

BENEFITS CULL MOVES

Forced labour and punishment is the future of welfare

The Welfare Reform Bill 2009 has now passed through the first stages of the Commons in a lightning-fast process which has left campaigning groups struggling to keep up.

The bill includes several clauses which have outraged left-leaning groups and looks set to mount a heavy assault on welfare rights as the number of people needing the social safety net starts to soar.

Among some of the most controversial parts of the bill are the eventual abolition of income support in favour of a conditional jobseekers' allowance, in which the disabled, lone parents and partners of benefit recipients would be placed on a spectrum of fitness and expected to work towards full job readiness.

Anyone out of work who is fit to do so will be eligible to be placed on mandatory full time 'work-experience' schemes, effectively paying claimants just £1.75 an hour for a 35-hour working week – potentially significantly undermining wage levels of those remaining in work.

Lone parents would be placed in 'Progression to Work' groups which would see them put **page 3** ▶▶

LENS CAP SPAIN



A march in Lebrija, near Seville. The town of some 26,000 inhabitants has gone on general strike to demand jobs, led by the CNT anarcho-syndicalist union and unemployed workers' groups. Local press have done their best to discredit the strike, calling it irresponsible, but have gained little traction in the town.

Photo: sevilla.cnttales

WILDCAT AFTERMATH TURNS UGLY

In the aftermath of the wildcat strikes in the refinery industry over hiring practices designed to drive down union power and working standards, the government has responded with new punitive measures against immigrants.

In a series of announcements and responses to the strikes, dubbed the 'foreign worker' strikes across much of the media, home secretary Jacqui Smith has announced that she is considering making it more difficult for skilled incomers to get work in the UK, saying that unless they have a masters-level degree and wages of over £20,000, they should be deported.

She has also set out ten 'milestones' for the UK Border Agency to meet this year, including

the opening soon of a new immigration removal centre near Gatwick.

The measures add to a new policy due to be implemented from 1st April which will see companies told to advertise jobs to UK workers before being offered out in Europe.

They come as new studies begin to show a major flow of EU migrants away from Britain as jobs dry up and pay falls, with a 35,000 drop in the number of Eastern European workers nationally at the end of last year.

The refinery strikes, which took place in January, saw an initially nationalist strike over jobs for British workers quickly evolve into a demand for more jobs and a fairer deal from company Total.

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NEWS

IN BRIEF

EDUCATION: The UCU education union has given in to a compromise deal over a dispute on planned job losses in Plymouth.

The University of Plymouth has spent the past five months seeking ways to shed 223 jobs – about 6.5% of its workforce – in an attempt to cut costs by £10 million. However following a lengthy campaign, this has been cut to 42 posts, with no compulsory redundancies. Despite the improved situation, staff at the university have voiced concerns that workloads will continue to increase under the current arrangement.

HOUSING: A total of 40,000 properties were repossessed by lenders during 2008, up from 25,900 in 2007, the Council of Mortgage Lenders has said. Repossession levels are expected to soar further this year as the credit crunch and deteriorating economy continue to bite, with the group predicting 75,000 people will lose their homes in 2009.

IMMIGRATION: A policy of denying people from outside the EU jobs unless it is advertised in Britain first has been mooted by Home Secretary Jacqui Smith. The measures would come on top of the existing points-based system which denies entry to the UK to anyone who isn't highly-skilled or wealthy.

JOBS: Unions and the Citizens Advice Bureau have warned that as more jobs are cut, companies are attempting to reduce redundancy payouts by increasing the number of spurious sackings and pretending layoffs would only be temporary.

In the last three months of 2008, the CAB's network of offices saw inquiries about dismissals increase by 18% on the same period a year before, with 7,500 people seeking advice every month on average, most over alleged unfair, constructive or wrongful dismissal. Employment tribunals service statistics show that in the 12 months to March 2008 there were just under 41,000 cases accepted for consideration, while in the last nine months alone there have been nearly 38,000, a 23% increase in the monthly average.

POLICING: Trigger-happy north Wales police fired 50,000 volts in to an 89 year-old man after he'd absconded from a care home in a confused and vulnerable state. A police spokesperson said: "the specially trained officers made the judgement, in order to protect the life of the man, that the use of Taser was the safest and most appropriate option."

TORTURE: A shocking new report has alleged British security agents have been working with Pakistani counterparts to aid in the torture of suspects. In a study, due to be published by Human Rights Watch, at least ten people have allegedly been tortured in Pakistan and then questioned by UK intelligence officials. It warns cases may surface and suggests such torture has been a regular part of intelligence gathering.

LENS CAP LONDON



A photographer takes a pointed shot of police during a protest against section 76 of the Terrorism Act 2008, which makes it an offence to take photographs of police officers. Hundreds of professional and amateur photographers turned out for the event on February 16th, which demanded the repeal of a law which would make it almost impossible to gather evidence of police misbehaviour.

BNP sidestep football row

The BNP have announced they will not be holding a rally on 14th March after police said an Everton match to cope, but have said they will reschedule.

Some antifascists have noted that the BNP have made enormous capital in the city out of the publicity, and will have received minimal damage after they agreed to move the date.

The party made national headlines after the police asked Everton FC to move its game so they could deal with a mass leafleting in Liverpool, potentially inconveniencing tens of thousands.

After initially refusing to move the day of the rally, a few days later the party backed down in the face of angry reactions from fans and antifascist groups. However this is

now being spun as a magnanimous gesture on their part.

In their Merseyside BNP blog they said: "We can leaflet whenever we want, so we are calling the police bluff by postponing this activity. There is plenty of time to switch the game back."

Following the events of last year, when the BNP's membership list was released by disgruntled ex-members, the party has continued to gather strength in preparation for the European elections.

In recent by-elections, the party took a seat the ward of Sevenoaks in Kent, with a 41% vote – their first seat south of the Thames and the first time they had stood there. In Leicestershire, another first time out saw them get 28%.



Huge pensions protest in Dublin

About 100,000 people have taken part in protests in Dublin city centre on 21st February to vent their anger at the Irish government's handling of the country's recession.

They oppose plans to impose a 'pension levy' (in real terms a 10% pay cut) on 350,000 public sector workers. Trade union organisers of the march said workers did not cause the economic crisis but were having to pay for it.

Reports say the plan could cost the 350,000 public sector workers between 1,500 and 2,800 euros (£2,500) a year.

There were conflicting estimates of the numbers of people at the march, which began on the north side of Dublin in the middle of the afternoon. Police said 100,000 people were on the streets, while organisers said they expected 200,000 to protest in total.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU),

which organised the march, said it was campaigning for 'a fairer and better way' of dealing with the economic crisis.

"Our priority is about ensuring that people are looked after, the interests of people are looked after, not the interests of big business or the wealthy," Sally-Anne Kinahan, ICTU's secretary general, told the BBC.

However, reports from the Workers' Solidarity Movement (an Irish anarchist organisation) said: "The idea of the so called 'Pensions Levy' come from some of the very Irish Congress of Trade Unions leadership who are supposed to negotiate on behalf of workers. This is one revelation that emerged on Saturday morning at a meeting of over 100 public sector trade unionists and two delegates from the Waterford Glass occupation. We were meeting in the Davenport hotel, Dublin to discuss a collective response to

government attacks on workers and in particular the public sector pay cut.

"The revelation that the source of the 'pensions levy' may have come from within the ICTU delegation was made by Civil Public & Services Union (CPSU) executive member Terry Kelleher, reporting on what their executive had been told by the CPSU General Secretary who was at the talks. It's claimed that when the proposed 10% pay cut was put on the table part of the ICTU delegation proposed the 'pensions levy' as being more sellable."

Ireland, which was once one of Europe's fastest-growing economies, has fallen into recession faster than many other members of the European Union. The country officially fell into recession in September 2008, and unemployment has risen sharply in the following months.

(adapted from libcom.org)

Benefit cull moves closer

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on individualised schemes making them take action planning and work-related activities.

The age at which they are forced off income support onto JSA will change from October 2009, to ten years old – down from 16 a few years ago. There will be no increase in the supply of childcare until 2015, which would only find funding if benefits payouts had fallen by that point.

Known drug users meanwhile would be told to make and comply with a rehabilitation plan, and may have to submit to drug testing.

Around one million disabled people, including many with mental health difficulties, will be taken off disability benefits and put through a mandatory rehabilitation programme to make them prepare for work, taking compulsory

work-focused interviews, training or unpaid work placements.

Failure to follow directions in any of the above scenarios will result in cuts to benefits.

Campaign groups across the country have scrambled to bring their opinions to bear on the bill, with mental health and autism support groups at the front of the line.

Mental health charity MIND believes that the bill could end up penalising people who are not able to take care of themselves, noting that if someone left work experience due to mental health issues they could lose benefits. They said: "It is unfair and unrealistic to expect employment advisors without skills in mental health to make these judgements."

The National Autistic Society meanwhile

said: "Due to their social and communication difficulties the behaviour of someone with autism can also be easily misinterpreted and they may be mistakenly labelled as 'difficult' or unco-operative. We are deeply concerned that people with autism are at an increased risk of facing compulsory work programmes and hefty sanctions due to misunderstandings related to their condition."

In the unions, concerns have been raised over both the increased workload which a reduced workforce will have to deal with if such programmes are to be implemented and run, particularly as the number of jobless people rises, and the continued blurring of workers' roles into a policing of the unemployed.

Rob Ray

PUBLIC SECTOR

Anger builds over continued PFI

Campaigners slam controversial plans to revitalise market with state funds

Health campaigning groups have voiced their anger after it was confirmed earlier this month that a large percentage of the public bailout fund would be diverted to faltering PFI projects, as predicted by *Freedom* at the end of last year.

The Campaigning group Health Emergency has demanded a full reversal of the 'busted-flush' of PFI and a return to direct public ownership and funding, saying that the current attempt to marketise the NHS has left hospitals across the country facing bankruptcy.

The group have held up the example of the flagship Barts and the Royal London PFI – a scheme worth around £1 billion – which will see debt servicing profits of 16%, nearly three times the assumed figure in the government's own tariff of Payment by Results charges.

The scheme will bleed the NHS budget in East London dry for many years to come if it is allowed to run its course.

With cash running dry for new schemes it appears Darling's bailout will enable the private sector to resume normal profit-taking from hospital building schemes when the market improves, socialising the whole risk of PFI from top to bottom.

Geoff Martin, Health Emergency Head of Campaigns, said: "The Government have recognised that private funding of hospitals and other public works is dead in the water but instead of taking the whole raft of



planned schemes back into public ownership they are offering the speculators and bankers another fat wodge of taxpayers money to prop up their profits and bonuses. That is an outrage.

