

## TOMORROW'S SCHOOLS A FIASCO

### Secondaries refurbishment becoming a financial disaster zone

The government is pushing through its second tranche of academy schools despite severe funding shortages for the project, which is part of the troubled Building Schools for the Future programme, amid a rising chorus of complaints.

The scheme is now putting out £4 billion of contracts to build 100 more academies – despite funding and completion issues with the existing 127 projects and other school refurbishment plans.

At least 240 major school construction projects have been delayed in the last year, with financial difficulties on the part of private concerns which were supposed to be funding the projects via PFI being frequently cited.

Building Schools for the Future is the umbrella programme for what the government has termed the largest refurbishment and upgrade to secondary school institutions of the last 50 years.

Using PFI funding, where private concerns raise the funds for major overhauls and the building of new schools which local councils

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### LENS CAP IRELAND



An aerial view of Rossport, Ireland. Shell will attempt to lay the offshore pipe at the controversial site this spring and preparation work both on land and at sea is due to start in the next few weeks. Campaigners are determined to stop this preparation work, which is taking place against the wishes of the local populace and may be highly dangerous, and so people are needed from mid-March to May. Email [rossportsolidaritycamp-subscribe@lists.riseup.net](mailto:rossportsolidaritycamp-subscribe@lists.riseup.net).

## MOBILISATION FOR END OF MARCH

Anarchist groups in London are calling for a wide coalition of people and groups to turn out for to be part of a libertarian ‘militant workers bloc’ at the upcoming Put People First demonstration in central London against the G20 on 28th March.

The callout aims to place direct action ‘at the core’ of any fightback against repossessions and redundancies caused by the financial crisis and to bring people together against blind alleys on the right.

The communiqué said: “This is not an end in it self, but a means to meet each other and collectively get involved in supporting a working class fightback to the crisis.

“The institutions of government and global finance are making us pay for their

mistakes, giving themselves hefty bonuses for the privilege. As big banks get billions of our money to bail them out, the Post Office is threatened with privatisation and mass redundancies to claw back the pension hole.

“Government and bosses, while protecting their own interests, are steadily losing their grip as the anger of the working class becomes more and more apparent.”

It is hoped to be the starting point for what many in the mainstream media are calling a ‘new summer of rage’, pulling in people disaffected by the financial crisis for an intervention in the Financial Fools day and Meltdown in the City party on 1st and 2nd April.

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## NEWS

### IN BRIEF

**EDUCATION:** The UCU union has expressed concerns that science's ability to aid the UK's path to economic recovery could be threatened by new funding arrangements for universities. While funding per student will continue to be maintained in real terms, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has cut funding for a number of research-intensive institutions, including Imperial College London.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT:** Unions reacted with glee as ACAS awarded local government workers a pay rise of just 2.75% – the tenth year in a row that local government staff have received a below inflation settlement.

Despite the ACAS offer award being significantly below the official rate of inflation (let alone the real cost of living) and just 0.3% above the employer's offer, Unison said: "Unions representing 1.3 million local government workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, have welcomed an ACAS award of an additional 0.3% pay rise."

**MEDIA:** In an unfortunate turn of events, Google's 'contextual' advertising and allowing of BNP advertising on their database left editors at the *Bristol Evening Post* red-faced after an interview with Tony Benn produced adverts on the side of the page for the British National Party. Benn had been talking in the interview about fighting racism in Bristol in the 1960s.

**NUCLEAR:** A planning committee meeting has approved plans for a new nuclear war-head facility on a flood plain at Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Burghfield, near Reading, Berkshire. The proposal has received a record number of objections from the public, drawing mainstream media attention.

**RAIL:** A strike ballot of more than 250 RMT members employed by Nexus at Tyne and Wear Metro will be concluded by 30th March. The union is urging members to vote for action in a dispute over the threat to jobs, pensions and conditions posed by moves to privatise the network's operations. Ballot papers are scheduled to be sent out on 16th March, with the result announced two weeks later.

