have lost over 260,000

pensioners during the winter months because of cold-related illnesses, yet the government seems incapable of acting. No other section of our society is so vulnerable and treated so badly.”

The government has been severely embarrassed by its inability to keep its promise of eradicating fuel poverty – something which the economic crisis is likely to put out of its reach altogether.

It's two main initiatives, which offer packages to improve insulation and fuel efficiency within the home, have largely failed to deal with the problem.

Last year Friends of the Earth took the government to court for this failure, and are currently appealing a court judgement which said Labour hadn't been acting illegally.

PUBLIC SECTOR

Housing surprise for Birmingham

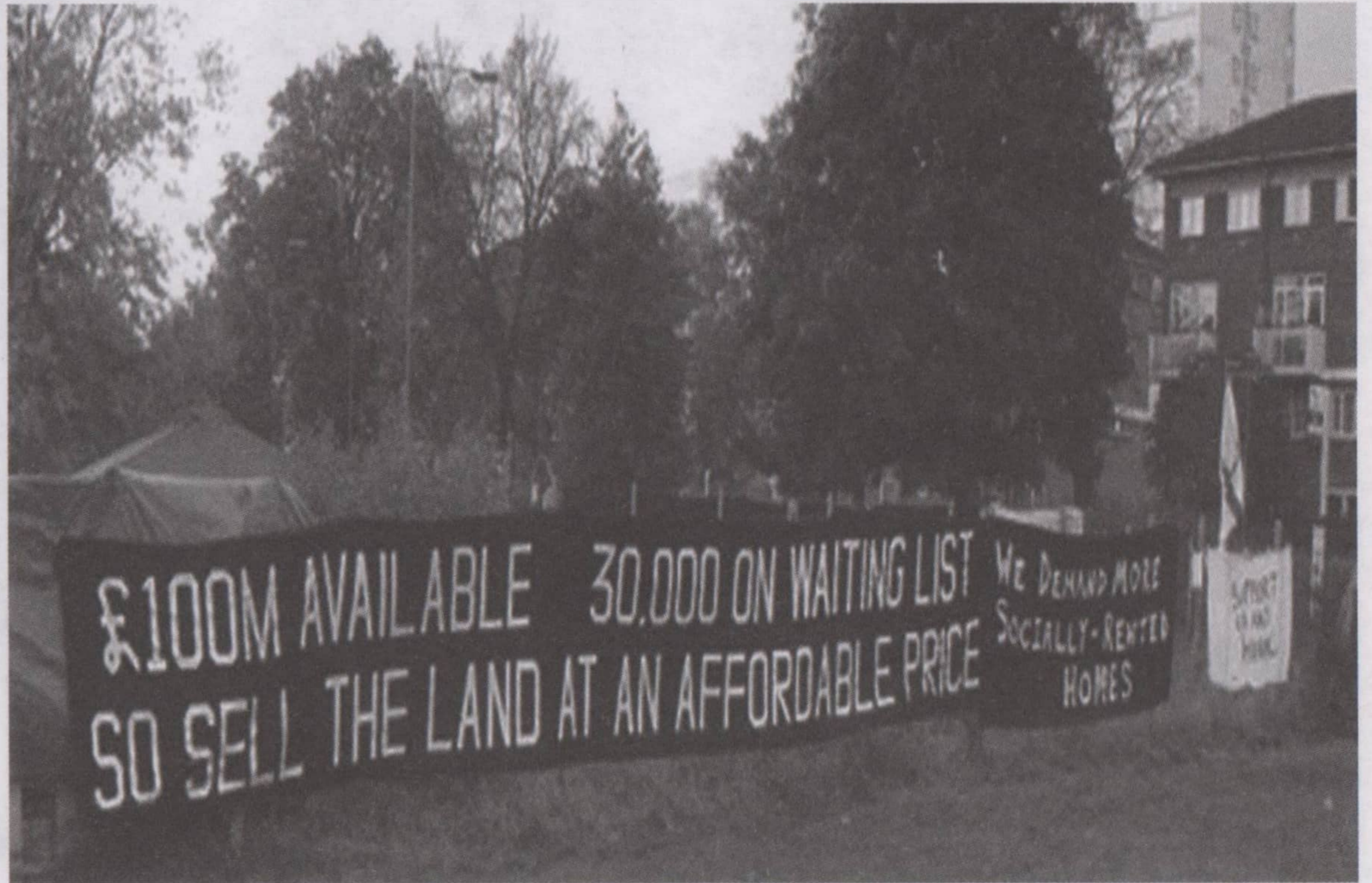
Clean bill of health for council sparks accusations of whitewash

Birmingham has received a 'good' two-star rating for its housing policies just two months after it was publicly humiliated when a squatted tent village sprang up in the city to protest its huge council house waiting list.

A report by the Audit Commission, the main watchdog for housing policy nationwide, risked accusations of farce after it approvingly noted of council policy that it had: "A good understanding of housing need, supported by strong links with partner organisations, is improving housing conditions and preventing increasing numbers of people from becoming homeless. A thorough understanding of the main causes of homelessness has resulted in an effective housing options service, which makes use of a wide range of tools, and is increasingly preventing people from becoming homeless. Plans to increase choice in lettings across the city are well advanced."

Yet the report, published on 8th January, comes after a November protest by a range of groups and individuals saw a piece of disused council land occupied to bring attention to massive wastage within the system as tens of thousands of people continue to wait for homes.

The initiative, which included campaigning groups Justice for Crisis and Freespace Brum, saw land on Vardon Way, Balsall Heath, turned into a haven for the homeless, gaining widespread support from local residents who brought blankets, refreshments



Last November's tent city protest at Vardon Way, Balsall Heath, in Birmingham

and food and garnering national attention.

The protesters highlighted a £130m pot which had been set aside to tackle the housing crisis, but which had barely been touched as the council waited for favourable conditions for private companies to buy and build on the land for private homes with a percentage of 'affordable' properties.

Talking to *Freedom* at the time, one person on site said: "The land is there, the money is there, the associations are there and what's missing is the council selling land at an affordable price. Now council housing is back on the agenda as well, but Birmingham aren't using that either. We don't really care who builds it but the

money is out there and it's not being used."

Commenting on the two-star rating, Justice Not Crisis congratulated the council but noted: "Some facts for John Lines's Housing Department – there are still 30,000 people on waiting lists in this city, there are homeless people living on the streets of this city, there are thousands of people living in overcrowded accommodation desperate for a property of their own, there are people living in Hostels and Bed & Breakfast accommodation in this city and finally there are people in this city living in horrendously poor, damp, cold city council accommodation. Start to sort that out John and you will deserve 200 stars."

FE employers 'disingenuous' on pay

Unionists have reacted with anger after a crowing report from the Universities and Colleges Employers' Association (UCEA) attempted to take credit for higher wages within the further education sector for making it more attractive to new workers.

The Recruitment and retention of staff in higher education report published by UCEA suggests that pay rises offered since 2006, notably a catchup raise designed to give lecturers parity with teachers, has been behind a rise in the number of people considering higher education as a career.

However the 10.37% two-year deal, which was controversially negotiated with the now-merged AUT and Nafthe unions after industrial unrest and which remains a sore point as many unionists felt it was a soft deal, was fought every step of the way by UCEA, say critics.

The UCU further education union accuses UCEA of 'disingenuously taking credit'.

UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt, said: "Those pay rises were opposed at every opportunity by the employers and would not have been achieved without the strong action taken by UCU members."

Commenting on other finding in the report, Hunt said: "We are unsurprised that heavy workloads and the use of fixed-term contracts are cited as the main reasons why institutions struggle to retain academic staff. Our recent stress survey showed levels of stress in the higher education sector to be considerably higher than average."

UCU called off a series of one-day strikes in July of 2008 after admitting it was disappointed by the sector's most recent 3.2% deal, which it nevertheless boasted was the best in the public sector. In February UCU are demanding a catch-up pay rise of 6% to bring lecturers' wages into true parity with those of teachers.

Public sector chiefs exposed

While cuts continue to be made across the civil service, top bosses have come under fire after it emerged that they have been taking allowances for second homes worth more than twice the wages of lower-grade staff.

In some of the worst cases, senior officials were taking home more than £40,000 in living allowances, even though their primary homes were in the same city as their 'secondary' ones.

NHS chief David Nicholson has been picked out for claiming £37,600 for working away from home in his London-based role – despite living in a flat in central London when he took the job. The perk is enough to pay the mortgage on a £500,000 house. Exams watchdog the QCA offers even more to its top personnel, recruiting one boss, Ken Boston, with a £50,000 per annum allowance.

The practice appears to be widespread, even as pay offers continue to fall far below inflation.

IN BRIEF

BREWING: The Stag Brewery at Mortlake is to close, with the loss of up to 182 jobs.