"PFI is part of the same package of reckless financial speculating, fuelled by greed, which has wrecked the UK economy. Rather than an expensive course of intensive care, funded by the taxpayer, the PFI should have the plug pulled right now in favour of the publicly-funded and publicly-owned alternative."

The PFI market had begun to fall apart as the scale of the financial crisis hit home, as many investing groups pulled stopped offering the loans necessary to pay for major infrastructure projects, or demanded that loans be paid rather than refinanced.

As a result, the government has stepped in both to guarantee that existing loans will be paid, and as the direct backer for new projects – ignoring the entire premise behind PFI that the private sector was supposed to find the capital and shoulder the risk on big projects in exchange for their profit margins.

Databases cost as much as defence

Building and running databases for the police and secret services to monitor the entire gamut of health, wealth and activity in the UK population now costs around the same amount as the entire defence budget, according to new estimates.

As spending on defence resources continues to climb above inflation, rising to £35 billion this year despite a supposed winding down of troops in Iraq, the cost of state databases, including particularly the ID card database and the NHS 'spine' has hit £34 billion, not including the cost of bringing database laws through parliament or requiring the private sector to maintain their own databases for governmental perusal at any point.

A plan to monitor online traffic by placing all calls, emails and texts into a central database to monitor who is calling who would cost £12 billion by itself, using

a database of names as people are forced to register their identity on purchase of any new phones.

Officially, over 25 Acts of Parliament and some 50 other measures have been passed specifically on the subject of surveillance and individual freedoms, with an unknown number of unofficial guideline policies also being brought in over the last few years.

Rules preventing departments from reading each other's databases have also been relaxed, causing serious concerns that beyond state malpractice, individual infiltrators could have access to comprehensive information about almost anyone.

Databases currently in operation or being built include areas such as health, education, childcare, foreign movement and contacts, financial records and online habits.

One view to rule them all

An expansion of plans to use college lecturers to monitor and report on 'extremist' behaviour has met minimal resistance from the UCU further education union. Lecturers are being given guidelines telling them to watch for graffiti symbols, monitor students' artwork and online use, keep track of friendship networks and note strong opinions.

At present the focus of the guidelines is on al-Qaeda and related fundamentalist groups, however any group professing politics outside the existing system could potentially be targeted – animal rights is also on the list.

Alongside monitoring, lecturers will be expected to create space for 'listening to and supporting mainstream voices', effectively undermining education as a direct method of undermining other viewpoints in the young.

This latest set of guidelines follows on from plans to make universities monitor students from the EU.

IN BRIEF

COMMUNICATIONS: Staff at Airwave, the secure digital radio network used by the emergency services, have threatened strike action after its owner announced plans to cut 11% of the workforce.

Airwave was being unreasonable by offering workers only the minimum legal consultation period of 30 days and insisting on some compulsory cuts, they said.

DEFENCE: BAE systems is continuing to post rising profits as the downturn deepens, with its land and armaments division doing particularly well following continued high spending on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

The company said its order book had risen from £38.6bn to £46.5bn, and all its divisions increased their turnover for the year as massive long-term spending plans from the UK government continue to go through.

MEDIA: A strike by the *Yorkshire Evening Post* has seen more than 140 join the picket line in Leeds, as a row breaks out with the Press Association, who are providing replacement copy to management.

The four-day strike is being undermined by the agreement, say journalists, with only a few staff at the national newswire refusing to provide more text during the stoppage.

MEDIA: Journalists at the *Morning Star* have called off a one-day strike "as a sign of good faith".

Union members on the title had voted by 11 to three in favour of the walkout next Monday after rejecting a 3% pay increase plus a one-off four per cent lump sum bonus.

But the National Union of Journalists chapel said that it had decided to suspend the industrial action to allow talks to continue.

MOTORING: Workers at BMW have expressed their anger after the company sacked 850 temporary workers at their Mini plant in Oxford. The group removed an entire shift from work, picking on casual workers as they do not qualify for redundancy or pensions.

PAY: The average pay increase for FTSE 100 non-executives – including those whose pay was frozen – was 6.3 per cent last year, according to figures published by Income Data Services (IDS).

The highest-paid non-executives were at Kazakhmys, the mining company, where fees averaged £120,000 in 2008, despite an 82% fall in the share price.

PRINTING: Cambridge University Press is closing its printing facilities, sacking 133 of its 170 workers there, and some on the editorial side.

A march organised on the 14th February 2009 to protest against these closures drew 500 people.

Rail cuts despite profits

All three of the companies involved in a major upcoming rail dispute are cutting staff despite growing profits and increased dividends to shareholders – and amidst plans from the government to start subsidising travel for the unemployed to attend interviews.

National Express, Stagecoach and First Group, the ultimate owners of the three franchises currently balloting for strike action, are planning on cutting the equivalent of more than 1,000 full time roles as part of a major cost-cutting drive for 2009.

They have accused the RMT union, which has balloted 3,500 of their workers for industrial action, of being 'out of touch' with current economic realities. However the profit margins of each group are looking significantly more healthy than other industries, buoyed by continued heavy government subsidy and monopoly positions on the tracks.

Stagecoach owns South West Trains, which is cutting 660 posts – well over 10% of its workforce, has already increased its fares by 6% at peak and 7.2% at off-peak times. The larger entity made pre-tax profits of £105.2

million for the six months to September.

National Express, which is planning on removing 300 workers from its East Anglian line, and wants to casualise many staff, paid out more than £40 million to its shareholders in the six months up to June 2008 and raised ticket prices by six per cent in January. Underlying pre-tax profits for 2008 are expected to come in 10% higher at £195.3m.

And First Group, which runs First Capital Connect, proposes to reduce the opening hours of well over 40 ticket offices across its network by 800 hours a week, despite increasing fares by up to 9% in January and its parent group paying £55.5 million to shareholders in the six months up to September 2008. It recorded an interim six-month operating profit of £48.3 million to September.

Postal votes in all of the disputes will open on 3rd March and close on 17th March.

The same balloting timetable has also been scheduled in a further separate dispute at London Overground, over a breakdown in industrial relations.



NUM lawyers guilty of misconduct

Lawyers at Raleys, the law firm at the heart of the NUM compensation scandal, have been suspended after being found guilty of professional misconduct for slicing £7.7 million off payouts to disabled coal-miners.

Three partners at the Barnsley-based team breaches rules over their handling of 60,000 claims from NUM members whose health had been damaged at work.

The NUM provided 29,000 clients to the firm, which was being paid by the government to take on their cases, in exchange for

a 3% cut of the profits going to the union. Some of this money was then ploughed back into funding claims for a complaint called miners' knee.

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

The six Raleys partners were also found guilty of conduct unbecoming a solicitor over a separate batch of 19,000 claims that the firm purchased for £5.4 million from Zuko Legal, a cold-calling claims farmer.

INTERNATIONAL

IN BRIEF

FINLAND: Clerical workers at Tikkurila, part of Finnish chemicals group Kemira, have staged a walkout in protest against the company's planned job cuts.

Three hundred workers took part in the walkout which they say was triggered by the publishing of the company's final-quarter figures. The company stated last month it was considering cutting up to about 500 jobs at Tikkurila from a workforce of about 3,800 people.

IRAN: An independent workers' union in southern Iran is facing growing repression from the 'revolutionary court' for their role in a 46-day strike last year.

Five thousand workers at the Iranian Sugar Cane Plantation in the city of Shush formed an independent trade union following their strike in June of last year. The union states that official organisations created by the government have failed to protect workers' conditions. Last year thousands of people downed tools in protest over wages owed but police, security forces and Revolutionary Guards responded with mass arrests and repeated interventions.

IRELAND: Dublin Bus drivers plan to strike indefinitely from 1st March in solidarity with 190 drivers laid off this month.

Dublin Bus announced major cuts in an attempt to save 31 million euros, the cuts will see 120 buses taken off the streets and 290 staff let go throughout the company.

The striking drivers are calling for the reinstatement of all staff and more investment in public transport infrastructure across the city. Over 1,300 drivers are expected to take part in the action which will see up to 500,000 commuters potentially left without transport. Dublin Bus are currently refusing to negotiate.

ITALY: Three hundred illegal immigrants were transferred from the southernmost Italian island of Lampedusa to holding centres across Italy following a riot in which they destroyed an entire wing of their detention centre. The immigrants were protesting at expulsion orders issued to 100 Tunisian illegal immigrants and the overcrowded conditions they are forced to live in.

Concerns have been raised several times about the conditions at the Lampedusa detention centre and the Italian government's policy of repatriating illegal migrants to countries where they could suffer human rights violations.

MOROCCO: Online journalists have formed a new union to defend their rights and regulate the industry. A committee is now planning a national conference for online journalists, bloggers and other web – publishers to launch the National Moroccan E-press Syndicate. The groups says their objective of establishing a new syndicate is to provide rights and recognition to a new and significant generation of young journalists.

LENS CAP BORDEAUX



A student member of the SUD Union takes part in a 3,000-strong protest in Bordeaux, France. Academics, researchers and students have united to call for new employment rights and a reform of teacher training. The crowd marched behind a banner proclaiming 'Knowledge is expensive, try ignorance'.

French general strike

Dubbed 'Black Thursday' in the international press, last month French workers displayed an impressive show of solidarity against the growing collapse of the world economic system.

Over 2.5 million people held a general strike across the country to demonstrate against mounting job losses, cut-backs in education and what is seen as worker's bailing out the bosses.

The strike, supported by three-quarters of the French population and called for by the eight biggest unions in France, caused major disruption to the transport infrastructure of the country, with widespread cancellations on the rail and air networks.

Unemployment reached 2.07 million in

2008, rising by approximately 8.5%. It is no surprise then that the 300,000 Parisians marching on the streets of the capital were chanting 'Sarkozy gives money to the people who created this crisis, but what about the man in the street?'

Capitalists now worry that events in France are a sign of things to come for the rest of us. With growing labour unrest across Europe it seems that the challenge to capitalism will come from workers as well as its own failing economics.

French workers have opened a path that will be followed by their counterparts across Europe and the world. The crisis in capitalism has yet to reach its depth, but the effects of the economic collapse are all too clear.

Notes from the United States

In, Pennsylvania, two judges, Mark Ciavarella and Michael Conahan have, pleaded guilty to taking substantial bribes – \$2.6 (£1.8) million – in return for ensuring juvenile suspects ended up in jails owned by private companies PA Child Care and Western PA Child Care.

The allegation is that the companies paid the bribes to have youths jailed despite objections by their probation officers. Since 2002 5,000 such young people are estimated to have been sentenced by Ciavarella. It also seems likely that the

judges were responsible for facilitating the building of jails and forcing 'waivers of counsel', where those accused give up their right to representation.