**SURVEILLANCE:** The allegations of many activists appear to have been confirmed after footage was leaked showing police building video profiles of activists alongside other evidence that police have been maintaining a database of thousands of activists regardless of whether they have committed any crimes.

**WOMEN'S RIGHTS:** Several thousand women marched through London's main shopping streets on 7th March in an International Women's Day event dedicated to ending male violence against women. The 'Million Women Rise 2009', was a women-only march to end male violence against women.

### LENS CAP MANCHESTER



Picture: Manchester No Borders

Activists from Manchester No Borders interrupt a panel discussion with the leader of Manchester city council, Sir Richard Leese. They dumped 100 jumpers in front of the panellists of the event entitled 'The Right to the City', held in the Town Hall, in a protest against immigration detention. The protest follows efforts to deport Congolese asylum seekers en masse out of the city

## Roadshow for direct action on housing

A London borough initiative aimed at using direct action to force councils to keep their promises in providing aid to the vulnerable has proven so effective that a roadshow is being set up to spread the idea city-wide.

The London Coalition Against Poverty (LCAP) has been campaigning against the practice of 'gatekeeping' in Hackney, where housing and homelessness officers, under pressure to hit targets for homelessness statistics, artificially depress the statistics by ruling people ineligible for aid on spurious grounds.

The group, which recently opened an office at the Freedom Press building in Angel Alley, has used a combination of individual advocacy and individual collective action to help dozens of families and individuals to fight for their own rights.

Now they want to expand the concept to the 13 inner-city boroughs with a roadshow, and are looking for people to help with the scheme.

In a callout they said: "The process uses wrong paperwork, obscure laws, outright lies and unreasonable demands. We have found an efficient and flexible weapon for countering the council's gatekeeping policies in our method of Direct Action Casework and we would like to spread our tactics to the rest of London. We are looking for all kinds of people to get involved: whether you have experience of community organising, housing/homelessness issues or event organising, or are just keen to pass on what we've been doing in Hackney." For more details get in touch with LCAP by email at: londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com or telephone 07938 241 737 or 020 7247 6106

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# Dale Farm evictions

## The outcome at Dale Farm is critical for travellers

How the traveller village of Dale Farm, currently under threat of a £3 million eviction, is treated in the next few months could set the tone across Britain, campaigners say.

Since the siege of Dale Farm commenced, public expenditure on anti-Gypsy measures in England has amounted to well over £180 million. That's more than the entire outlay during the EU Decade of Roma Inclusion.

Thousands have been evicted from their own land; tens of thousands of children denied a chance to go to school. Old folk and the sick left to perish because medical care has been unobtainable in what is supposed to be a welfare state.

Not a few of those internal refugees have sought refuge at Dale Farm. Crays Hill, in

Essex, is no distance in today's world from the Roma ghettos of Paris and Rome; nor remote even from the big Romani enclaves of Eastern Europe. Travellers from Britain now reach every corner of Europe.

Butchered in Romanian villages, ethnically-cleansed from Kosovo and more recently murdered in Hungary and fire-bombed by Italian thugs, Europe's 12 million Roma are compelled to make common cause. And on the frontline of this growing conflict stands the bastion of Dale Farm.

It's well documented that the 90 families facing the bulldozing of their homes have nowhere to go. The short-fall in mobile-home park accommodation is chronic, especially in the South of England. Basildon has been told it should provide at least 70 of the needed pitches and could meet this requirement by granting planning permits for the unauthorised yards at Dale Farm.

"That's the commonsense solution we'd

like to see," says Richard Sheridan, the Gypsy Council president. "Unfortunately, commonsense, not to mention compassion, is in very short supply."

A meeting at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Wickford is drawing up plans to assist the most vulnerable in the event of a violent eviction by Buckley's bailiffs.