The brewery, which produces Budweiser, Bud Ice and Michelob Ultra, will shut next year as part of the \$1.5 billion (£690 million) cost savings announced by InBev.

DEFENCE: An Israeli-owned British company has been drawn into the political controversy over arms sales to Israel prompted by the assault on Gaza. UAV Engines, of Lichfield, Staffordshire, is the creator of engines for the Hermes drones – unmanned aerial vehicles that have been notorious for their killing sprees in the recent conflict.

FINANCE: Staff at Newcastle Building Society have been told there will be 150 job cuts across the business.

FINANCE: Unite, the UK's largest trade union, has expressed concern that Barclays is to make 410 job cuts in Cheshire, Northampton and London. The jobs will be lost from the bank's IT function.

FOOD: Trade union bosses have begun talks with Icelandic food manufacturers Bakkavor over possible job losses at Exotic Farm Produce in Kirton. It is believed 400 jobs are on the line.

MEDIA: More than 60 journalists who attended an all-day compulsory NUJ meeting at the *Northern Echo* yesterday in protest at a pay freeze will have their pay docked, according to the title's managing director. Union sources believe the move may be illegal.

MOTORING: Nissan has confirmed plans to make 1,200 people redundant at its Sunderland plant. The figure includes 400 workers on temporary contracts and 800 members of staff. The move will reduce the permanent workforce from 3,800 to 2,600.

MOTORING: The GMB union has called on bosses at roadside aid group AA to come clean about cuts as localised losses continue in a move which it is believed is meant to quietly do away with up to 20% of the roadside patrols in the next few months which could amount to over 300 job losses.

OIL: Schlumberger, the world's largest oil services company, has announced plans to cut its global workforce. The company, which employs 4,000 people in the UK, confirmed it was cutting 5% of its US workforce, and was seeking further cuts elsewhere.

RAIL: Plans by South Eastern Trains to axe 300 rail workers' jobs are unjustifiable and will be resisted, the RMT rail union has said.

As news emerged that the Govia-owned franchise intends to shed staff to protect profits and shareholder dividends, RMT warned that it would not accept compulsory redundancies.

Not just any employer...

Marks & Spencer has been hit by accusations that it has systematically been bugging workers and monitoring all emails, phone calls and conversations, particularly regarding workplace negotiations.

The accusation follows a series of embarrassing revelations about the company after whistleblower Tony Goode exposed management plans to cut redundancy payments ahead of a massive round of layoffs.

M&S subsequently fired Goode for his actions, dismissing talk of cuts – only to announce that 1,200 roles would be for the chop earlier this month.

Taken to a tribunal by the GMB union, who are attempting to win compensation for Goode, a series of revelations have since rocked the company, with the most recent revolving around a statement from an employee of surveillance equipment provider Eurosis, that his company was paid to install bugging equipment in the employee meeting room where representatives from the company's

European Work's Council were discussing negotiations on pay and conditions.

GMB lawyer Maria Ludkin says the company installed a secret, illegal 'special line' in the workers' meeting room that allowed management to overhear their private conversations.

An M&S spokesperson has denied any knowledge of such a practice, and the company has denied that it snoops on its workers. However in tracking Goode, who sent a report to *The Times* newspaper after exhausting internal disciplinary processes when he found out about the layoff plans, the company found him through a search of his business emails.

M&S may also be taken to tribunal over the redundancy announcement, which the GMB says requires a 90-day consultation before it can take place, if the company attempts to divide up the losses into smaller units, which would require only 30-days' notice.

No date has been set for the tribunal.



Compensation for miners

NUM accused of taking 3% compensation slice

Allegations have been made at a tribunal hearing that the NUM built a relationship with law firm Raleys which allowed them to take substantial amounts of money from damages claims brought on behalf of injured miners.

The South Yorkshire law firm, which has represented the claims of some 29,000 miners, was allegedly lent £4 million in a loan approved personally by Arthur Scargill, and was recommended by the union to its members for their claims.

The loan, which was paid back at 11% interest, allowed Raleys to continue operating and begin a funding arrangement where deductions were made to compensation pay-

outs before they reached the miners. Around 3% of all compensation was passed on to the NUM – even though the government was paying the legal fees, according to the prosecution.

The cut amounted to £10 million, some of which has been ploughed back into funding claims for an arthritic condition called miner's knee.

The tribunal heard the firm has earned £72 million for its handling of claims for respiratory disease and a disabling hand condition called vibration white finger.

Gregory Treverton-Jones, for Raleys, told the hearing that in November 1999 Kevin Barron, MP for Rother Valley, had complained about what he described as a 'scam' involving Raleys passing on a 3% slice of miners' compensation to the NUM.

The tribunal, due to last until 30th January, continues.

INTERNATIONAL

IN BRIEF

COLOMBIA: Former paramilitary chief Rodrigo Tovar Pupo, also known as 'Jorge 40', has been accused of the murder of two members of the multinational mining company Drummond. It is understood that both victims, Valmore Locarno Rodríguez and Víctor Hugo Orcasita, are respectively president and vicepresident of the trade union of the company 'Sintramienergética'. 'Jorge 40' didn't act on his own. Colombian justice also accused paramilitary Óscar José Ospino, alias 'Tolemaida', of participating in the crime.

IRELAND: Union officials in Ireland say 'No Irish' signs have started to appear on several Polish building sites seeking staff.

Siptu have suggested that Ireland's international reputation as a fair employer has been 'sullied' by the negative experiences of a number of migrants who came to the country in search of work.

ITALY: Silvio Berlusconi and other senior figures in government could be in trouble with the law if a referendum goes through this winter. During summer 2008 Italian opposition party Italia Dei Valori, led by Antonio Di Pietro, asked the population to sign a petition in favour of calling a referendum against the immunity law issued by the Italian New Liberal government. This law was clearly implemented to save prime minister Silvio Berlusconi and Italy's four most senior office holders, including the prime minister and president, from being persecuted for corruption and other crimes.

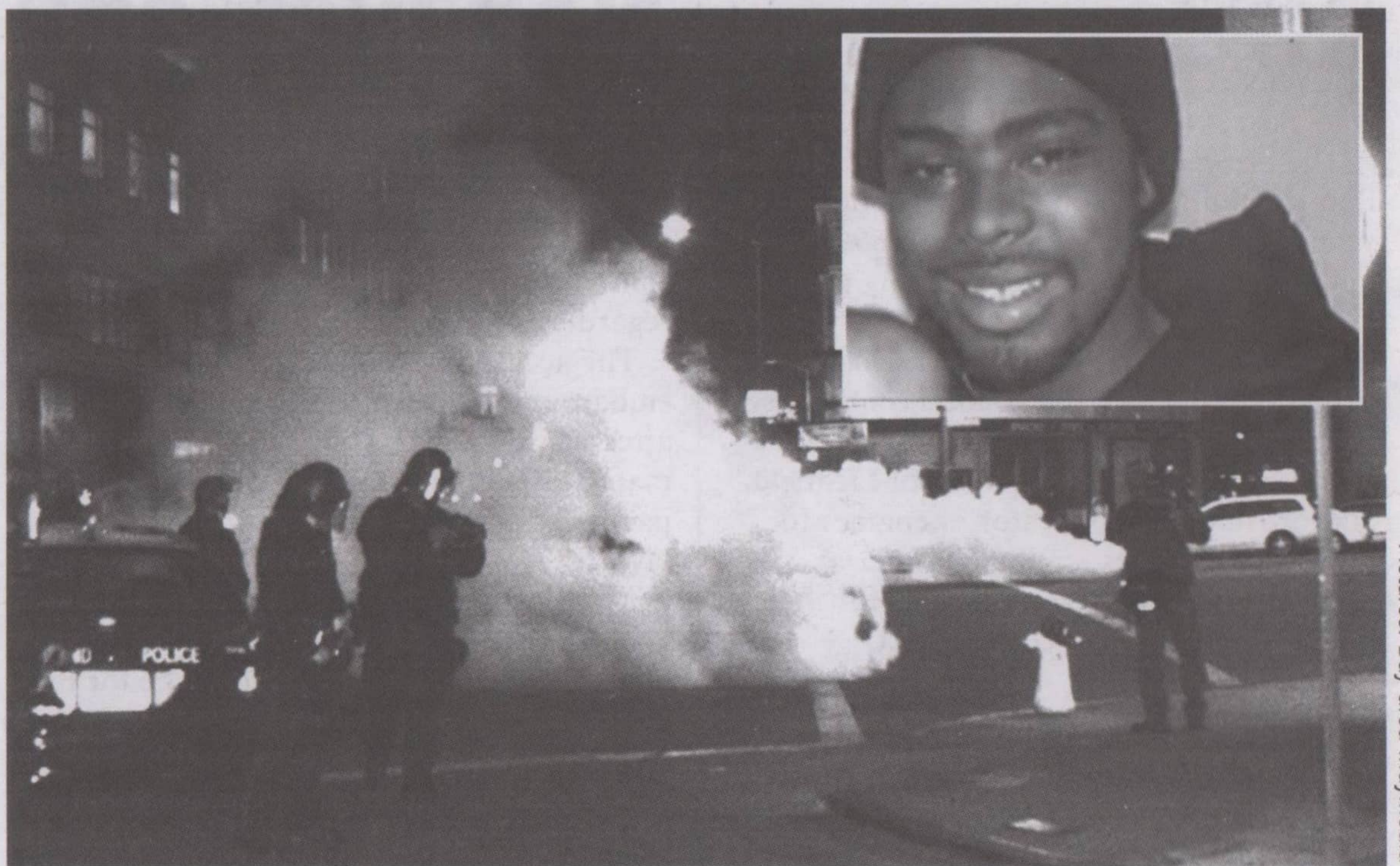
MEXICO: On 3rd January more than 20 people were arrested in a peaceful march *en route* to the US Consulate in Oaxaca, against the invasion of the Gaza strip. Initially, those arrested were taken to the Metropolitana, and it would seem that they were later transferred to San Bartolo Teontepac.