Hillary Transue, for example, was sent down for posting a parody of her school's Deputy Head on MySpace with the gloss, "I hope she has a sense of humour". She hadn't, and the teacher's complaint to the police resulted in a harassment petition against Transue. A court hearing lasting less than a minute-and-a-half left her effectively

The colonies are in revolt

As class struggle on the French mainland continues to intensify, with a general strike crippling French infrastructure at the beginning of February followed by various one-day stoppages across both the public and private sectors, the French colony of Guadeloupe has been in open revolt since a general strike was called on 20th January.

Guadeloupe, which lies thousands of miles from Paris in the Caribbean and whose official website lists the island as an integral part of the French Republic, has been in French hands since 1815.

The French dominion's population is split into two groups; those who are descended from the African slaves brought to the island at the peak of the slave trade to work on the island's large banana plantations and the landed white ascendancy, who ran those large plantations and whose descendents remain in control of the island today, though a minority.

The island's caste system has been the central feature around which the recent uprising in has revolved. Christiane Taubura, an MP from French Guyana, has admitted the situation in Guadeloupe is not far from social apartheid.

While Government websites may describe Guadeloupe as "a central component of the French Republic", trade unions in France have so far chosen to ignore the colony's trade unions strike for better living conditions, and media coverage of the strike has been rare.

While the traditional French unions may be ignoring their 'comrades' in the Caribbean the French government has taken aversive action, sending detachments of the CRS to the island.

So far the CRS has managed to murder one rioter, which leaves them with 99 more kills to go before they match their 1967 record of 100 Guadeloupeans killed by the



CRS during disturbances that year.

While rioting has been a feature of the strikes, echoing recent happenings in Greece, the strike has also brought thousands onto the streets to protest in a peaceful manner, with 40,000 attending a 25th January carnival to support the Unions demands.

The demands of the strikers led by the majority trade union, the UGTG (General Union of Guadeloupean Workers), have centred on the price of basic necessities.

They call for an immediate reduction of 50 centimes on car fuel, a lowering of prices

of transport and water, a rent freeze, an increase of €200 in the minimum wage, permanent contracts for all temporary workers and the right to education and training for youth and workers.

They also want Priority to be given to Guadeloupeans in key employment posts and an end to racism in employment.

The development of local production to satisfy the population's needs and an end to taxes on fertilizers and cattle feed also figure among the total of 146 demands advanced by the strikers.

Notes from the Unites States

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unrepresented after her mother too signed a waiver of counsel. Jail.

Eighteen-year-old Jamie Quinn meanwhile was sent to a military boot camp called VisionQuest in Quincy Township for eleven months after getting into an argument with one of her friends four years earlier: "It ... was just a basic fight. She slapped me in the face, and I did the same thing back. There was no marks, no witnesses, nothing. It was just her word against my word. My only charges were simple assault and harassment." Incarceration nevertheless.

In reaction to hearing that the judges would get just seven years in jail themselves, Quinn said, "It just makes me really question other authority figures and people that we're supposed to look up to and trust. I mean, Ciavarella has been a judge for a long time, from what I know, and a well-respected one."

Bob Schwartz, Co-founder and Executive Director of the Juvenile Law Center, points out: "... in most Pennsylvania counties, almost all kids have a lawyer all the time. Pennsylvania law requires all youth to have a lawyer at the time of the first hearing before a detention officer, to a judge at every subsequent hearing. Pennsylvania has granted kids, in many ways, more rights to lawyers than many states.

"On the other hand, in Luzerne County, that was a right that was largely ignored. The probation department was intimidated by the judges. They are court employees. [It's claimed that ...] Judge Ciavarella and Judge Conahan had probation officers change their recommendations, ordered them to change their recommendations, in order to make sure that they had enough kids to fill slots at these childcare facilities."

Louis Further

Ukraine plant occupied

Workers have been occupying an engineering plant in Ukraine since the start of February demanding payment of owed wages, nationalisation of the plant, and production of socially useful machinery.

The workers are now calling for the struggle to spread across the country and for workers at other plants to seize control.

In a statement, a group of Crimean Anarchists who have been attending demonstrations in support of the occupation and recently visited the factory, are counterposing socialisation of production as an alternative to nationalisation.

However, the group are also raising the question, 'are the workers ready for this?'

"The liberation of workers is their own job and they should keep this in mind and not trust their lives and working conditions to the bourgeoisie or the state," the group stated.

Architects of social change – Radical Routes

Rob Ray visits the co-op of co-ops, and finds it's safer than houses

Debate is raging around the ongoing housing crisis in Britain. It's no longer a case of 'too dear' but one of 'no loans' as the financial crisis causes new housing sales to fall dramatically, construction companies to hack back their operations and the social housing project to stumble.

But this turnaround may have a silver lining for some. As prices come down, different models of housing people are beginning to come to the fore, with one anarchist-led initiative in particular likely to get a chance to push its progressive ideas – Radical Routes.

Founded originally as an education co-operative in Birmingham opposed to Thatcher's education system, the group is coming of age in more ways than one, celebrating its 21st birthday this year, and finally overcoming a block on expansion which had been caused by the housing bubble over the last half-decade.

Assuming the title 'co-op of co-ops', Radical Routes is today an umbrella organisation for some 28 co-operatives at various stages of operation, representing hundreds of people, and provides sustainable finance to radicals wanting to set up horizontally-run housing or workers' groups, primarily on low incomes.

In most cases its funds, raised via the group's Rootstock investment vehicle, are handed out as bridging loans, to allow member co-ops to raise the money to get a normal mortgage from sympathetic banks like Triodos, where they might otherwise come up short.

This has allowed a network of radical groups to build up stable communes around the country, from London to Brighton, to Oxford and Glasgow, which would never have been possible relying on the traditional banking system alone.

It's a function which became less relevant at the height of the housing bubble, when prices soared so high that even with the boost provided by Radical Routes, most prospective housing co-ops were simply unable to afford

new mortgages.

But as prices come crashing down, the caution enforced by operating with far less funds and a horizontal structure has come storming back for the current crisis – and after three years of standing still Radical Routes has just welcomed its first new building into the fold, a six-member co-op called Out of Town, from Brighton.

The group itself is also looking to give more loans where it can, as the disappearance of interest payments on its funds means it is better off with the money out and doing than leaving it in the bank.

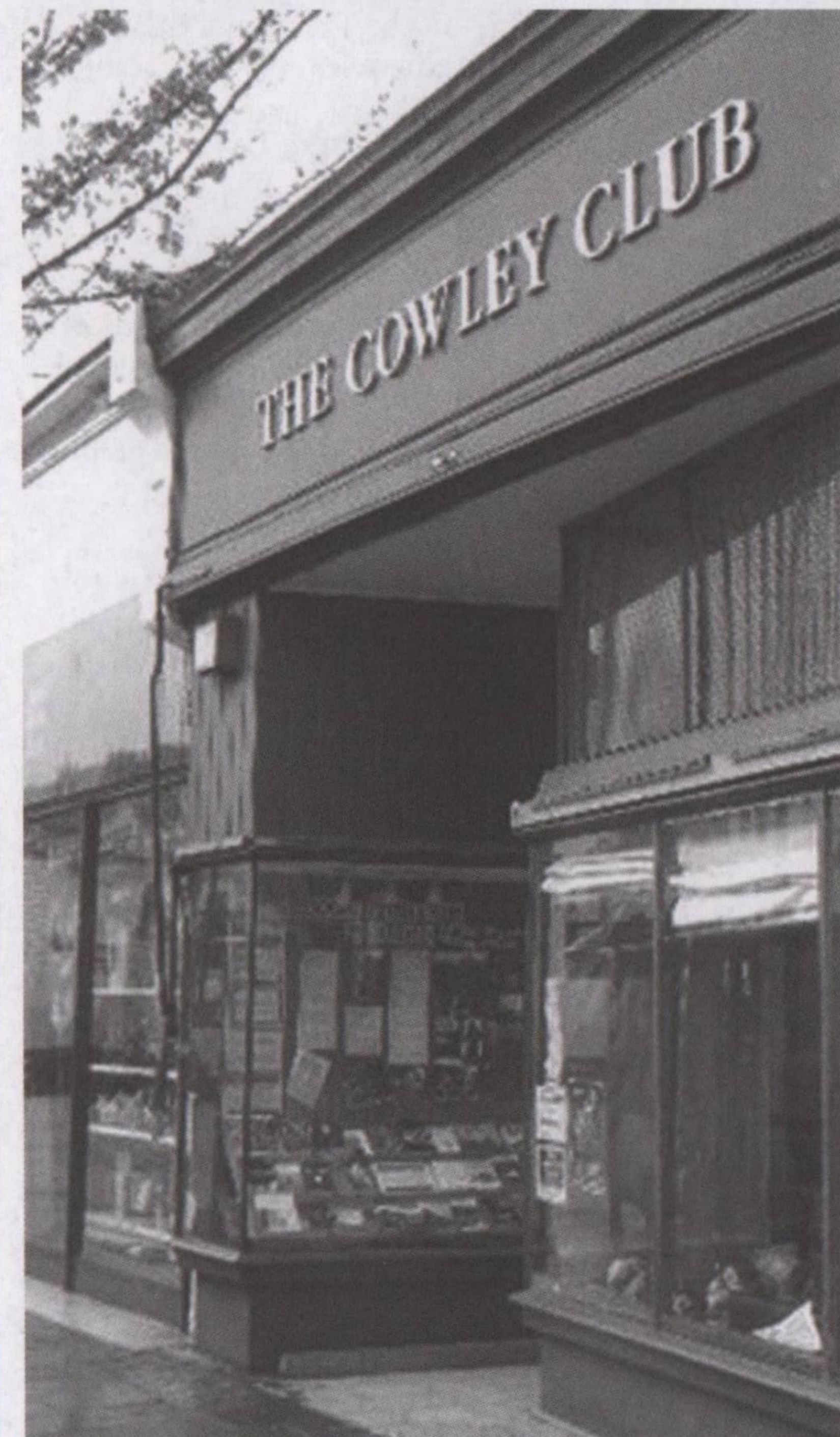
At its quarterly meeting, Radical Routes working groups reported an upsurge of interest in its loans, and introductory meetings at the most recent gathering saw a significant increase in new faces, including several activist veterans emboldened to take the plunge and start the process of joining and fundraising.

That process is lengthy. Induction into the Radical Routes co-op includes a rigorous vetting process, with groups required to send delegates to three gatherings in a row, the first as observers and to learn the ropes, the second to present a statement of intent about their group and the third to give a presentation about who they are and what they want to achieve.

Once in the organisation, member co-ops are required to put in a certain number of hours per week to help maintain the overall entity, and must place one of their number on a working group to help both with organising and with learning about how the intricate system functions.