In the past Wickford town itself has seen some of the most outrageous clearance operations. Caravans have been crushed and even a court injunction ignored in the haste to expel families without mercy from Hovefields Avenue and Gipsy Hill.

The whole process is now being scrutinised by UN Habitat which has approved a mission to London for the purpose. The UN Advisory Group on Forced Evictions, which favours a negotiated settlement and an upgrading of existing homes, would monitor any future direct action to destroy Dale Farm.

Edited from an article by Grattan Puxon

## Tomorrow's schools a fiasco

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and government then pay off via a 30-year mortgage, the government has said it will make education fit for the 21st century.

However in reality, the scheme has already led to the proposed or actual closure of dozens of mid-sized secondary schools and the opening of super-schools or academies in their place, run with private sector involvement.

Where it has been implemented, Building Schools for the Future has allowed the government to effectively force many local councils to hand over the refurbishment, maintenance and eventual running of their school systems to private hands, at great expense.

In Dudley for example, a plan to upgrade the school system has been estimated to cost the local council an extra £1million annually,

cutting into other services and forcing councillors to defer bidding in an effort to get spending under control.

They are far from the only ones. A recent National Audit Office (NAO) report found that only 42 of 200 schools which should have opened by the end of last year have actually done so, while overall costs for the project have already soared 23% from original estimates to £55 billion, and are likely to rise further.

In the report, the NAO noted that Partnerships for Schools, which runs the programme, would find it 'very challenging' to hit the 2020 deadline to renovate all 3,500 secondary schools.

Part of the problem has been that no

funders can be found to back the projects, forcing central or local government to put up the initial capital – largely negating the point of making it PFI in the first place. It's estimated around 60% of the overall project will now be built by direct government grant, effectively giving money to the private sector to allow it to take schooling out of public hands while charging the public sector through the nose for the next 30 years, at no risk to themselves.

The government is scrabbling around for this money. In its most recent plan to raise the cash, it was mooted that local councils should dip into the employee pension funds, worth around £100 billion, to provide the startup funding for the project.



## PUBLIC SECTOR

# Armed police use rising fast

## But success of tasers shows lethal threat unnecessary

The use of armed police has increased by 17.5% in the last year – bringing the overall rise since 2001 up by over 50% to 21,180 incidents in a year in which they were called out.

Particular hotspots for the increase are Bedfordshire, which has seen armed police called out on 1,217 occasions, up from 237 in 2001, and the West Midlands, which saw a rise from 822 incidents to 2,350.