VIETNAM: Nearly 4,000 workers at a Taiwanese footwear plant in Vietnam have gone on strike to protest alleged ill-treatment by their bosses. The workers, mostly women, said managers from mainland China had beaten and humiliated employees at the Sun Jade company in Thanh Hoa province.

Workers also reported being denied sick leave and days off for deaths in the family, and were often docked an entire month's pay if they failed to show up.

ZIMBABWE: Mineworkers have threatened to down tools should they receive their next salary in local currency. Associated Mine-workers Union of Zimbabwe president Tinago Ruzive said mineworkers will hold showdown talks with the Chamber of Mines on Thursday where they will table their demand for all mineworkers to be paid in US dollars. "Mineworkers are reeling in poverty and are starving because they are being paid in local currency when almost everything is being charged in US dollars," he said.

LENS CAP CALIFORNIA



Pictures: Bay area Indymedia

RIOTS: Violence has erupted in Oakland, California, after the shooting of an unarmed black man in a standoff at a tube station. Video footage of the shooting shows young dad Oscar Young (inset), 22, being restrained on the ground and then his legs twitching upwards as the shot rings out. While it has been admitted by the police that Young was unarmed, state officials have suggested it was an accident. The officer, who remains unnamed, has been put on leave since the incident. On 7th January, an infuriated community clashed with police, who made 107 arrests. A march in protest is due on 19th January.

Poverty on Ivory Coast

A new report on Ivory Coast has found that poverty in the West African country has soared, despite a booming cocoa industry which is set to draw in record profits this year.

Almost half the country's population live on less than £1 a day – the state definition of extreme poverty – which equated to around five times as many people as in 1985, according to the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Document.

The report also found a significant gap between the rural and urban poor, with 60% of people in the countryside in extreme poverty compared to a little under half in the cities.

"The poverty rate in rural areas worsened particularly in the recent period coinciding

with that of the politico-military crisis," the report said.

"It rose from 49% in 2002 to 62.45% in 2008, a rise of more than 13% while in urban areas the increase was only four points."

The country was left in turmoil in 2002 after a coup attempt saw the country split in two and a bloody civil war developed. The short conflict ended with in a power sharing agreement between President Lurent Gbagbo and Prime Minister Guillaume Soro.

However since the agreement was reached, improvements to the working conditions of the poor have failed to materialise, with huge profits being made from the cocoa fields leaking out of the country while millions continue to live in poverty.

Notes from the United States

As Obama comes to power, Louis Further looks back at the Bush period.

Violence: A couple of years after Bush and co were selected, there were already 2,500 juveniles imprisoned in the United States as enemy combatants (or over three a day). Of these at least eight were tortured to death. In just the past two years the US is known to have conducted 200 extraordinary renditions.

There were nearly 900 incidents of torture shown on the prime-time TV networks alone in the five years to 2007. It's estimated that in the previous seven years the number was less than a tenth of that.

Fully 1% of all adult Americans are now in jail with members of the ethnic minorities increasingly disproportionately represented.

Economy: Bush managed to run up the largest national debt in the US' history, to spend \$567 billion (£340 billion) on the Iraq war and to preside over the time when over

Statement on Gaza

The Anarchist Federation has drafted the following article on the situation in Gaza, which is among the clearest pieces of thinking on the situation to have emerged on the left. We print it here with some minor cuts for space reasons:

“One thing is absolutely clear about the current situation in Gaza: the Israeli state is committing atrocities which must end immediately.

“With hundreds dead and thousands wounded, it has become increasingly clear that the aim of the military operation, which has been in the planning stages since the signing of the original ceasefire in June, is to break Hamas completely.

“The attack follows the crippling blockade throughout the supposed ‘ceasefire’, which has destroyed the livelihoods of Gazans, ruined civilian infrastructure and created a humanitarian disaster which anyone with an ounce of humanity would seek an end to. But that’s not all there is to say about the situation.

“On both sides of the conflict, the idea that opposing Israel has to mean supporting Hamas and its ‘resistance’ movement is worryingly common. We totally reject this argument. Just like any other set of rulers, Hamas, like all the other major Palestinian factions, are happy and willing to sacrifice ordinary Palestinians to increase their power.

“This isn’t some vague theoretical point – for a period recently most deaths in Gaza were a result of fighting between Hamas and Fatah. The ‘choices’ offered to ordinary Palestinian people are between Islamist gangsters (Hamas, Islamic Jihad) or nationalist gangsters (Fatah, Al-Aqsa Martyrs brigades). These groups have shown their willingness to attack working class attempts to improve their living conditions, seizing union offices,



kidnapping prominent trade unionists, and breaking strikes.

“One spectacular example is the attack on Palestine Workers’ Radio by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs brigades, for ‘stoking internal conflicts’. Clearly, a ‘free Palestine’ under the control of any of these groups would be nothing of the sort.

“As anarchists, we are internationalists, opposing the idea that the rulers and ruled within a nation have any interests in common. Therefore, anarchists reject Palestinian nationalism just as we reject Israeli nationalism (Zionism).

“Ethnicity does not grant ‘rights’ to lands, which require the state to enforce them. People, on the other hand, have a right to having their human needs met, and should be able to live where they choose, freely.

“We fully support the ordinary inhabitants of Gaza and Israel against state warfare – not because of their nationality, ethnicity, or religion, but simply because they’re real living, feeling, thinking, suffering, struggling human beings. And this support has to mean total hostility to all those who would oppress and exploit them – the Israeli state and the Western governments and corporations that supply it with weapons, but also any other capitalist factions who seek to use ordinary working-class Palestinians as pawns in their power struggles.

“The only real solution is one which is collective, based on the fact that as a class, globally, we ultimately have nothing but our ability to work for others, and everything to gain in ending this system – capitalism – and the states and wars it needs.”

Notes from the Unites States

◀ page 6

40 million homes in the country are highly likely to suffer significantly as a result of the huge increase in foreclosures (250 an hour by 2008). In fact \$4 trillion (£2.4 trillion) in home equity is estimated to have been lost since the housing bubble burst. That’s in keeping with a decrease in median income of working households since 2000 of \$2,010 (£1,200). Since 2001 the number of Americans living in poverty has increased to well over 10% of the population, at 4.4 million. Nearly 80,000 fewer children have access to health care than when he was selected; a fifth of Bush’s vetoes blocked attempts to improve the situation for children’s health.

There are 928,000 more millionaires now than there were in 2001.

The total value of government contracts in only the first year of Bush’s presidency to be awarded without competitive bidding? Nearly

\$75 billion (£45 billion). By 2007 it was twice that amount.

Intellect: The cost of the George W. Bush Presidential Library is likely to be \$250 million (£150 million) when it opens in six years’ time. That leaves a full two years for Bush to learn to read well: the No Child Left Behind education act mandated that all students in the USA must achieve grade-level proficiency in reading and maths by 2016. No country in history has ever achieved this, of course. According to the Department of Education, the Bush Administration’s budget request of \$24.4 billion (£15bn) for No Child Left Behind in 2008 raises the financial cost of the measure by over 40% over what it was at the start of his administration. Wildly unpopular with the teaching profession, it’s also been estimated that the annual paperwork burden to achieve the unachievable has increased by nearly seven million hours.

Warnings on Afghanistan

A social catastrophe is unfolding in Afghanistan. 2008 was the seventh consecutive year of drought and poor harvests and as many as 8–10 million people face starvation as the harsh winter sets in and snow-falls isolate rural communities. The worst affected provinces are in central and northern Afghanistan where US and NATO forces have exerted almost unchallenged control since the 2001 invasion and claim to have spent billions of dollars on reconstruction and development.