This has allowed Radical Routes to remain cohesive despite numerous comings and goings from the overall organisation. Much like the torrent system of downloading files online, only some groups are willing and able to continue being part of the network after they have bought their building, and these provide the continuity which trains and guides new groups in their search for a home. Some, like the Blackcurrent collective (currently down on its luck, see page 12), have been around since the beginning.

It has also meant that the success rate for established members in paying back their loans has been 'pretty much 100%', as younger co-ops get significant help from old hands in drawing up sustainable loan plans,



Radical Routes member co-ops: left, The Cowley Club in Brighton; right, volunteers renew windows at the Sumac Centre in Nottingham.



with one facilitator noting that the mere mention of Radical Routes' involvement now carries weight with certain banks.

Historically Radical Routes has been heavily based in what would be loosely termed the anarcho-green movement, and several faces at the gathering continue to be influential green direct actionists.

Growing out of the midlands, it began by pulling in a large number of people from the then-numerous activist presence there, on a co-operative mission to make resources and information more freely accessible, working as an unofficial entity for three years before being officially founded in 1991.

It grew quickly through the 1990s before being caught in the housing bubble, and has in the last couple of years made small but significant losses as realistic places for its

funding to go started to dry up. Rootstock treasurer Stuart Field said in his recent notes to the *Radical Rumours* internal newsletter: "After both Radical Routes and Rootstock made losses last year, we held a workshop in Nottingham on financial models. We saw that we needed to lend more money to co-ops in order to break even."

However Stuart is optimistic about the future for Radical Routes, as *Freedom* caught up with him at the gathering. He noted that elsewhere, the model has begun to really take off again as the economic crisis unfolds and people look for alternatives to the trap of punitive bank loans.

"The Meithäuser Syndikat, which only does housing, is expanding all over Germany. They have 33 million Euros of property compared to Radical Routes which has only a few million. They have a slightly different setup to us as the central organisation actually owns a share of the buildings they buy, but here it's all loans.

"For many years they were only in Freiburg but recently they have expanded massively, picking up cheaper housing and bringing in ex-squats which got organised and bought out. The economics of housing still work in Germany – and we are starting to see this option again here as the prices come down. Radical Routes makes no secret of its activist

past and present, and part of its vetting procedure is to make sure that it retains this ethos throughout. But even for non-radicals, the structure of mutual aid and sustainable building for the future provides an alternative to the stark profiteering of the banking sector. As one attendee at the gathering put it: "It gives us our own self-controlled means of achieving our dream of ousting the landlords."

How it works

Radical Routes operates on a federated basis, which every member co-op getting a say in how it should be run at quarterly gatherings, the most recent of which took place at a large rural retreat in the north of Suffolk in mid-February.

Decision making is based on consensus and is, in the words of one attendee, "designed to slow things down, as we're talking about a lot of money here".

In between gatherings, any group can make a proposal for discussion, which is then brought to the gathering itself along with any objections. If a consensus can't be reached through workshops between any disagreeing parties, it can be put off until a following gathering, before going to a two-thirds vote if there has been no progress after nine months – though this has happened only twice in Radical Routes' history.

There are several working groups which organise between the gatherings, including a publicity group, finance team, development, the Rootstock group and a kids group to make sure crèche facilities are available.

Personnel change frequently, with only the finance group requiring a two-year commitment, and generally working groups comprise two to three core people and a number of floating members.

The group has one paid position managing the financial accounts, with the rest volunteering as part of their charge to work half a day a week for Radical Routes in exchange for membership.

GETTING IN TOUCH

Housing co-ops

- Enheduanna (Birmingham) brumcoop@gmail.com
- Torch (Birmingham) 0121 554 4256
- Branches (Bradford) branches@riseup.net
- The Hive (Bradford) hive@riseup.net
- Wild Peak (Bradwell, Peak District) wildpeak@phoncoop.coop
- Ringo (Brighton) ringohousingcoop@yahoo.co.uk
- Out of Town (Brighton) outoftown@riseup.net
- Uncarved Stone (Cornwall) cornwallhousingcoop@googlegroups.com
- Coventry Peace House 02476 664616
- Pangaia (Dyfed, Wales) 01239 841675
- Natclough (Hebden Bridge) 01422 845990
- Random Camel (Ipswich)
- Cornerstone (Leeds) 0113 262 9365
- Mary Ann Johnson (north London) bluedemon@ukonline.co.uk
- One Community (Looe, Cornwall) 01503 250215
- Equinox (Manchester) 0161 248 9224
- Stepping Stones (Monmouthshire, Wales) 01600 713942
- Nautia (Norfolk) all@nautia.org.uk
- Ned's (Nottingham) 0845 458 9595
- Dragonfly (Oxford) 01865 770833
- Brambles (Sheffield) 0114 279 7164
- Talamh (South Lanarkshire, Scotland) 01555 820555
- Walden Pond (St Leonards on Sea, East Sussex) 0845 4589572
- New Education (Near Swansea) c/o Werndolau, Gelli Aur, SA32 8NE

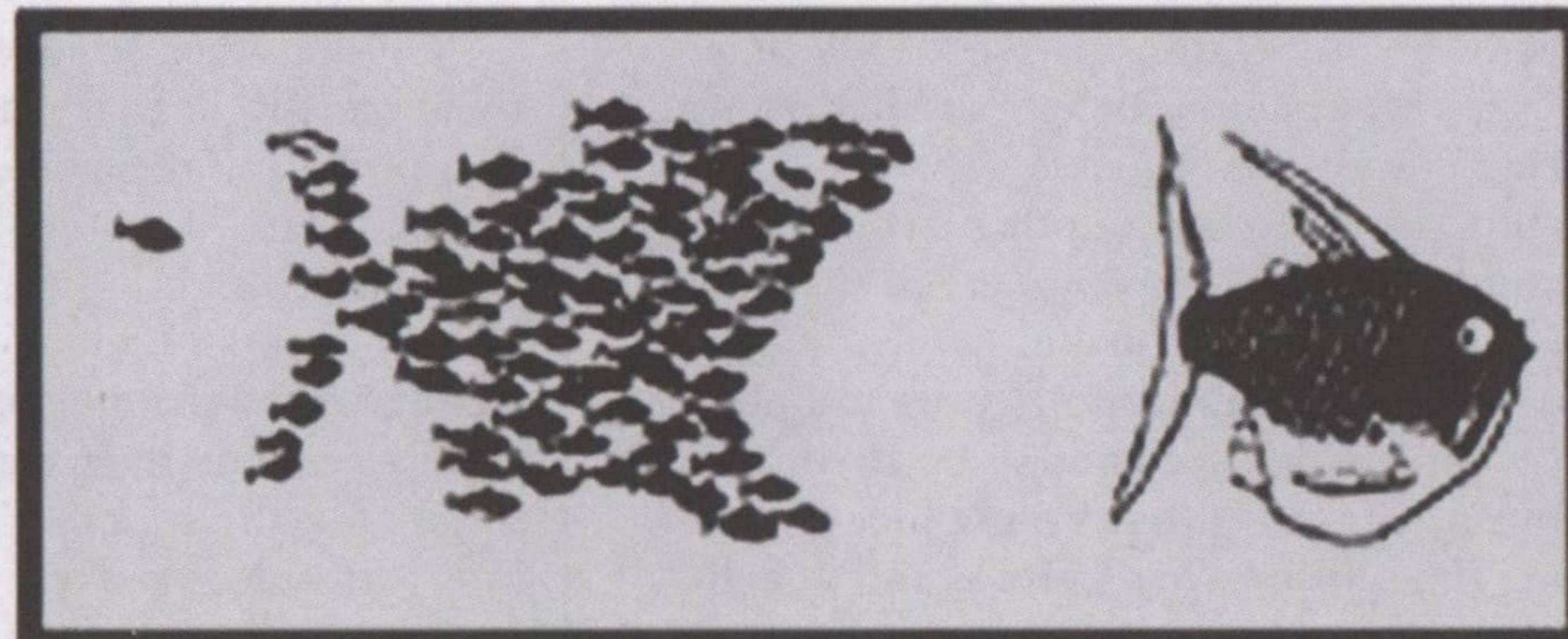
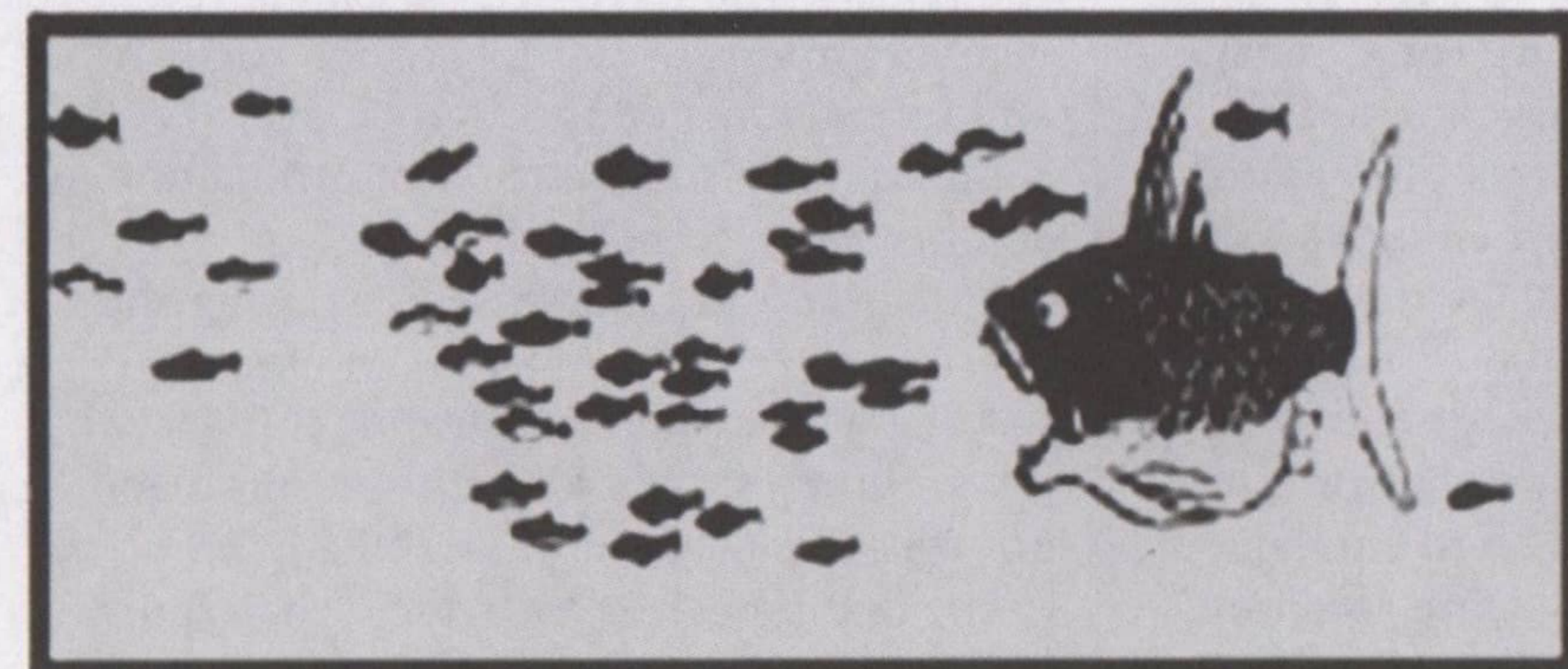
Social centres

- The Cowley Club (Brighton) theegg@easynet.co.uk
- The Sumac Centre (Nottingham) 0845 458 9595

Workers' co-ops

- Catalyst (co-op advice) 0845 223 5254
- Footprint (printing) 0113 262 4408

For more information go to radicalroutes.org.uk



COMMENT

ABOUT FREEDOM

ANGEL ALLEY

We've had a couple of new arrivals. The brand new edition of Kropotkin's masterpiece on evolution, *Mutual Aid*, all reset and including additional material from Iain McKay and Donald Rooum (available from Freedom Press at £15). There will be a launch party on Wednesday 4th March from 7pm at Freedom bookshop, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX, see freedompress.org.uk for more details.