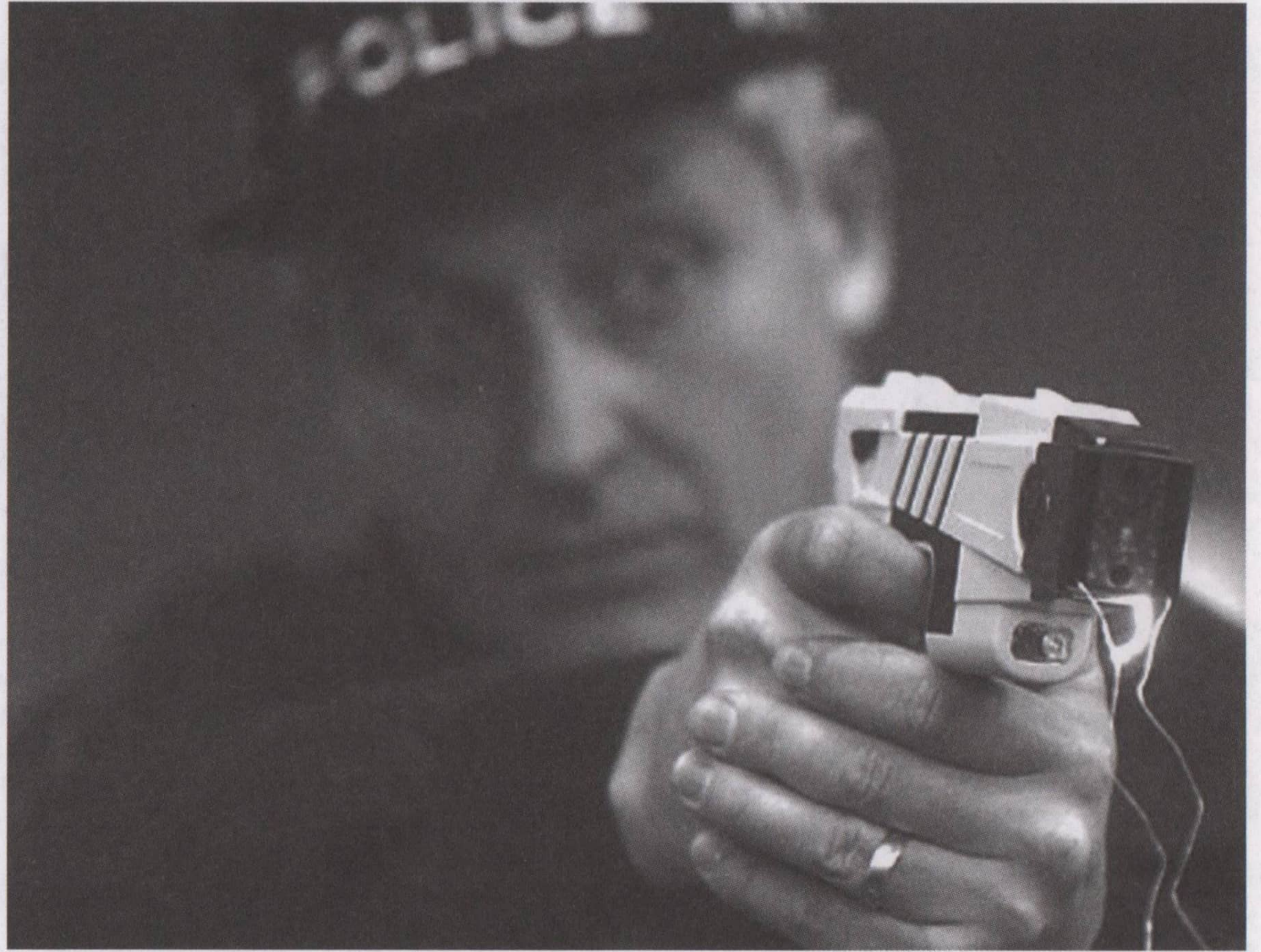
The Metropolitan Police had the greatest number of operations in which firearms were authorised – 4,948. They were followed by the West Midlands. Cumbria had the fewest operations – 92.

The police have blamed the rise on an increase in violent crime and use of guns in the last few years. However in Northumbria, the force recorded a reduction from 1,440 armed response cases to 229 in the same period – a fall they have attributed to the use of Taser guns.

The electronic shock devices, which paralyse people who have been shot by them, are effective in bringing down individuals but would be unsafe to bring to a situation where guns are being used due to their short range and single-shot capacity.

The Northumbria case suggests that armed response is being used more and more widely throughout the national force in situations where it is not needed and non-lethal threats can be used instead.

The use of Taser guns themselves has been heavily criticised however following hundreds of deaths in the US through



widespread use of the technology, which is acknowledged to be extremely dangerous if used on people with weak hearts.

Police in London have increasingly been using Taser guns to deal with teenagers, with 26 teens receiving shocks in the first eight months of 2008. The youngest child shot was 15 years old. It directly correlates to the introduction of 400 Tasers to frontline police to tackle disorder situations.

The issue of Taser use is unlikely to die down, as the government recently ordered 5,000 stun guns for the UK police force, and

has vowed to place them into more common use on the streets.

Currently they are mostly only used by specialist firearms officers, but would be given to street beats in future.

Territorial Support Group officers, who are charged with tackling disorder on the streets, were the first group other than specialist firearms officers to receive the weapons in December 2007.