A minimum of 6 million tonnes of wheat and other cereals are needed to feed the country’s population, which has swollen to nearly 30 million after the return of refugees from Pakistan and Iran. Last year just 3.5 million tonnes of cereal were produced with the entire crop being lost in some areas. Over 1.5 million animals – some 10% of livestock – also died due to water shortages.

From the World Socialist website

2008: Rounding up the dodgy deals

January

As the year began *Freedom* was the only newspaper to draw the links between a series of cuts to the fire service across the UK, following a falling grant settlement and wholesale attempts to remove full-time firefighters from service, replacing them with part-time 'retained' staff.

The report highlighted the link between the cuts and rising damage costs to property, and injury rates among firefighters. Later on the year, these fears were vindicated when national figures were brought out largely confirming the warnings of the FBU that frontline protection across the UK was at an all-time low.

February

With the credit crunch beginning to worsen, *Freedom* looked at how big investors were fleeing to the arms industry, as it represented a safe pair of hands for their money. The sector has massively outperformed the general market, with a series of long-term mega-deals cut between the US/UK and a number of regimes providing years of stability for the production of weapons of mass destruction.

Later on in the month, as a media storm blew up over the holding of mercenary British ex-pat Simon Mann in Equatorial Guinea (he'd tried to raise an army to mount a military coup there), research for *Freedom* showed that while complaining that Mann could be tortured, the state continues to have a policy of automatic deportation for Equatorial Guinean refugees from the UK.

March

Freedom has run a series of exposés on the impact of Independent Sector Treatment

Centres since they became a major part of the NHS, and in February a further analysis of the situation was run, with the welcome news that enthusiasm for the expensive free-market exploiting of illness was on the wane as it became clear that the £2bn experiment had gone horribly wrong.

Also in March, the spectre of Rendition – where the US state flies terror suspects to countries without anti-torture laws for interrogation to avoid their own constitution – raised its head again after an investigation found the notorious flight N478GS, mentioned specifically for its role in the initiative by both the EU and Amnesty International, had landed in Glasgow and the disappeared from the records for four days...

April

In April *Freedom* looked at housing, splashing with warnings that changes to the benefits system was being hit by a string of complaints as it switched over to a system of Local Housing Allowances – which would effectively price many people out of expensive areas.

Meanwhile in schooling, strong warnings were sounded as it emerged that the switchover to academies, semi-privatised schooling run by a variety of churches and companies paying a pittance for the privilege, had reached the stage in Manchester where two-thirds of secondary schools were set to be running outside the state sector.

May

In May, a report on pay and gender in Social Care work highlighted how people working with the most vulnerable sector of the population are being paid below poverty



wages, while throughout the sector men were in all of the skilled and highly-paid roles, leaving women to carry out the worst-paid care jobs. The report highlighted significantly better pay and conditions which were still prevalent in state-run areas, leading to better conditions for those being looked after.

In the same month, predictions made in *Freedom* in 2007 came a step closer, as it was revealed that privatisation of the Royal Mail was being considered after another poor year of trading brought on by anti-competition legislation. At the same time, job cuts and mergers of sorting offices were announced.

June

As the second half of the year began, warnings were sounded that housing estates across the country could be put under surveillance and harassed in the same way as demonstrations, with police Forward Intelligence Team units placed on 'problem' housing estates to monitor the actions of young people.

Later in the month, in a follow-up to earlier reports, *Freedom* reported that two major attacks on the public sector had been launched by the government, with 'struggling' schools and NHS hospitals both facing mandatory switchovers to a private-

Later on that month, *Freedom* took note of a warning by EU labour groups that new legal and policy plans at the heart of European law could herald the start of a wholesale attack on conditions. The Viking, Lafal and Ruffert cases potentially allow companies to exploit cheaper labour more easily and use it to drag down national-level labour rights.

October

As the financial crisis went into overdrive, with the stock markets swaying crazily and huge uncertainty as to what would happen over the next few weeks, *Freedom* ran a lengthy opinion piece in its 11th October issue, looking at the roots of the crisis and how systemically the way in which capital operates forces such crises over time, with capital hoarding wealth and working-class debt racking up to compensate.

This was followed by a report on a major new crackdown in Oaxaca, Mexico, where almost two years on from the murder of US Indymedia journalist Brad Will and the destruction of the Oaxaca resistance movement which he had been covering, Mexican police used his death as an excuse to arrest or intimidate hundreds of activists throughout the region.

November

In *Freedom's* 8th November paper, it was finally announced that after months of buildup and slow removal of obstacles, Royal Mail bosses were ready to being another major series of cuts to the business, with an estimated 20,000 jobs set to go following a reorganisation which would see sorting offices across the country closed. In a series of announcements, posties were told to 'walk faster' to make up for the cuts, and privatisation was also mooted.

Meanwhile in the rest of the public sector, a loose coalition of unions talking tough about taking action on derisory pay offers well below the rate of inflation finally fell apart altogether, with most of the major unions eventually ruling out strike action.

December

Finally, in December *Freedom* reported on the destination of the multi-billion pound bailout Gordon Brown had promised would be keeping Britain afloat – it would be spent on the economic black hole that is PFI. Much of the huge sum is likely to go towards replacing 'senior debt' in the initiative.

The same month saw some of the state's most recent machinations exposed when it was found that the police Forward Intelligence Team, along with three other covert and semi-covert operations run by the police, has exempted themselves from public scrutiny by operating as part of a private company – the Association of Chief Police Officers.



The 'poverty paparazzi' appeared in June

COMMENT

ABOUT FREEDOM

ANGEL ALLEY

A warm welcome to you on the other side of the holidays, we trust you got everything you wanted (well, the revolutionary upsurge was always a long-shot as a stocking-filler)?

It seems like things always kick off when we're on our breaks, and this year has been no exception, with the horrifying spectacle that is Gaza lighting up our screens with blood and tracer-fire every night. Sadly, protests aside we seem to be largely helpless to do much but hope against hope that the various brutal factions stop killing innocent people.

But this helplessness is not the case in all things, which is why we have run a story about cold islanders on the front page. Brutality does not always come at the end of a barrel, and capitalism is, in its quiet and unflashy way, going about its murderous business at the heart of our communities. You are as dead while shivering your last in your own home as you are from a bullet wound. In lieu of taking a trip out to far flung climes, there are practical things you can do at home to save a life – your community could do with your help...

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Quite a lot of your subscriptions are up for renewal at this time of year, and it would really help us if you could renew. If the four-digit number above your name on the address label starts with 69, then your sub is overdue for renewal and you will no longer receive *Freedom* if you don't renew soon. See page 16 for the subscription rates and renewal form or, if you don't want to worry in future about remembering to renew your subscription to *Freedom*, ask us to send you a standing order form either at subs@freedompress.org.uk or write to us at 'Subscriptions', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be a double issue dated 31st January 2009 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 22nd January. 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

The wonder that is the BBC i-player allowed me to catch up with a programme I deliberately missed last year. It was recommended by a comrade, who, not entirely seriously, suggested that its subject held what he characterised as a 'lifestyle anarchist position'.

It's not that far fetched to see someone who has never had a proper job, is against genetically modified food and most modern development, while being passionate about organic food and getting business to do its bit on global warming, as sharing some values with a lot of anarchists.

Of course, *Charles at 60: The passionate Prince* was made with the co-operation of the prince, so it's not surprising that it painted a positive picture of him. It also skirted around the constitutional issues of his political interventions and didn't mention any issues around the concentration of power his lands give him in the south west.

He is clearly committed, and it is a measure of lack of cohesion in our society that the old-style concerned paternalism that Charles promotes seems so unusual. In an off-guard conversation he has talking to West Indian business leaders, he makes the case for corporate responsibility by invoking the spectre of communism. His point is that if business just takes things out of society and puts nothing back, the people who have nothing will become embittered and opt for a society that precludes people like him having his position.

However, it is through his various charities that he is at his most political. He could almost be an activist; he admits he'd rather be doing something than

nothing, mainly because he will be criticised either way. He also echoes some of the views I've heard expressed by green anarchists, especially about not enough weight being given to empiricism. His built environment foundation is responsible for Poundbury in Dorset, a development where the quality of the homes is the same, regardless of whether they are for rent or sale to the wealthy. The settlement is planned around people, not cars, and he rejected the planning zones before a brick was laid.

Of course, a few similarities to some anarchists doesn't mean I'm going to approve of the man. I'm sure his good works are many, but all are undermined by his inevitable promotion of the hereditary principle. He can hardly avoid that, I suppose, but there is also a problem with his militarism. In addition, he is naïve at times – he mentions arranging for some kids at a special school getting to visit the Royal Shakespeare Company and that he got a letter from every single child. Of course, he doesn't realise that sitting down and writing a letter can be a lesson plan in itself.