And also hot off the press, we've just got Peter Marshall's *William Blake: Visionary Anarchist* with several colour plates in a smart new edition (available from Freedom Press for £6). We're hoping to have a launch party in April for this title – watch this space, and the website, for details.

The experiment with opening the Freedom Press bookshop on Sundays has been a roaring success – we're now open seven days a week, from noon until 6pm Monday to Saturday and from noon until 4pm on Sundays. If you can't make it down to visit us in person, we also offer a mail order service – see our website at freedompress.org.uk or call 020 7247 9249 for more information.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

To work out if your subscription is due for renewal, look at the number above your name on the address label. This issue is vol 70, no 4, so if your sub runs out with this issue you'll have 7004 above your name. If the number is 7004 or less, then your subscription is due for renewal. See page 16 for the subscription rates and a renewal form or, if you don't want to worry in the future about remembering to renew your subscription to *Freedom*, ask for a standing order form at subs@freedompress.org.uk or you can write to us at 'Subscriptions', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 14th March 2009 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 5th 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

Most people who work in companies that employ more than a hundred and fifty people are covered by a works council under European law. It's part of the 'social partnership' approach favoured by social democrats in most European countries, where management and unions sit down to work out their differences. It flows from the idea that management and workers do have something in common. There are different European models of labour relations, of course, not least the British one of hostility to any form of organised labour as a brake on profits. But works councils are one of those areas where there is no benefit to workers, so the government didn't need to opt out.

The regulations were brought into British law by a statutory instrument – not even a Parliamentary debate – called the Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations 2004 (EC Directive 2002/14). The regulations themselves are a bit conflicted, possibly because they have two roles. Firstly, to provide representation in places where the lack of it might cost the employer at some point. Secondly, to undermine workers organisation where it exists. (Okay I know that it's getting rarer).

My employer has adopted these regulations and set up a works council. Tellingly, it reserves the right to remove any employee representative. There is no such right for employees to do the same, which tells us everything we need to know about who is being represented. I'm not particularly fussed at the moment as the whole thing is completely shambolic – we've never had any elections and our 'representative' is someone no one has ever met and has never turned up to canvass our views. However, should a dispute arise it

will be used to 'consult' with us workers in a way that is even less accountable to us than the unions are!

My previous employer had a much more developed works council, but then it also had a recognised union in some sites and the works council was one focus of the struggle between the union and management. The union explicitly stood candidates for the works council and they were usually elected, reflecting how most employees saw the works council. All the time the company refused to recognise a union or talk to workers collectively unless forced to. They had a whole bureaucracy associated with individual appraisal and bargaining, which presumably was worth it for them. My current employers have a lot less bureaucracy and seem to just assume that people will put up with no pay rises.

It is not surprising that attitudes to such councils has caused so many splits in syndicalist groups in Europe. In Spain, France and Italy, such structures are the preferred industrial relations machinery of the state. They are stacked so that the majority unions (usually aligned to the Socialist Party) get the lion's share of posts and have lots of inbuilt advantages. In Spain, for example, the 'representative unions' in some industries get a place on a firm's works council even if they have no members there.

Should the current crisis indicate to workers that their interests conflict with their bosses, the works councils represent a more boss-friendly avenue for those struggles to be diverted down. Of course, this can happen with unions as well, but works councils are answerable to the company – not the workers. Even the worst union is at least answerable in some way.

Blog Bites

(from unsuitablog.com)

There's a lot to be said for having progressive targets in all sorts of things, foremost among these is reducing the amount of climate changing gas being poured into the atmosphere; so when, for instance, a government (like that of the UK) says that it will aim to reduce the amount of carbon the nation is sending into the atmosphere by 80% by the year 2050, then it's good to know that somewhere down the line people are going to check that they are on target.

That said, of course 80% by 2050 is hopelessly inadequate, given that that only a net reduction in the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere – as distinct from the amount being emitted – by, say, 2050, will have any chance of preventing the worst effects of climate change.

You would think that, even with the rather modest reduction of 80% by 2050, a

regular check would be made, say once a year, just to make sure the current government in power can't blame the previous one or the next one, or be blamed by the next one, etc. But that requires commitment; it requires sticking by your policies; it requires continuity of action – all the kinds of things that the governments of the industrial West are very, very bad at. And that's why you never see year-on-year targets and audits.

Another reason you never see such things is because, to be quite frank, the recent performance of governments in the industrial West in reducing emissions has been crap. For instance, if we look at the two great Kyoto bashers, the USA and Australia (based on DoE statistics), we see that between 2001 and 2006 the USA increased its emissions by 2.4% and

Reply to McKay

I'll reply to Iain (Letters, 14th February) in the hope of clarifying some of his misunderstandings or misrepresentations of my position. To begin with, Iain claims that my arguments are contradictory: "As a tiny minority in the class, our 'calls' for this or that are impotent cries". Yet, without irony, he raises various "communist demands" we should be making!

There is no contradiction here. As I made clear in my first article ('Co-ops or conflicts?', *Freedom*, 20th December) my objection to a strategy of co-operatives is twofold.

Like Trot demands for nationalisation, anarchist demands for co-operatives are impotent, since we're in no position to force them. They would not represent a communist demand even if we were.

But even in the absence of a powerful workers' movement, proposals of what workers should do are not as impotent, because while the current managers of capital can only be swayed by force our fellow workers can in principle be persuaded by force of argument.

Of course even if you think co-ops are a good idea, we'd first need to get into a position to force them. Iain agrees, thus the overriding challenge for an anarchist response to the crisis is how we increase the power and confidence of the class.

Iain summarises his argument as being that co-operatives represent "a valid socialist alternative to bail-outs and nationalisation".

However, Iain's "argument was primarily related to when firms are about to go bust". What then are we going to take over and self-manage? A co-op would be faced with

the same problem as the boss. Occupations may help prevent the administrators selling off assets to pay off creditors instead of workers, and help secure improved redundancy terms, but they can't make a failing firm viable. The only thing that might be a big increase in unpaid overtime by the workers, but even that unappealing prospect is dependent on creditors and suppliers extending credit and workable terms of trade to an illegally occupied firm.

Bosses are not free, they must act broadly in accordance with the market. They're almost certainly not lying when they say they regret making redundancies, I'm sure they would rather be taking on more workers and making more profit. Of course they choose to lay off a worker on £15k rather than take a £15k pay cut themselves, so yes "being a boss shapes any decisions made" – as I made clear in my article.

But this returns us to the point, if the resources are there to make less redundancies, in what way is it more realistic to demand the boss surrenders his capital to the workers rather than say forgoing some or all of his salary to save jobs? What boss would rather surrender their capital than take a temporary pay cut?

It's not that I think it would be a bad thing if laid off workers occupied their workplace and tried to run it as a co-op, but I think it's a) not really on the cards, b) far less practical and realistic than demanding improved redundancy packages or no redundancies at all, and that given this it's c) not something libertarian communists should be proposing as a strategy.

The problem is not how capital is managed, but that it is capital, regardless of who manages it or how democratically they do so. There remains a need to accumulate with all the drive to minimise the labour time taken to do a task this requires, even in a co-op.

Later Iain asks: "Is he seriously suggesting that workers, faced with the closure of their workplaces, should simply collect their P45s?"

Nowhere do I oppose workers occupying their workplaces or propose workers 'simply collecting their P45s'. I wrote: "we have to make concrete material demands; no to job losses, wage cuts, public service cuts and evictions".

Iain also writes: "Is he seriously suggesting that ... we should be indifferent when public (our!) money is used to bailout the muppets who got us into this crisis to begin with?"

Firstly, state funds raised by taxation are no more 'ours' than my boss's Bentley is 'mine', because tax revenue represents the state's portion of the surplus value expropriated by the capitalist class.

Secondly, it repeats the line of no less than the Prime Minister, that the bankers are to blame for the crisis, which is populist scapegoating.

I feel he has misrepresented my objections and claimed – undoubtedly in continuity with some in the 'anarchist tradition' – that running your own business is a useful strategy in the class struggle. In doing so he

has demonstrated several assumptions quite in line with bourgeois ideology; that the market represents a freedom worth fighting for, that state finances are 'our money' and that the crisis is all the fault of some banker 'muppets' and not rooted in the very contradictions of capitalist accumulation.

Joseph Kay

On the construction industry

In the first week of February, *El Pais* (2nd February 2009) in Madrid reported: "The British xenophobic strike is the tip of an iceberg that is being repeated across Europe".

A national mass meeting of shop stewards from the construction industry in Manchester on 9th February was assured by union officials that many politicians and much of the media were 'on our side'. Yet the message in the European media is one of a British disease of 'xenophobia and nationalism' reflected in the protests at the oil refineries and power stations around the country.

The union position is that the unofficial strikes and demos are in defence of the national agreements and against 'social dumping': the undercutting of wages and conditions on the construction sites. It is difficult to find out what will be the true wages and conditions of the foreign workers or even in some cases where they are coming from. Some reports now suggest they are on less than the Brits.

Early this month, the Government called in ACAS within days of the snowballing of guerrilla sympathy strikes supporting the 1,000 workers at the Lindsey oil refinery in Lincolnshire. In the end the bosses caved-in and agreed to employ 102 UK workers.