Other options than live firearms and putting 50,000 volts through subjects are not at present being considered.

## Council outsourcing rides again

A new round of attempts to outsource almost all services and care provision out of council hands has been initiated, with Essex County Council and Barnet leading the way.

The plan was abortively attempted in Suffolk and Newcastle two years ago, but was largely aborted in both cases as a round of changes to boundary lines and a clear lack of practical ability to carry through the plans became clear.

However with the economic crisis continuing, several Tory councils are taking the opportunity to remove almost all services and offer them out to private or voluntary bodies, leaving only a strata of top executives as policy-directors for the new structure.

Essex has shortlisted two companies for a £5.4 billion contract over eight years, is attempting the most radical changes, which

local government union Unison believes could lead to 6,500 job losses and a major failure in public service provision. The union is considering a legal challenge over the issue.

Several authorities have already privatised refuse collection, parking and street cleaning, and many argue that bigger savings can be made by awarding much larger contracts, encompassing several services.

Somerset County Council, run by the Liberal Democrats, awarded a contract to IBM recently to run a range of back-office. Several London Boroughs are also considering a widespread privatisation plan.

Wholesale contracting-out of services was envisaged by the late Conservative minister Nicholas Ridley in a pamphlet published in 1988 that proposed that councils should 'enable' rather than 'provide'.

## Private surgery plan a fiasco

After months of wrangling and a £300,000 scheme to push it through, it looks like the controversial plan to privatise an entire NHS surgery department is going to be handed unopposed to the only remaining bidder.

Kingston Hospital in south west London floated its trail-blazing plans to extend the boundaries of NHS privatisation last year – since then, the hospital's Chief Executive has departed and the private surgery scheme appears to be unravelling.

The Trust have repeatedly refused to name the companies in the frame, but they have now admitted that the two preferred bidders have been reduced down to one as another outfit has withdrawn citing 'market conditions'.

Campaigners have slammed the whole botched and expensive process as a waste of time and money which could leave the hospital with a private company providing life-or-death surgery going bust in mid-contract.



## IN BRIEF

**ALCOHOL:** John Dunsmore, the new chief executive of C&C Group, and two fellow directors of the Magners Irish Cider maker have waived a combined bonus worth up to 1.2million euros (£1.07m) and put the money into a bonus pool for the company's workers, saying that after a round of pay cuts they were worried they could face a 'worker revolt' if they kept them.

**CONSTRUCTION:** Nearly three years after the story was first broken in *Freedom*, the existence of a construction blacklist involving thousands of trade unionists has been officially confirmed by the Information Commissioners Office. The list, maintained by a private firm and sold on to household names such as Balfour Beattie, had been sold to a number of household names in the construction industry including Balfour Beattie, Amec, Laing O'Rourke and Taylor Woodhurst. The ICO said the secret system was run for over 15 years, enabling employers to unlawfully vet job applicants. *Freedom* first reported on the leaking of a version of the blacklist in 2006 when it was released by a disaffected company employee.

**JOBS:** Five hundred jobs are to go with the closure of the home shopping retailer Freemans Grattan's operation in Peterborough, a union has claimed, and more than 300 jobs are set to go with the closure of the Indesit washing machine factory in Denbighshire.

**MANUFACTURING:** As *Freedom* goes to press, workers from Prisme Packaging Ltd in Dundee vowed they would not leave the Tannadice Street factory until they get money they are due. While redundancy letters from the company detailed the payout the dozen workers are entitled to, they also made clear the firm would not be making any payments to their former employees. The company has also declined to hand over wages outstanding since 1st March, holiday pay or pay in lieu of notice.

**PHARMACEUTICALS:** AstraZeneca tried to 'bury' adverse medical studies about Seroquel, its blockbuster drug, internal company memos released in an American court case have revealed. The Anglo-Swedish drugs group is being sued by a total of 9,200 patients, most of whom allege that the Seroquel treatment for psychiatric disorders gave them diabetes.