Charles is engaged and busy, but admits he is most relaxed gardening or walking. I'm reminded of the film *The Last Emperor*, about the boy emperor of China, who becomes a Japanese puppet ruler in Manchuria. Once he is overthrown by the Russians, he is passed back to the Chinese Communists, who put him to work as a gardener. I don't know how true to life the film is, but he has a more enjoyable life with the plants than he does in the rarefied air of the Forbidden City. The point of revolution is to restore all our humanity – those with privileges would also benefit.

Blog Bites

(from jimjay.blogspot.com)

I was never into *Big Brother* until George Galloway made an appearance in the celebrity version a couple of years back. It was essentially some the best TV that has ever been broadcast rivalling even *The Wire*, another show about surveillance, and the series had me hooked. It then went back to the ordinary version where fools have rows with each about how much toast they eat or whatever and I turned away again.

Anyway, it's with great delight that I just watched (online) the moment left wing Scottish politician Tommy Sheridan entered the house.

With the crowd booing something rotten (they didn't seem to do this for the others, I'm surprised they knew who he was) Sheridan made a brisk walk to the entrance in what must have been extremely intimidating circumstances. I'm fascinated by the idea that he'll be spending the next however long chatting to LaToya Jackson (who eyed him skeptically when he entered the house), and Mini-Me from Austin Powers (hearty

handshake), who incidentally must be a shoe in for the winner.

His *BB* biog says that apart from being a socialist politician he's "a qualified gym instructor and describes himself as a control freak. He enjoys sunbeds, touching his nose and scratching his bum". Well I never. The touching his nose thing made it very tempting to make a remark about Pinocchio, as he's on bail for perjury, but see ... I've resisted!

Whether Tommy will be able to top Galloway's performance it's hard to tell. Galloway was superb (sometimes for good reasons, sometimes for the horror of it) and I can see the spark of greatness in Sheridan. Unfortunately, I'm unlikely to have the time to follow his antics properly but I will definitely make an effort to see the many highlights that I'm sure are to come.

Almost the first thing he said to his fellow housemates had me in stitches. "Let the madness begin!" I couldn't agree more Tommy, could not agree more.

The McDonaldisation of anarchism

We live in a time where consciousness would appear to be increasingly appropriated on a globalised basis by standardised logos. Personality and product are increasingly inseparable; commodification is not just the reduction process of converting commercial objects into iconised symbols for buying and selling. Within the vastness of global techno/culture, media, models codes and cyberspace, morality, ethics, ideas, values, beliefs basic to radicalism itself are vanishing into the black hole vortex, of transnational capitalism. Ethics become commodified goods, controlled by small sects, and I think this includes radical belief systems and anarchism.

Radicals and sectarian revolutionaries within the anarchist tradition tend to look in dualistic/possessive terms at their own theory and practice. The vision or analysis tends to be one that reinforces the specific orthodoxy or 'correct line'. There is increasingly a love, or dependency on the words, phrases, slogans of the tradition, without reference to what they mean within the contemporary world. 'Class War', 'Working Class' sloganeering easily becomes a structure of recycled mantras or holy writ that is beyond question.

To revert to exclusive dogma can help to reinforce the essential principles of anarchism against the commodification of this/time, but strangely research suggests that the exclusiveness creates the situation that is resisted. It contracts, rather than expands. It gives exclusive power to self-serving High Priests. The ideology becomes a commodified possession, that is constantly re-cycled as a political product, and sectarian power, rather than being used as a cutting edge for change, and communication.

To develop this further it is necessary to look at George Ritzer's early work *The McDonaldisation of Society* (which suggests

society is increasingly taking on the characteristics of a fast food restaurant), and the evolution of capitalism, supported by technology and science.

Rationalisation, or the process of finding the most effective way to achieving a process, was seen to create 'disenchantment' as the magical, moral, ethical innovative, creative, and improvisational aspects of production are stripped of meaning, in a search for efficiency and greater profitability. This was exemplified in the early 1900s by Fordism and Taylorism; the invention of the production line leading to increasing alienation, and mechanisation of the workforce.

The such principles were applied by Joe and Dick McDonald in the early 1930s to create the first fast-food restaurant in Pasadena, California. Ritzer described these principles as Calculability, Efficiency, Predictability and Control by Non-Human Technologies. This standardised product, personality and philosophy of production and consumption is described by Ritzer as defining every sector of American society.

It is more subtle and complex than workers being exploited by capitalists. Radicals and anarchists, or The Left in general are not exempt from the impact of culture – no human behaviour takes place outside of its social/cultural context.

How is anarchism and its 'movement' affected by these processes?

In many anarchist group meetings and publications there is still transmitted the belief that the industrial working class are waiting in the wings to seize power given the correct timing, etc. Bits of Marxian class war politics are clung onto which have no reference to current reality. The moral ethical, social and spiritual value system that were once universal are now largely commodified. The social/industrial model as the road to emancipation does not have any bearing on the consciousness of 'the masses'.

The basis of the social order has clearly shifted from being based upon production to being based and determined by consumption. So what generates the reality that anarchists attempt to engage with? The economic base?

Baudrillard writes; "it is no longer relevant to say that The Real World exists, no system of representation or analysis can refer to that reality". Baudrillard was involved with Guy Debord and The Situationists during the May '68 revolt in France, but felt that people are not mystified and alienated against their will. His view is that we are surrounded increasingly not by people but by sign objects, that allow their own meaning and reality of radicalism to circulate. The new mutation dances to the rhythm of consumer goods.

Radical values are no longer based on ethics, but on commodity that stimulates and impersonates authentic human values. This state is one in which the consumer voluntarily plays in the commodified circus, the Super Store Churches and Cathedral Shopping Malls. Freedom of choice is the key to the system, but it is a freedom that is imposed upon the consumer, it is played with as a mode of regressed behaviour.

So often anarchists and radicals still

genuinely believe that all you have to do is expose the system, and liberation will ultimately follow. The reality is that for the average person their common point of recognition is not proletarian solidarity, justice, compassion, truth or the unity of the oppressed against tyranny, but consumer goods and the language of meaning and units that the goods themselves circulate.

Possibly to be without the capacity for incessant consumption would be the ultimate in tyranny. Value systems that have always been rooted in human ethics and moral and social concerns, have been simulated and inverted by commodification. The lowest common denominator of fear-based survival is elevated to a place of reverential transcendence, a major control mechanism that is structured within language, culture and media is not overt political repression, but the conscious planned participatory inclusion of all people in the global circus of consumption. The repression is the illusion of complete liberation from material want; and belief that there is nothing beyond that value system.

A dependency is fostered upon plastic/cyber toys and the nurturing of social relations neglected. Ultimately all human behaviour has to be confirmed within a social context; without this we have a 'wolf/man culture' with its inevitable cult of 'serial killing' with 'Washington Thriller Killers', or 'Natural Born' ones. Now, even murder has a bar code.

The key elements of McDonaldisation have, I believe, happened to radical belief systems, including anarchism.

Standardisation, predictability, calculability, control and rationalisation have happened to its political philosophy, and group organisation. Core beliefs concerning Marxist analysis of capitalism, and the working class, revolutionary violence etc have remained stuck in the nineteenth century, and are kept there without thought of their relevance now.

This has blocked the growth of new and relevant thinking applicable to contemporary conditions. Like a McDonalds, dogmatic traditional anarchist theory has become a constantly re-cycled product. Ideology itself has become a political commodity, a possession that is jealously guarded, because if it moves beyond its dogmatic parameters it has nowhere to go.

The need for social revolution, and the liberatory guiding star of anarchism was never more relevant and critically needed than now. It requires hard work, courage and honest creative thinking to give it the contemporary life and relevance that the tradition, and humanity itself so richly deserves.

Mark A, News

Gillian Fleming

Freedom Press is reprinting some of the works of Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta and would very much like to get in touch with Gillian Fleming, who worked with Freedom Press many years ago and translated some of Malatesta's works into English.

CROSSWORD SOLUTION

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The first three correct entries drawn from the hat are NW in Leeds, FD in Liverpool and RA in Camarthenshire. Congratulations, your prizes will be in the post shortly.

GETTING ACTIVE

PRISON NEWS

Daniel McGowan moved

Green scare prisoner Daniel McGowan seems to be on the move yet again. The following address is the most recent posted, but please be advised it can change.

- Daniel McGowan 63794-053, Columbia County Jail, 403 Jackson Street, Portage, WI 53901, USA

Ruchell Magee moved

Black activist and long-time prisoner Ruchell Cinque Magee was recently transferred to a new location. His new address is:

- Ruchell Cinque Magee # A92051 C-2 107L, CSATF/ State Prison Corcoran, P.O. Box 5242, Corcoran, CA 93212, USA

Alberto Torres hearing date

Carlos Albert Torres' parole hearing will be during the week of 19th January. This is two months earlier than was originally anticipated.