Now the blacklisted Manchester electricians, whom local anarchists and *Northern Voices* have in the past supported, are protesting at the Staythorpe power station in Nottinghamshire, where a Spanish company Monpressa has said it will not employ British workers.

The Scottish shop stewards told the Manchester meeting that the Scottish construction industry was coming out on a day's strike in sympathy with the protestors at Staythorpe.

Meanwhile in Spain the number of registered unemployed rose by 200,000 in January. Spain is in crisis now the housing bubble and the second homes market has burst. Last month the anarcho-syndicalist CGT, the third biggest confederation of labour in Spain, held a big demo in snow-bound Madrid to protest against the current crisis.

What was refreshing about the Manchester meeting was that the meeting showed awareness of the situation in Italy and Spain, and that at our insistence the unions are now contacting the union confederations in France and Spain to ascertain the facts and gain some mutual understanding.

Brian Bamford

Blog bites

◀ page 10

Australia had increased by 11.5%.

So what about the keenest signatories of the Kyoto Protocol:

- Germany reduced its emissions by 2.3%
- France increased its emissions by 2.9%
- Britain increased its emissions by 1.8%
- The Netherlands reduced its emissions by 6.4%

• Spain increased its emissions by 12.4%
Five years of 'action' and only one country out of five so-called advanced European nations – all of which fought with the USA to get it to sign the Kyoto Protocol – has managed to reduce its emissions by more than 5%. 'Blair's Britain', the most vocal of the governments pushing the Kyoto Protocol has utterly failed, showing quite clearly that in the battle between the corporate-political agenda and the real needs of the planet, it's the corporate-political agenda that comes out on top. The system is not going to permit annual targets, or even five-year targets, because that makes it extremely hard to pull the wool over people's eyes: in this era of greenwashing excellence, that's a definite no-no.

GETTING ACTIVE

PRISON NEWS

Prisoners have few legal tools with which to defend themselves but have at times been able to bring successful court actions against the prison system's worst excesses. Labour's Justice Minister Jack Straw and the Prison Officers Association want to stop them doing this.

It was Straw who, in 1998 when Home Secretary, introduced the Human Rights Act (HRA), incorporating the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into British law.

The ECHR does not contain rights to be fed, clothed, housed or educated; however it provides for basic civil liberties, protecting the rights not to be tortured or subject to arbitrary detention and to have a fair trial, family life and freedom of expression.

A series of cases has reduced the executive power of the state to over-rule decisions by the Parole Board or judges on release or length of time to be served and has established the right of prisoners to have parole and disciplinary hearings heard by nominally independent parties

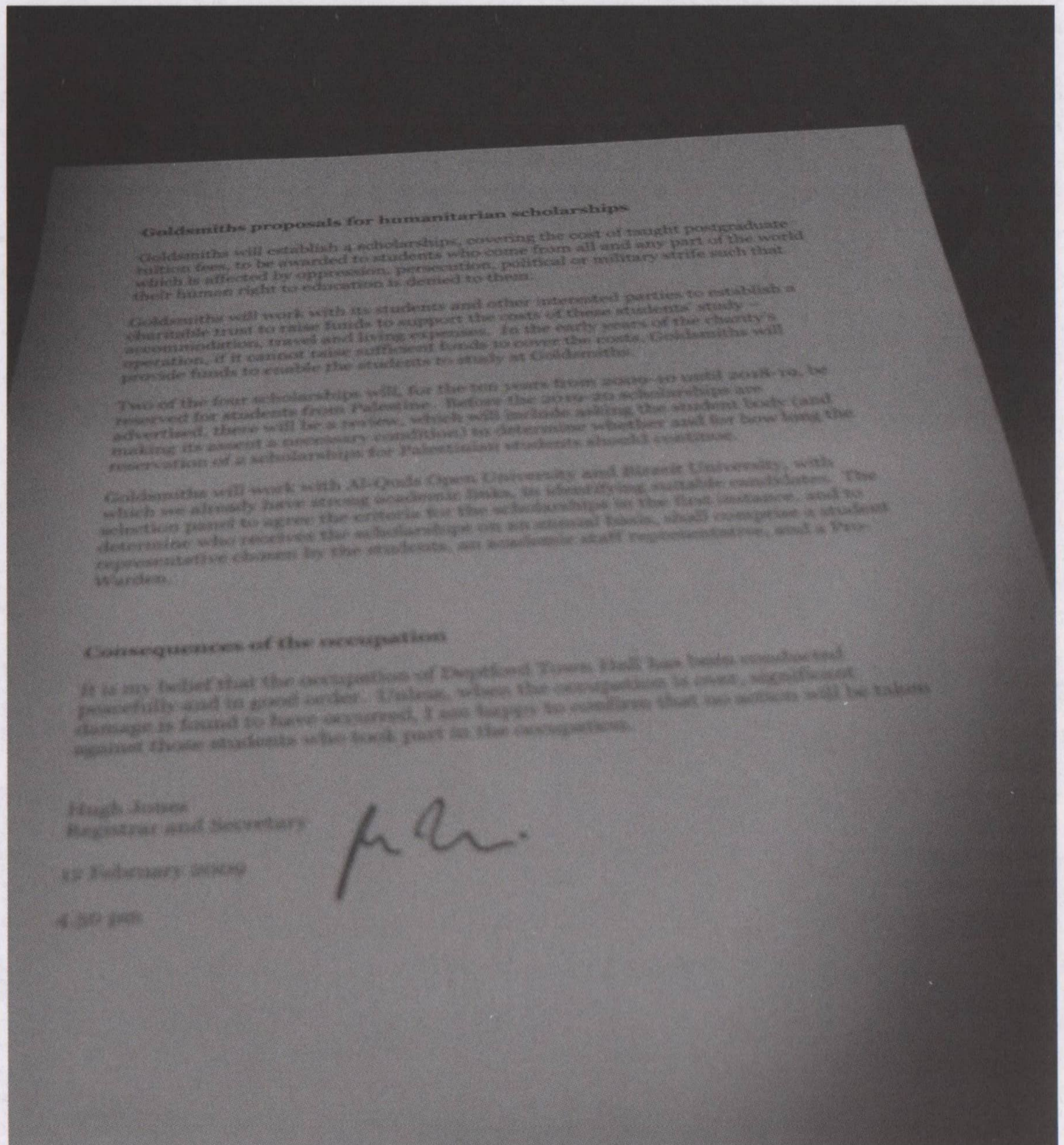
The Labour government now regards the HRA as a millstone around its neck. None of the gains won through legal challenges are ever completely secure and the government endlessly tries to reverse or ignore adverse decisions.

The *Daily Mail* and other tabloid papers, particularly those aimed at a more middle class readership, have long branded the HRA 'a villain's charter' and have devoted endless column inches to lambasting courts that have upheld cases brought by prisoners. In their view such people should be treated as less than human and stripped of all civil rights. In fact most compensation claims by prisoners have little to do with the HRA and are for common law abuses such as wrongful imprisonment, assault and misfeasance in public office. It is not easy to bring such a claim successfully and the government has recently scandalously capped the compensation payments to innocent prisoners released after overturning wrongful convictions.

When prisoners take action to defend their basic human rights, they do so on behalf of all of us. The British state herds working class people into prison in increasing numbers. At the same time political dissent is being suppressed and the 'war on terror' is criminalising entire communities. Trade unionists who take the kind of militant action that the POA says it applauds will also face prison. The fight for prisoners' rights has always been a key component of struggles for liberty and justice. Any attacks by Jack Straw, the POA, the *Daily Mail* and other opponents of prisoners' rights must be strenuously resisted.

Ronnie Easterbrook

On 22nd January FRFI supporters joined Brighton Anarchist Black Cross and the Friends of Ronnie Easterbrook outside the Ministry of Justice in London to show solidarity with Ronnie, who has been on long-term hunger strike.



● A second general planning meeting has been held to organise a **nationwide conference for anarchism** in London.

Provisionally, the venue will be the Queen Mary and Westfield College – the same place the London Anarchist Bookfair has been held for the last two years. The date of the conference will be Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th June. The estimated cost of event could be up to £10,000, and it is hoped that £15,000 can be raised to help pay for a venue next year as well. As such, each region of Britain is being asked to get together funds to contribute if possible to make the event a success.

Alessio, who is helping to organise the conference, said: "What we've got at the moment is a framework, and the content of what people are wanting to discuss is being left open until at least March so we can get as many people to contribute as possible. We will be having a pre-registration system, people will need to pay to get in with different rates for the waged and non-waged. We're also going to ask groups to sign up, they'd be expected to do some fundraising towards it and mobilise people to come.

Discussion on the event is being held on the conference09@haringey.org.uk mailing list. The next organising meeting is provisionally going to be held in Sheffield in March, but the exact date and venue is still to be confirmed.

● The **Digg** collective in Northampton are calling for progressives to fill space in their building, as the radical group is close to collapse.

Digg, a workers' co-operative, took the house over from the Blackcurrent co-op, which was a founder member of Radical Routes (see page 8), but has found itself in financial trouble after a number of tenants moved out. It has been attempting to buy the house outright after the building was sold up by the previous collective.

The group is keen to bring in people who are prepared to get stuck into a number of projects, including updating the building, and stresses that there is a lot of room and resources for people to work from.

To get in touch call 01604 633203.

● Students who began an **occupation at Goldsmith's College** in London have declared victory after college management caved in to their demands and signed a declaration of intent (pictured) to establish scholarships for students in Palestine and regions affected by oppression.

Goldsmiths will establish four scholarships, covering the cost of taught postgraduate tuition fees, to be awarded to students who come from all and any part of the world which is affected by oppression, persecution, political or military strife such that their human right to education is denied to them.

The Dahl-Jenson construction strike

With the papers full of stories about strikes supposedly 'against foreign workers' we thought it would be instructive to publish the relatively recent history of a victorious strike of British construction workers who were joined on picket lines by other subcontracted workers from around the world.

In the Dahl-Jenson strike of 1999, migrant workers demonstrated their willingness, when asked, to support British workers in struggle in this victorious strike of 300 building workers employed by different firms.

They also demonstrated that workers of all countries can improve their working lives by uniting together across divisions of nationality, employer and union membership and taking direct action...

Mechanical installers and pipe fitters working for construction contractor Dahl-Jenson found that cheques for their last three weeks' work had bounced after the company went bust. With massive amounts of overtime being worked some workers lost as much as £2,000, with the average amount being £550.

By then Dahl-Jenson had disappeared from their site next to Waterloo Station in London, where a building was being refurbished under the Government's Private Finance Initiative to turn it into a teaching college for student nurses. Responsibility for ensuring the work got completed on time was with Bouynes, a French construction giant.