**SUPERMARKETS:** Tesco has won an appeal against a new competition test that would make it harder for the supermarket chain to open new stores or expand existing premises. The Competition Appeal Tribunal ruled that a competition test drawn up last April by the Competition Commission risked harming consumers because of unforeseen consequences. It would mean permission for a new supermarket would be subject to a retailer's existing market share in the area.

# EDO decommissioners under cosh

The six Bristol-based anti-militarists who trashed the EDO-ITT weapons factory in Brighton, and the three Brighton activists caught up in the case, all charged with conspiracy to commit criminal damage of at least £300,000, are under attack by the state. With several homes searched, phones and computers seized and calls traced, CCTV footage logged, and even the FSA used to investigate the Brighton Three, it is clear the police are using their powers to the full.

With legal aid limited to £5,000 across the nine defendants, following changes to the legal aid system, and with attempts to limit fundraising, it is clear the state intends to impede their intention of making a political defence of acting to prevent a greater war crime (Israeli bombing of Gaza used EDO parts). The nine are further impeded by strict bail conditions including curfews, banning orders, and no contact. Two defendants remain on remand for the foreseeable future.

The police and arms industry of course faces no such limitations on their activities, and whilst they are offering no evidence for

now on burglary charges, the conspiracy charge is an attempt to set a nasty precedent along the lines of recent animal rights prosecutions. The Smash EDO campaign has been a nuisance for too long, and they'd just love to nail it along with other long-term anti-militarist activists.

The decommissioners need support, financially and practically, and with increased pressure on the arms industry. See <http://decommissioners.wordpress.com> and [www.smashedo.org.uk](http://www.smashedo.org.uk) for more info and how to write to the prisoners:

- Robert Alford, VP7552, HMP Lewes, 1 Brighton Road, Sussex BN7 1EA
- Elija Smith, VP7551, HMP Bristol, 19 Cambridge Road, Bristol BS7 8PS

Bristol ABC

● In related news, three directors of EDO UK have recently resigned, including chair Sir Robert Walmsley, Secretary Philip Davies, and Anne Davidson. Parent company ITT meanwhile, has recently agreed to pay \$1.7 million to settle a bribery case which alleged the company was involved in dodgy dealings in China.



# Utilities pass on demand loss

Utility companies are beginning to put pressure on regulators to allow them to radically increase prices, as demand slows in the wake of the downturn.

Ofwat has referred an appeal from Sutton and East Surrey Water to the Competition Commission (CC) following the water authority's decision to reject the company's application to increase its price limits by 10.2% before inflation this April.

The company argues that it should be allowed the hefty increase because of a

"shortfall in water consumption".

Falling demand has also started to bite into the profits of energy companies, with shares in Drax falling after a dip in demand of 4.3% in the last quarter of 2008.

The group's pre-tax profits dropped to £443 million last year from £449 million in 2007.

Drax still intends to build three biomass-fuelled power stations in the UK with Siemens, generating as much as 15% of the country's renewable power in 2014.



## INTERNATIONAL

### IN BRIEF

**AUSTRALIA:** Waterside workers have joined truck drivers and rail workers in refusing to carry the machinery of clothing group Bond's to China as part of an outsourcing plan. The label announced it was making 1,800 workers redundant and moving all manufacturing offshore. This is despite the company pocketing more than £12 million in government subsidies to stay in business in the past two years.

**EGYPT:** A woman who went to a police station to file a complaint in January was subjected to alleged torture by the force. Mona Said Thabet, her husband Yasser Naguib Mahran and their three children have been the targets of a campaign of intimidation to force her to withdraw complaints she made when her husband was allegedly beaten for refusing to become a police informant.

**EUROPE:** The latest EU statistics suggest that women across the economic zone earn on average 17.4% less than men. The EU says working women are concentrated in less lucrative jobs and positions than men.

**FRANCE:** Unionists at the port of Le Havre recently downed tools in protest at privatisation plans. The strike stopped work on freight containers, which is the port's main activity.