Mexican anarchist freed

After seven years, three months, and 21 days behind bars in Mexico City, Carlos Alberto Estrada Arroyo was finally released on Friday 5th September.

Carlos is an anarchist who was framed on false charges of robbery. It is believed that he was framed because of his participation in a local student strike and other community actions.

Olga Nevskaya is freed

Olga Nevskaya, the last imprisoned defendant of the group, the New Revolutionary Alternative (NRA), has been released after six years of imprisonment. The NRA is an anarchist organisation devoted to insurrectionary struggle in Russia. The group surfaced in 1996 in protest of the Chechen War and has targeted conscription centres, military and police stations. In 2003, Nevskaya and two other women were convicted for the actions carried out by the NRA.

Marie Mason update

A new website and listserv has been launched for Green Scare prisoner Marie Mason at supportmariemason.org

Contributors will be posting regular updates and information regarding Mason. She is currently in a county jail pending her sentencing on 5th February. Donations are still needed to cover legal and family costs.

Donations may now be made directly to Marie Mason's family. Please make cheques or money orders out to 'Karin Mason' and send to:

- Karin Mason, PO Box 352, Stanwood, MI 49346, USA

You can contact Marie at:

- Marie Jeanette Mason, Clinton County Jail, 1347 E Townsend Road, Saint Johns, MI 48879, USA (note: please do not try to discuss Marie's case, her co-defendants or Green Scare when writing).



● **Bristol's Anarchist Bookfair Collective** has kicked off 2009 with a new red and black flyer that is intended as a brief intro to anarchist ideas. They also have a couple of meetings arranged for January, one on 'What is Class', and a first organising meet of the year. A collective member has a quick look back over last year:

"2008 was a positive one for anarchists in Bristol. Apart from our successful first bookfair in 15 years, there was a developing mix of theory, organisation and action. Bristol Radical History Group held two fascinating week-long events. Local groups such as No Borders, Anarchist Black Cross, AntiFa, Rising Tide, Space Invaders, Animal Rights and Indymedia emerged or were consolidated with an increasing level of public activity.

"The Kebele social centre evolved into a community co-op, and continued to act as a resource, space, and hub for networks and info. On the action front there have been solidarity pickets, strike support, resisted squat evictions, art attacks, numerous small demos, office occupations and blockades, and a plethora of environmental events and protests. Known and anonymous networks carried out a variety of direct actions and sabotage. For example December saw posters, graffiti and four claimed attacks on police stations in solidarity with the Greek rebellion. Lastly, Bristol likes to party, which helps make the local movement self-sufficient via many benefit gigs and fundraisers with growing numbers of bands and dj's up for performing.

"Elsewhere in the region there are groups in Bath, Hereford and Swindon, and actions in places like Taunton, Frome and Glastonbury from like-minded networks."

● **Fitwatch** report that the police Forward Intelligence Team (FIT) had a bad day policing the Gaza protest in London earlier this month. One writer noted: "FIT coppers looked edgy from the start, focussing special attention on anyone who looked young Muslim and militant. But with such huge numbers of people, many wearing Arab scarves around their faces, it could hardly have been an easy day out for the FIT photographers.

"Public order cops were aggressive from the start too. This one (pictured above) posed delightfully for a shot, and even introduced himself – CO 5484 Churchman from CO11 (his friends call him Bob). But then he appeared to have a sudden change of heart. Aggressively he grabbed hold of my camera phone and tried to pull it out of my hands. 'You are going to delete that' he shouted in my face. 'You can't photograph us'. After a brief stand-off in which I refused to let go of my camera, he gave up and turned his attention to bullying someone else.

"He and his CO11 colleagues were clearly in a similar frame of mind when they tried to block in the march to the Israeli embassy at Hyde Park Corner underpass. Eyewitness accounts have emerged that police baton charged protesters on a march that had been, until then, entirely peaceful."

The 1973 Athens Polytechnic uprising

The Athens Polytechnic uprising in 1973 was a massive demonstration of popular rejection of the Greek military junta of 1967–1974. The uprising began on 14th November, escalated to an open anti-junta revolt and ended in bloodshed in the early morning of 17th November.

Since 21st April 1967, Greece had been under the dictatorial rule of the military, a regime which abolished civil rights, dissolved political parties and exiled, imprisoned and tortured politicians and citizens based on their political beliefs. In 1973, the junta leader George Papadopoulos undertook a 'liberalisation' process of the regime, which in practice provided opposition elements, including Socialists, with the opportunity to undertake political action against the junta.

In its attempt to control every aspect of Greek politics, the Junta had interfered with student syndicalism by banning student elections in universities, forcibly drafting students and imposing non-elected student union leaders in the national students' union, EFEE. These actions created anti-junta sentiments among students, such as Geology student Kostas Georgakis who committed suicide in 1970 in Genoa, Italy, as an act of protest against the junta.

The first large-scale public action against the junta came from students on 21st February 1973, when law students went on strike and barricaded themselves inside the buildings of the Law School of the university of Athens, demanding repeal of the law that imposed forceful drafting of 'subversive youths', as 88 of their colleagues had been forcefully drafted. The police were ordered to intervene and many students were reportedly subjected to police brutality.

On 14th November 1973, students at the Athens Polytechnic (Polytechnion) went on strike and started protesting against the regime. As the authorities stood by, the students, calling themselves the 'Free Besieged' (a reference to a poem by Greek national poet Dionysios Solomos inspired by the Ottoman siege of Mesolonghi), barricaded themselves in and constructed a radio station (using laboratory equipment) that repeatedly broadcast across Athens: "Here is Polytechnion! People of Greece, the Polytechnion is the flag bearer of our struggle and your struggle, our common struggle against the dictatorship and for democracy!" Leftist, later to be politician, Maria Damanaki was one of the major speakers. Soon thousands of workers and youngsters joined them protesting inside and outside of the 'Athens Polytechnic'.

The student uprising is generally believed to have been spontaneous, started with purely student demands at first, and not orchestrated by any political groups in Greece. Initially, it was condemned by the parties of the Greek left, which had been banned by the ruling junta. There were suspicions at the time that



Photo from the book *Pollitexhno: Apo tin katalypsi stin eisboll*

Tanks patrol the streets of Athens following the student rebellion of 1973.

the uprising was an act of provocation orchestrated by factions within the military regime opposed to the process of political normalisation and would use the uprising to derail it. However, within a few days the student protests in front of the Polytechnic evolved into a clearly political, quite vocal and rather widespread, albeit peaceful, rebellion against the dictatorship. After approximately three days and nights of continuous mass gatherings in front of the Polytechnic, the protests were put down by force, through the use of tanks and army units which stormed the building during the night of 17th November.

Prior to the crackdown, the city lights had been shut down and the area was only lit by the campus lights, powered by the university generators. In unclear footage clandestinely filmed by a Dutch journalist, a tank is shown bringing down the main steel entrance to the campus to which people were clinging. Documentary evidence also survives, in recordings of the 'Athens Polytechnic' radio transmissions from the occupied premises. In these a young man's voice is heard desperately asking the soldiers (whom he calls 'brothers in arms') surrounding the building complex to disobey the military orders and not to fight 'brothers protesting'. The voice carries on to an emotional outbreak, reciting the lyrics of the Greek National Anthem, until the tank enters the yard, at which time transmission ceases.

On 25th November Taxiarkhos Dimitrios Ioannides used the events as a pretext to stage a counter-coup that overthrew Papadopoulos, and put a dramatic end to Papadopoulos and Spyros Markezinis' attempt for a transition to democratic rule. General Dimitrios Ioannidis arrested Markezinis, cancelled the

elections, and fully reinstated martial law. His regime in turn crumbled in July 1974, after the coup against Makarios III, instigated by Cypriots in contact with the Greek junta, led to the Turkish invasion of Cyprus.

According to an official investigation undertaken after the fall of the Junta in 1974, no students of Athens Polytechnic were killed during the incident. Total recorded casualties amount to 24 civilians killed outside Athens Polytechnic campus. These include 19-year-old Michael Mirogiannis, reportedly shot and killed by officer G. Dertilis, high-school student Diomedes Komnenos, and a five-year old boy caught in the crossfire in the suburb of Zografou. The records of the trials held following the collapse of the Junta document the circumstances of the deaths of many civilians during the uprising, although the number of dead remains a subject of political controversy. In addition, hundreds of civilians were left injured during the events. Ioannides' involvement in inciting unit commanders of the security forces to commit criminal acts during the Athens Polytechnic uprising was noted in the indictment presented to the court by the prosecutor during the Greek junta trials and in his subsequent conviction in the Polytechnion trial where he was found to have been morally responsible for the events.