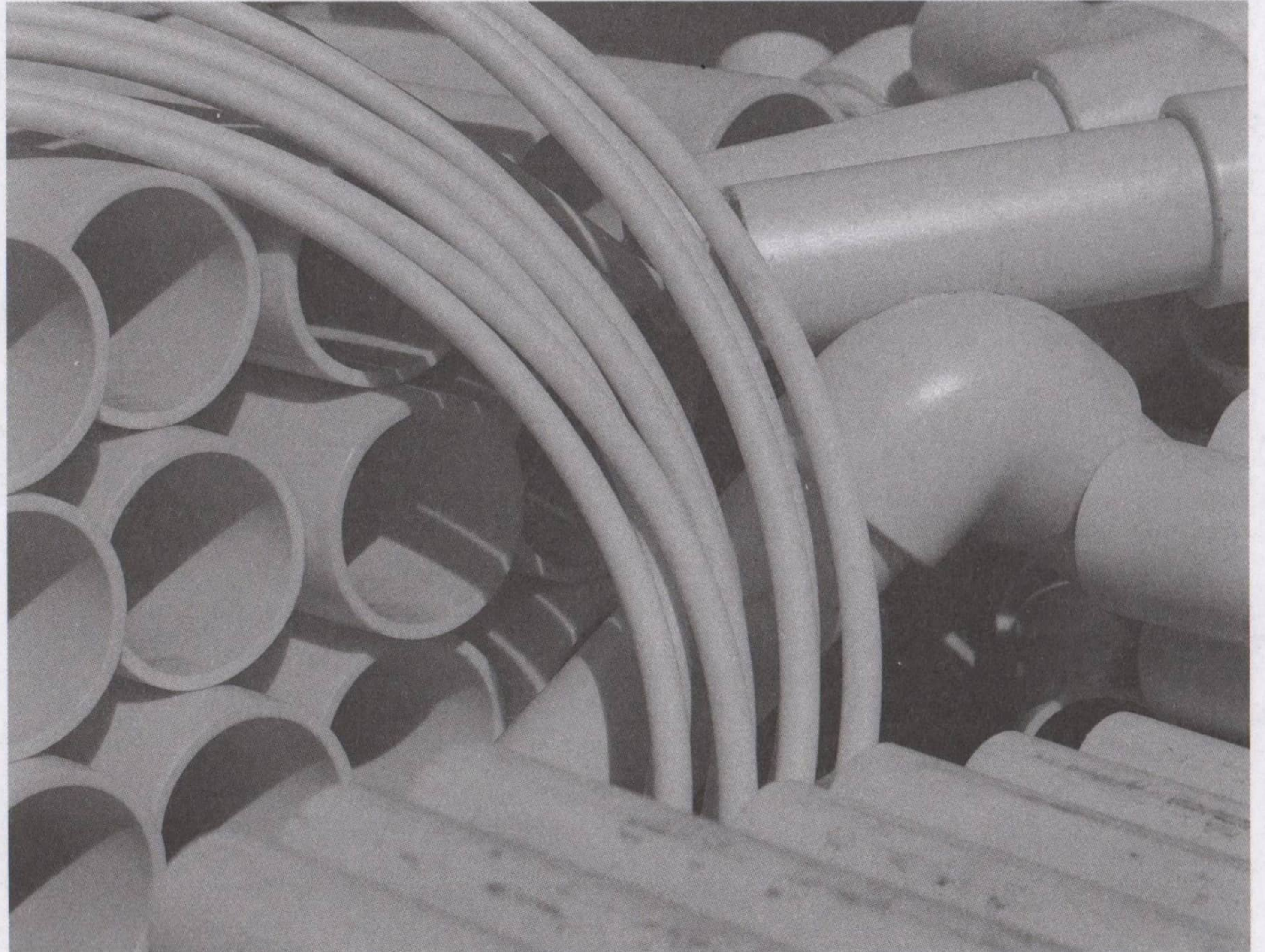
Workers employed by other firms on the site continued to work normally. The ex-Dahl-Jenson workers did not ask them for support, even when standing outside the site entrance on 5th and 6th July seeking their wages.

The workers had approached the broadly left-wing Joint Sites Committee (JSC) for assistance and the building workers' union UCATT had been informed.

The JSC produced a leaflet for the day stating "no work will take place on this site until all the building workers are paid the money they have worked for".

Amongst those working for the other firms on the site were members of a range of ethnic groups. These included Kosovans, Albanians, Latvians, Russians, Portuguese and French. There were also individuals from Poland, Croatia, Italy and Denmark. Add this to the English, Welsh, Irish and Scottish lads employed by Dahl-Jenson and you had quite a mix!

With the national and local news crammed full of scare stories about immigrants and asylum seekers it was unsurprising to find some suspicion and a degree of hostility amongst British workers towards the workers from other countries. We were told as a group of what turned out to be Kosovans approached, "it's no use speaking to them, they don't speak English".



As it turned out some did speak English but, not unnaturally, there was an unwillingness not to go to work. "We need the money". It was explained that many British workers supported the rights of Kosovans to be in the country but obviously with rights come responsibilities and one of these was not to cross picket lines or be used to undercut other workers' rates of pay. This did the trick, they agreed and joined the picket-line.

It took a lot less time to persuade the French, some of whom were absolutely delighted to see "the English doing something". By this time 'the English' had dumped some of their prejudices and begun communicating to other workers from around the world.

Workers from Russia and Latvia, rates of pay £7.50 an hour, were under immense pressure from their employer to cross but they resisted and joined the growing number of pickets.

By 8.30am there were 300 pickets on the gate, no work was taking place, deliveries were being turned away and machinery due to be picked up and moved elsewhere remained idle.

On a beautiful sunny day officials from UCATT were sent inside with a couple of workers to see Bouynes management. Before they did so it was agreed that the demands would be extended from getting all back pay to no victimisation of those workers refusing to cross the picket-line with no loss of pay.

Apparently Bouynes management were not too keen claiming that the wages were owed by the sub-contractors. Perhaps, but as the job was now stopped it was difficult to say it had nothing to do with them.

Emerging from the meeting UCATT officials said that whilst Bouynes were reluctant they had asked for a list of those owed money along with the amounts. Meanwhile they had said they would be contacting their Head Office in France.

There was a scramble to make sure the list was correct, at the same time a lad from Middlesbrough could be overheard telling a latecomer that the "foreigners are bloody marvellous".

A couple of hours later, and following speeches which urged workers to stick together, handshakes and thanks all round, the officials went back in and emerged to let workers know that Bouynes had agreed to pay workers two weeks wages and consider them for any jobs on the site. Those owed £2,000 got just over £1,000, and most workers were pleased with the result.

It had been agreed that there would be no victimisation of those who had stayed out and they would be paid.

Whilst not a complete victory for the workers, which may have been different had they stuck together and not let union officials negotiate on their behalf, the Dahl-Jenson strike is a small but important example of workers from many countries seeing their common interest, fighting the employers and winning.

This article was adapted by libcom.org from an article by Mark Metcalf for Revolutions per Minute, online at libcom.org/history/1999-dahl-jenson-construction-strike.

More information and news: <http://libcom.org/tags/immigration>

REVIEWS

WHAT'S ON

MARCH

1st Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers, talk by John Severs at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL, at 11am, see ethicalsoc.org.uk/events.htm

4th Launch party for new edition of Kropotkin's masterpiece on evolution, *Mutual Aid*, at Freedom bookshop, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX, from 7pm, see freedompress.org.uk

7th British premiere of documentary film *Chomsky and Company* at Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX, starts at 5.30pm, see housmans.com/events.php for more information.

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.

14th 25th anniversary of the miners's strike, working class bookfair from 11am until 4pm at Linskill Centre, Linskill Terrace, North Shields, Tyne & Wear NE30 2AY, see <http://workingclassbookfair.vpweb.com> for more information.

14th and 15th National Squat Meet in the Bristol area, see squatmeet09.wordpress.com for details.

NATIONAL SQUAT MEET 09

14 - 15TH MARCH
BRISTOL AREA

IN DEFENCE OF AUTONOMOUS SPACES
MORE INFO: WWW.SQUATMEET09.WORDPRESS.COM

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

28th Thomas Paine's legacy, with speakers John Keane and Gregory Claeys at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL, at 2pm, for more information see ethicalsoc.org.uk/events.htm

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!

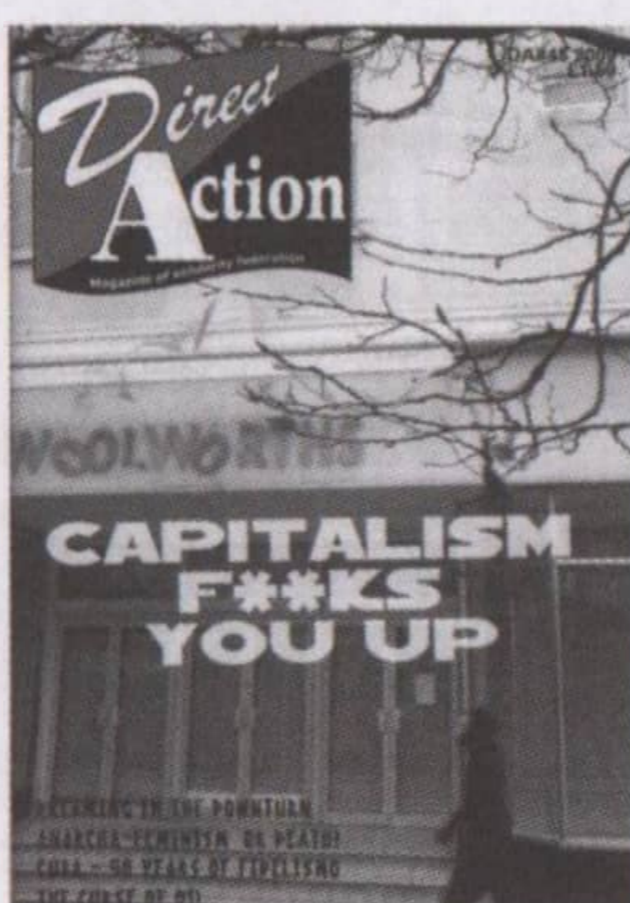
3rd to 5th Fifth Anarchist Bookfair in Zagreb, for all your anarchist and libertarian needs in Croatia, for more details see ask-zagreb.org/engliiski.htm

MAY

4th Mayday Reclaim the Streets against EDO MBM/ITT, Brighton's bomb factory, see smashedo.org.uk for more.