The uprising of 1973 is hailed by many as a valiant act of resistance against the military dictatorship and as a symbol of resistance to tyranny. The 17th of November, the date of the event, became the name of a Greek revolutionary Marxist group in reference to the uprising. The date remains a national school holiday in Greece during which schools and universities stay closed in remembrance.

REVIEWS

WHAT'S ON

JANUARY

21st 'What is Class?' discussion/workshop hosted by Bristol Anarchist Bookfair Collective, at 7.30pm at Kebele, 14 Robertson Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 6JY, see bristolanarchistbookfair.org for more.

27th Bristol anarchist bookfair organising meeting at 7.30pm at Kebele, 14 Robertson Road, Easton, Bristol BS5 6JY, for details see bristolanarchistbookfair.org.

29th Talk and reading by former Newbury protester and Worthing resident Jim Hindle, author of *Nine Miles; Two winters of Anti-Road Protest* (see ninemiles.co.uk) about his experiences in the 1990s and the lessons for today, at 8pm upstairs at The Rest, Bath Place, Worthing.

31st East End Radical History Pub Crawl beginning at Salmon & Ball (where Bethnal Green Road and Cambridge Heath Road meet) at 5pm sharp! A guided radical history tour crossed with a pub crawl. No excuses.

FEBRUARY

16th Film showing of *The Wobblies* (aka the Industrial Workers of the World, or IWW) at Pogo Café, 76a Clarence Road, London E5 8HB at 7.30pm, contact 020 8533 1214 or see pogocafe.org.uk for details.

18th Campaign for Climate Change present a talk and book launch for *Too Little, Too Late: the Politics of Climate Change* by Colin Challon MP at Housmans, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX, at 7pm, see housmans.com for details.

21st and 22nd Brighton Zine Fest at Cowley Club, 12 London Road, Brighton BN1 3PS and West Hill Community Village Hall, Compton Avenue, Brighton BN1 3PS, from midday, see brightonzinefest.co.uk for more details.

27th SHAC (Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty) demo at the Bank of England, Threadneedle Street, London EC2R 8AH, at 12 noon, for details call 0845 458 0630 or see shac.net for more information.

MARCH

14th Freedom March against police state, meet at Worthing Town Hall, Chapel Road, at 2pm, part of Worthing festival of liberty, see eco-action.org/porkbolter for more.

21st Brighton Vegan Fayre at Brighton Centre, Kings Road, Brighton BN1 2GR from 11am until 6pm, call 0117 9239053, email info@yaoah.co.uk or see <http://brighton.veganfayre.org.uk> for more.

APRIL

1st Fossil Fools Day 2009 – last year saw 35 actions in 20 cities across the UK in protest against the madness of burning fossil fuels. For what's happening this year, watch the website and start organising – see fossilfoolsday.org

2nd G20 financial summit in London. Protests expected!

BOOK

Geordies – Wa Mental

by David John Douglass
published by Christie Books, £9.95

How do you make a communist revolutionary Marxist who has sympathetic views to the anarchist left?

Answer? You take a young boy who was delivered of a parentage of Irish/English and true Geordie, who was born in Jarrow and thrust into the post-war cauldron of the working-class struggle against oppression and victimisation, and then ground under the heel of an ignorant and arrogant school system. You threaten his eternal soul with all the hell and brimstone that Catholicism can muster, and then throw what's left to the dole queue.

Dave Douglass has written a number of books, including this autobiography, *Geordies – Wa Mental*, briefly published by Trade Union Publication Service before it was disastrously and inadvertently pulped as the company moved premises and then went out of existence. Now it reappears published by Christiebooks and represents the first part of a trilogy containing the complete and unabridged life story under the collective title *Stardust and Coaldust* – which reflects his contrasting spiritual and proletarian political influence and experience, and the conflict of ideologies and idealism.

In *Geordies*, Dave tells us of his beginnings and describes his life as a child in the 1950s. He tells the reader of his Irish/Northumbrian ancestry and of the visits to Ireland to see his Gaelic grandparents and cousins, their own political ideas as far apart as Cromwell and the Irish Confederate Catholics had ever been, with one part of the family sympathising with the IRA and another being English Loyalists! He tells of his Irish grandmother, who always greeted guests to the house with, "Will ye no be having a spud?" and of how the visiting "English side of the family" was always treated with a kind of reverence.

He tells us of his childhood battle with TB, of the cockroaches, the squalor, and the outright poverty, which was normal for the working class people of Jarrow. Dave writes of his earliest memories and lays them bare for the reader, sometimes lingering on a particular memory or incident and sometimes pouring forth with a brutal honesty the like of which is rarely heard on this side of the confessional box, which in itself left its own indelible imprint on the young Douglass. And yet, despite the stories of bullying, wanton violence and the horrors of the playground

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. He replied that it "isn't an argument against atheism, it's an argument against foxholes".
2. *Knitting for Anarchists*, by Anna Zilboorg. An Amazon review recommends the book for its "ability to deflect purists, stitch nazis, and other fiber arts authoritarians".
3. The 1998 Aubry laws for a 35-hour working week!
4. About 10% – the much higher figure of popular belief probably came from a US Army training manual which was covering fighting in Arctic conditions.



jungle, one soon realises that Dave looked at the world in a more open and questioning way than any of his pompous, middle-class schoolteachers could ever comprehend. Whilst condemning him to life in the lowest grades they had little idea that by the age of 7 he was already questioning the ethics of killing and eating our fellow creatures and had become a committed vegetarian, or that whilst his class mates were getting to grips with learning to read, Dave was reading about Karl Marx and the history of the Russian revolution.

Between the anecdotes and rhymes, related mainly in Standard English and interspersed with local Geordie dialect where Dave deems it necessary, is an account of the history which shaped the north east of England and the people who live there. Throughout his book, Dave, through his reminiscences of his mentor Jonty, tells how his homeland was influenced by the Romans, Vikings, Scots and Angles, making it a unique fusion and stamping an independence of character on the 'Geordies'.

Dave has managed to create a book which is entertaining, touching, fascinating, and above all, honest. His stories have you laughing out loud at certain characters and their situations, filling your eyes with tears as you feel the sadness of those involved, and squirming with embarrassment at revelations which you wouldn't admit even to your best friend. It is a book about a Geordie Lone Ranger, mad bastard Geordies, Geordies who wear their Geordie identity as a badge of hardness, Geordie meedmen.

Geordies – Wa Mental? Indeed they are.

Adge Covell

Adge Covell is a former miner and union activist who worked with Dave down Hatfield Main Colliery in Doncaster and engaged in the thick of the epic 1984–5 strike. He is the site manager of the unofficial rank and file miners website www.minersadvice.co.uk

Small axe for a big tree

Geordie hip-hop crew the Verbal Terrorists' debut album brings forthright radical messages to agitate, educate and entertain. Tom Jennings goes with the flow.

Waxing and waning over the decades, UK hip-hop has never seemed sure of its ambitions or its place in youth culture and popular music. Parochially defensive about the movement's stateside origins, its adherents typically affect an elitist subcultural pose – which wider audiences disdain, instead dancing to crossovers with reggae and R&B or rave styles from jungle and garage to grime and dubstep. Nevertheless, rap's inherent transgressiveness reliably generates genuinely resistive voices this side of the pond – including landmarks like Skinnyman's *Council Estate of Mind* (2004) and consistent consciousness from such as Klashnekoff, Jehst and Braintax. Thankfully, straight-up revolutionary lyricism also no longer only comes with American accents (think Paris, Dead Prez, Immortal Technique), and Verbal Terrorists' excellent debut *Small Axe* delivers just what it says on the tin – “Governmental advisory: seditious lyrics” – with passion, panache and intelligence and some banging beats to boot.

On the grass-roots DIY tip with Tyneside label White Elephant, MCs Drop Dead Fred and Nobull, DJ Bigfoot and producers Mr Blazey and Burt combine blistering verbal barrages agin the bad global B-boys (Blair, Bush, Brown et al – for example: “Mr ‘Witch Project’ sucking up to ‘Shrubbery’ / Democracy’s a farce and it’s daylight robbery”) – with deft denunciations of the consumer society’s destruction of lifeworlds for the benefit of the rich. Emphasis on the hassles of the modern urban environment (‘NE64 Life’, ‘Idle Hands’) dovetail with trends in national (‘Fuck Bovis’, ‘New Britain’) and international government (‘Kindness Is His Middle Name’, ‘Wealth of Nations’), with close attention to class conflict, collective struggle and communal culture (‘Heavy Affiliates’, ‘Hardcore’). Enunciative skill and dexterity shine throughout, offering political insight without arrogance or contrivance and allowing contrasting musical styles and guest slots to reflect eclectic influences without losing focus or direction.

The final cut, ‘Dance of the Money Men’, exemplifies the Verbal Terrorists’ stance as well as honouring Fred and Nobull’s backgrounds in left-wing families and networks. A simple drum break bolsters the Old Rope



String Band’s folksy busking vibe – a fixture at North-East demos and festivals back in the day – with vitriolic anti-capitalism peppering the rabble-rousing chorus:

“Ching, ching, ching goes the beat that we dance to / Or left on welfare and never get a chance to / Work, work, work just to spend, spend, spend / Whilst we’re stuck in the crowd that watch the Dance of the Money Men. / We watch the dance of the money men, they cackle and they scream / We take a chance on the lottery, we love to buy the dream / But there is nothing at this rainbow’s end / There isn’t any crock of gold to spend.”

At the other end of the sonic spectrum, ‘Idle Hands’ wraps Burt’s classically soulful, guitar-picking sample around verses meditating on wasted lives coping with a terminally messed-up world:

“Driven to distraction in this city of sin / ‘Cause we’re living trapped in by the grittiest things / We’re willing to be villains for the prettiest bling / But divven’t give in, just keep chilling with kin ... / I stay calm like the mood of the song / But I know I might blow ‘cause my fuse isn’t strong / Me I elevate a thirsty and righteous man / ‘Cause the devil makes work for these idle hands.”

Meanwhile, accomplished (if less memorable) instrumentals elsewhere foreground diagnoses of the causes – as in ‘Edukators’: “We’re after social equality, better global economy / Government’s a waste of space, from PM candidates to local authorities / Branded slaves to these total monopolies / With their vocal apologies to win voters’ majorities” – capped with snippets of political speeches, including Chomsky: “making corporations accountable would mean abolishing them”.

And fortunately, since space here permits only hints of their sophisticated subtlety, the lyrics will soon be listed online – where you can already check selected tracks.*

Axes to Grind

If the group’s moniker conforms to the genre’s traditionally inflated claims to self-importance, the album title (invoking Bob Marley’s imagery of felling a ‘big tree’) shoulders a humbler role in the historical fight for freedom and equality – their embrace of diverse musics matching admirably non-sectarian support of various political campaigns and events (including the last Projectile Anarchist Festival in Newcastle). Nonetheless, crowd-pleasing generalities aside, expressions of what’s wrong with the world – however cleverly and convincingly articulated – would ideally embody portents of what could be done about it. Conversely, for example, seeming to support charismatic leaderships is as dodgy as demands for ‘nationalisation’ conjuring up the evils of state control and nationalism. Parroting (rather than remixing) the lowest common denominators of popular protest thus risks being mistaken as woolly liberals or, worse, allies of the authoritarian Left’s would-be dictators and bureaucratic manipulators who ordinary folk justifiably despise. Obviously these issues trouble us all, but hip-hop’s distinctive cultural paradigm does offer pathways through the impasse.

Yet despite notable achievements, *Small Axe* exhibits a somewhat monotonous vocal tone and rhythm – concentrating on static juxtaposition condensing symbol and metaphor merely to assert opinion. But the

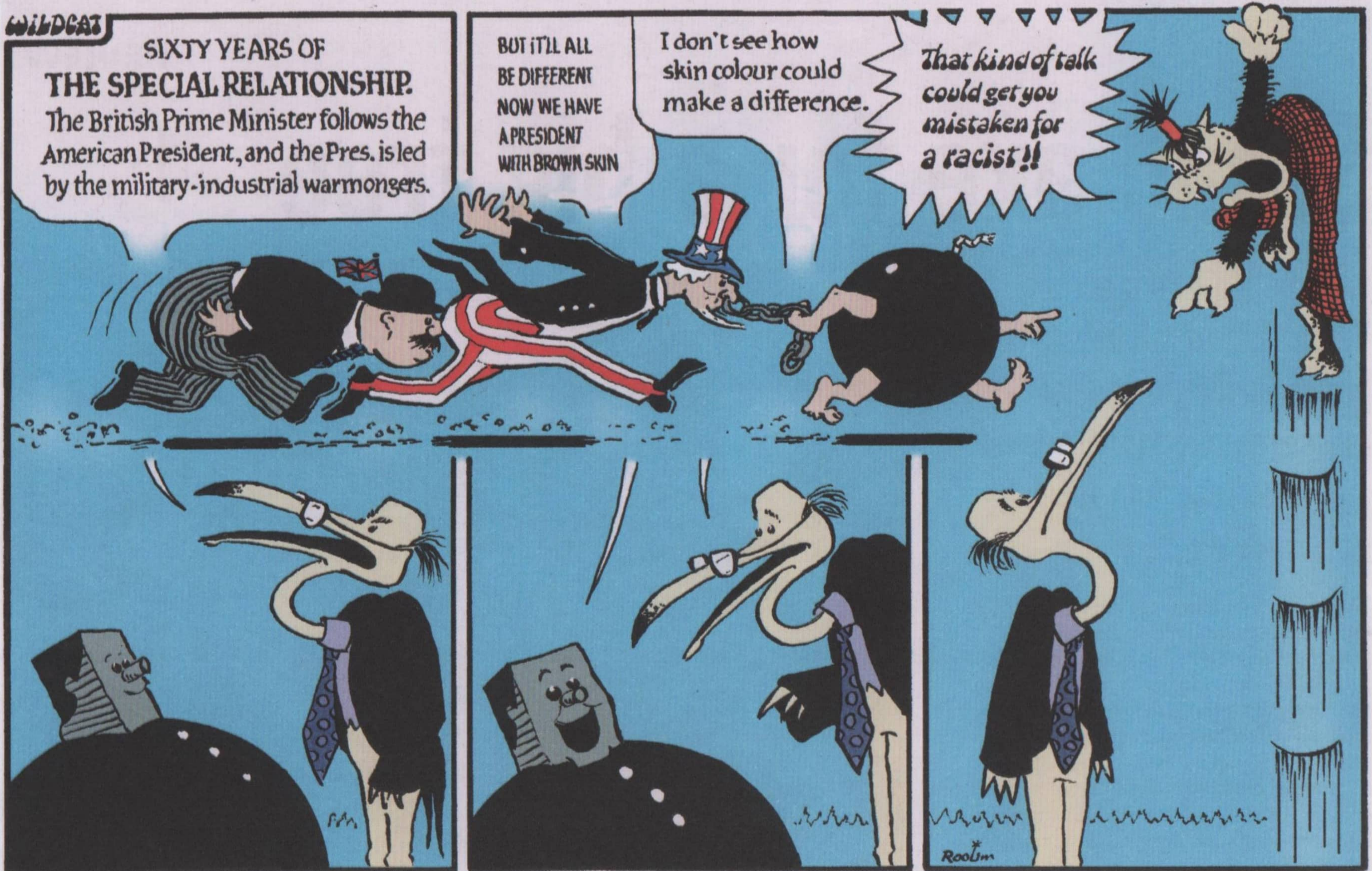
WILDCAT

SIXTY YEARS OF THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP.
The British Prime Minister follows the American President, and the Pres. is led by the military-industrial warmongers.

BUT IT'LL ALL BE DIFFERENT NOW WE HAVE A PRESIDENT WITH BROWN SKIN

I don't see how skin colour could make a difference.

That kind of talk could get you mistaken for a racist!!



Review

◀ page 15

African-trickster and slave-resistance ancestry bequeaths greater potential – rap’s full rhetorical range wielding spoken word and musical backdrop dynamically for storytelling and confessional; humour lacing fury; inspiration beyond realism; nourishing heart and guts as well as brain. The MC’s many-layered calls then prompt corresponding depth and breadth in responses among audiences predisposed to puncture the pretensions of power in the dancehall’s carnivalesque celebration of momentary escape from mundane drudgery. Doubtless the Verbal Terrorists deploy such performative nuances in their rave and showcase gig appearances across the land (albeit restricted

by techno’s manic beats-per-minute ratios!). So in future recordings I look forward to more personal touches anchored in lived experience rather than objective knowledge, along with a sense of how their practice strives to reconcile its contradictions to facilitate positive change. I’m confident these lads will go from strength to strength, but meantime this CD represents a valuable addition to anyone’s library – I’ll certainly be enjoying it on a regular basis.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

* At www.myspace.com/verbalterrorists, where *Small Axe* is available via PayPal for £10 (£5 low/unwaged) plus £2 p&p. Or get it by post from (and with cheques payable to) Joseph Turnbull, c/o Black Flame Books, 1a/1b Bolingbroke Street, Heaton, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 5PH.

THE QUIZ

1. It is a military saying that there are no atheists in foxholes, implying that the danger of combat makes a man a believer in God. How did author James Morrow respond to this?
2. Which book is of interest to libertarians who use needles?
3. What did one French boss describe as being “worse than the October revolution”?
4. According to recent scientific research, how much body heat is lost through your uncovered head?

Answers on page 14

The Anarchist Quiz Book by Martin Howard is available from Freedom Press for £5 post free.

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