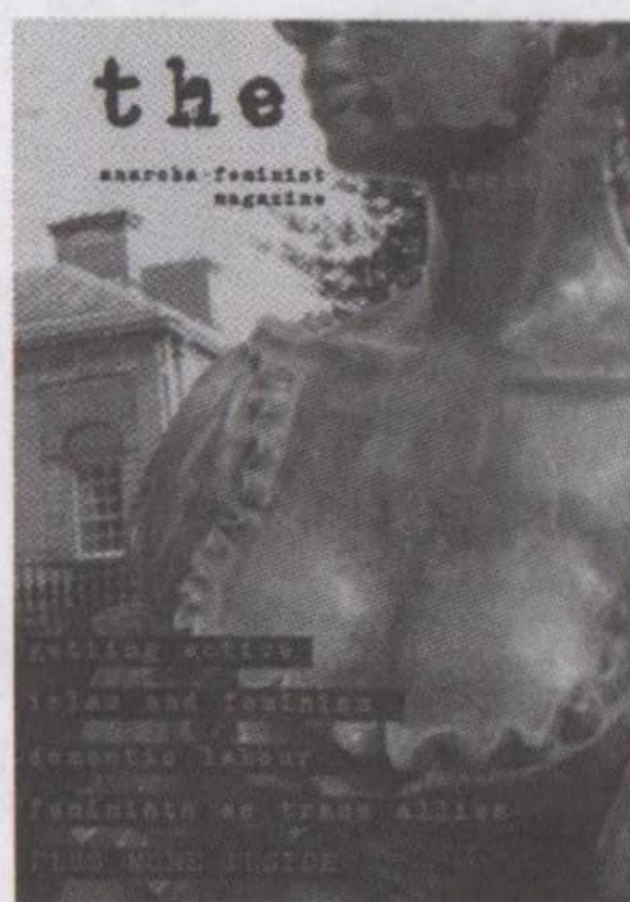
MAGAZINES

A brief round up of recent magazines.

**Direct Action #45**

36 pages, £1.50

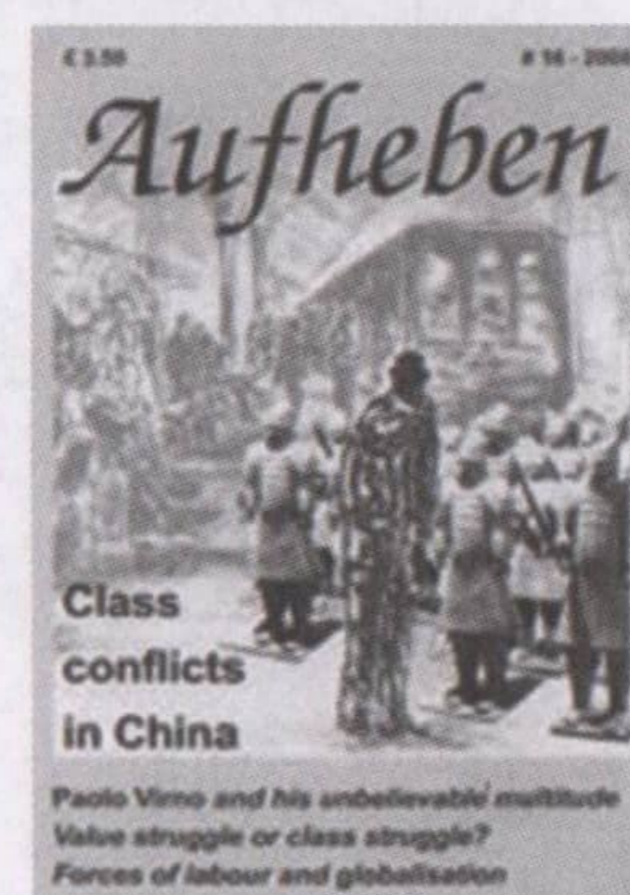
Produced by the Solidarity Federation, this magazine has improved considerably over the past couple of years. The current issue has items on an anti-BNP rally in Liverpool, self-organising in mental health, the inevitable ones on the current crisis of capitalism and political responses to it, workers' control, 50 years of Fidelismo in Cuba and our dependency on oil. Plus many shorter items, letters, reviews, etc.

**The Rag #3**

44 pages, £3.00/
4 euros

The Irish anarchist feminist magazine *The Rag* has made its third appearance. There's a refreshing diversity of layouts, tones and styles in this magazine. I suspect the people involved enjoy producing it. Topics covered include

getting active; feminism in Muslim countries; the anti-drug dealer movement in Dublin; women and language; feminists and trans people; attitudes to rape; plus a few book reviews, lots of shorter items, letters, etc. Politics and the personal as it should be done.

**Aufheben #16**

56 pages, £3.50

This magazine has established itself as a must-read for anyone requiring an analysis of what is happening in the world from an libertarian/autonomist/marxist point of view. Only four articles in this issue – the main one being a detailed look at class conflict in the transformation of China. The other three are devoted to responses/reviews of books: Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*; Massimo De Angelis, *The Beginning of History*; and Beverly J. Silver, *Forces of Labour: Workers Movements and Globalisation Since 1870*. Texts to get your teeth into.

All available from the Freedom Bookshop, for mail order please send payment with order and add 42p for postage.

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Antonie Pannekoek.
2. A government-paid climate change television advertisement was banned by Sammy Wilson, the DUP's Northern Ireland environment minister. Wilson is a born-again Christian and climate change sceptic.
3. The Museum has been running an exhibition about Darwin and evolution, as it is the bicentenary of his birth and 150th anniversary of *On the Origin of Species*. DUP minister Sammy Wilson has said that the museum should put on an exhibition about creationism and threatened a legal challenge under 'equality legislation'.
4. The Discovery Institute is a right wing creationist think tank. The *Wedge Document* outlined the short and long-term goals of intelligent design advocates, not just in displacing evolution from schools, but with the broader cultural, social, and political aim to "reverse the stifling dominance of the materialist worldview, and to replace it with a science consonant with Christian and theistic convictions". It was leaked and exposed 'intelligent design' as creationism by the back door.

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Class rap

Hip-hop has seen artists with social and political awareness. Rarely, however, has there been hip-hop fused with unashamedly class struggle, libertarian politics. 22-year-old Comrade Malone attempts to buck that trend with his album *The Spontaneous Revolt LP*. Ed Goddard from libcom.org caught up with him to talk about life and politics in music.

Tell us a bit about your life growing up and how you got into politics.

I grew up on a council estate in north-west London and lived there for the first twenty years of my life. I'm not from a political background and didn't really pay attention to politics until my late teens. In 2003, when the invasion of Iraq began, there was a massive walkout at my school with students blocking roads and making their way to go and protest outside parliament. At the time, this was just a day off school which let me go and get stoned with mates in the park. But it did have an effect and I started thinking a lot more about how shit things are. I questioned things a lot more after that, to the point where I was questioning the overall nature of capitalism, which I started to see as the root cause of all these problems.

When I was 20, I left home and lived in a homeless people's hostel for a year. Throughout my time there, I was unemployed, on benefits and getting more pissed off, as were the boys I shared facilities with.

That hostel was a trap. The only way you could leave and get into social housing was by being referred by the staff there, which meant submitting to their rules and keeping up to date with the weekly service charge you'd pay from your benefits. My money would go fast on food and transport I'd use to look for work. When I got into service charge arrears I was threatened with eviction twice. Serious bully business from a housing 'charity'! You could get on the council list, but it'd take a few years to build up enough points for a flat and even then your chances are ultra slim.

*Why did you call the album *The Spontaneous Revolt LP*?*

We made the album in about two weeks and I wanted that to be reflected in the name, as well as reflecting its political content. *Spontaneous Revolt* refers both to the nature of the album and the way in which it was made.

Tell us about your experiences so far within the UK hip-hop scene.

I got into the scene by grabbing the mic and turning up for free studio time any time I could. I recorded a cheaply made track at a music college which got passed around on copied CDs and ended up on pirate radio. I got invited to do live shows on air and eventually got a phone call from Kemet Entertainment



Records, who I signed a recording contract with in 2006. Whilst on Kemet, I worked with some quality producers such as Baby J, Joe Buddha, and DJ Flip, and was getting a lot of shows.

Sadly, UK hip hop had its own little economic collapse, with nights like Kung Fu in Camden and Speakers Corner in Brixton closing, Itch FM shutting down, Low-Life records closing, and Kemet as well. There's no green shoots here and no one's bailing us out! We're all redundant rappers now; last year I was in a quality studio off Harley street, and now I'm in DJ Downlow's flat eating fried chicken with ghetto-flavoured mayonnaise.

As a class struggle anarchist, you're quite different from a lot of other socially conscious rappers. What are your views on the prevalence of nationalist, religious or pro-Obama views in hip-hop?

They're just a reflection of opinion in America. Politically, some of those opinions might be to the left, but if you want more class struggle

in hip-hop, you need more class struggle in society first. Hip-hop reflects what's already there, whether its street violence, political consciousness, or 'Vote Obama' feeling.

What radical traditions/movements do you take inspiration from?

The movements that inspire me most are always working class grassroots ones, and often, but not always, those with libertarian principles. Learning about what the CNT-FAI achieved in the 1930s, contributed to the confidence I have in the possibility of a self-managed society on a large scale. Hungary 1956 is another good example. It's hard to hear conscious American hip-hop without reference to the Black Panthers. What's inspiring about them is that they were a street-level organisation and their survival programs made a big positive difference to the lives of people in the community. These days, there's often focus on organising in the workplace, but not enough on dealing with



Review

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community issues. Right now, I'm also inspired by all the shit kicking off in Greece.

What do you think of the anarchist movement's ability to engage working class youth such as yourself?

The anarchist movement needs to start holding *Skins* parties with free booze and drugs, and a strict dress code of hoodies, caps, and trainers only! But on a serious level, it's about communicating with people in the right way. People in political groups might be experienced and knowledgeable but young working class people often feel they lack that experience and knowledge to be active.

Most people don't know the definition of anarchism. The anarchist movement has got to let people know what it's all about and show people that there are no intellectual entry requirements.

What are your plans for the future?

I'm gonna be recording and releasing more free material. For most of the time, I'll be working alongside DJ Downlow, my partner in crime in studio and pub. I'd love to do a tour across Europe and I'm thinking about the possibility of doing that, but it won't happen this year. As for now, I'm just gonna keep releasing free music.

Spontaneous Revolt Free Download at www.sensei.fm
Comrade Malone official myspace page at myspace.com/comrademalone

THE QUIZ

1. Which council communist was a renowned astronomer who had a crater on the moon and an asteroid named after him?
2. What was banned in Northern Ireland as "insidious New Labour propaganda"?
3. Why has the Ulster Museum in Belfast come under fire from the governing Democratic Unionist Party?
4. What was the Discovery Institute's *Wedge Document* and what is its significance?

Answers on page 14

The Anarchist Quiz Book by Martin Howard, illustrated by Paul Petard, is available from 'Book Orders', Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX for just £5, post free.

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