**GREECE:** The main labour body is calling a 24-hour general strike to protest more than 4,000 lay-offs that have swept the country. Workers should not "pay the price of the financial crisis" the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE), representing 600,000 workers, said in a statement. A date has not been set as *Freedom* goes to press.

**GUADELOUPE:** Union leaders on the French Caribbean island have agreed to end a 44-day-old general strike after most of their demands were met. The announcement came after the LKP collective signed a deal to raise workers' pay and lower the cost of basic goods. Negotiations are continuing in nearby Martinique over a similar stoppage.

**ITALY:** The government is in the process of examining a new bill which will restrict the right to call a strike. The bill will introduce a so-called 'virtual strike' (you call the strike but you go to work) for the categories of workers considered 'essential'.

**USA:** Last month demonstrators gathered in Santa Rosa's Courthouse Square to demand that the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department end their use of Tasers, after the devices caused five deaths of unarmed civilians in the community over the last two years.

**WORLD:** The United Nations is celebrating the 100th anniversary of the international war on drugs. It was in 1909 that 13 countries joined together to halt the Chinese opium trade. So far, the tactic has failed to halt drug production or use.

### LENS CAP RUSSIA



Picture: Russia indymedia

Bas relief portraits are hung on walls in Moscow of far-right murder victims Stasa Markelov and Nastya Baburovoy on the 40-day anniversary of their killing. The inscription reads: 'They died for freedom, remember forever'.

## Ecuador villagers take on Canada's markets

Two villagers from the Andean mountains of Ecuador have travelled to Toronto, Canada, to announce on 4th March the launch of a billion dollar lawsuit in Ontario, based on violence and human rights abuses related to a proposed future open pit copper mine in the Ecuadorean Andes.

Marcia Ramirez and Carlos Zorrilla allege the exploration operations of a Canadian junior mining company have resulted in armed attacks, death threats and assaults on local community members and leaders who oppose the planned future mine, as well as causing social upheaval. Local leaders are arguing for ecologically-sound local development instead.

The Ecuadorians are also naming the Toronto Stock Exchange as a defendant for its role in arranging financing for the mining company after the Exchange had been warned of the

risk of violence from the mining company's local tactics.

The three plaintiffs in the lawsuit say they have all suffered physical attack from what they believe were company agents.

The Ecuadorians believe lax laws and regulations in Canada allow Canadian mining companies to cause serious harm all over the world without adequate legal accountability. In addition to pursuing a major legal action, they have been pressing for Canadian law reform.

The plaintiffs seek compensation, plus punitive damages totaling over a billion dollars to offset the financial incentives for abuse created by the lure of open pit mine revenues. All net proceeds from the legal claim, if successful, will be devoted to ecological and human rights causes.

## Notes from the United States

By the end of 2008 nearly 10% of all mortgages in the United States were either 'delinquent' (significantly behind) or already in foreclosure, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association. Credit Suisse suggests that a total of 8.1 million US homes (16% of all households with mortgages), could fall into foreclosure by 2012.

ACORN (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) launched its 'Home Staying' campaign in late February. It starts from the premise that once a home has been repossessed, there's little you can do to get it back. Better to

resist repossession before that happens.

Using texting, email and mobile phone networking as well as word of mouth, those in danger are being urged to call volunteers already registered with local networks to gather and physically resist sheriff's deputies (the equivalent of bailiffs). The house may still be lost to developers, banks, mortgage companies or into the almost unbelievably callous new industry supported by 'infomercials' enabling other homeowners to take advantage of 'defaulters' misfortune and distress; buy a repossessed property low – then sell high. But



# New Bonnot gang strikes again

**Helicopter getaway was the third by anarchist Paleokosta crew**

Styled as Greece's most notorious criminal, Vasilis Palaiokostas has gained international fame by escaping prison in the back of a hijacked helicopter – for the second time.

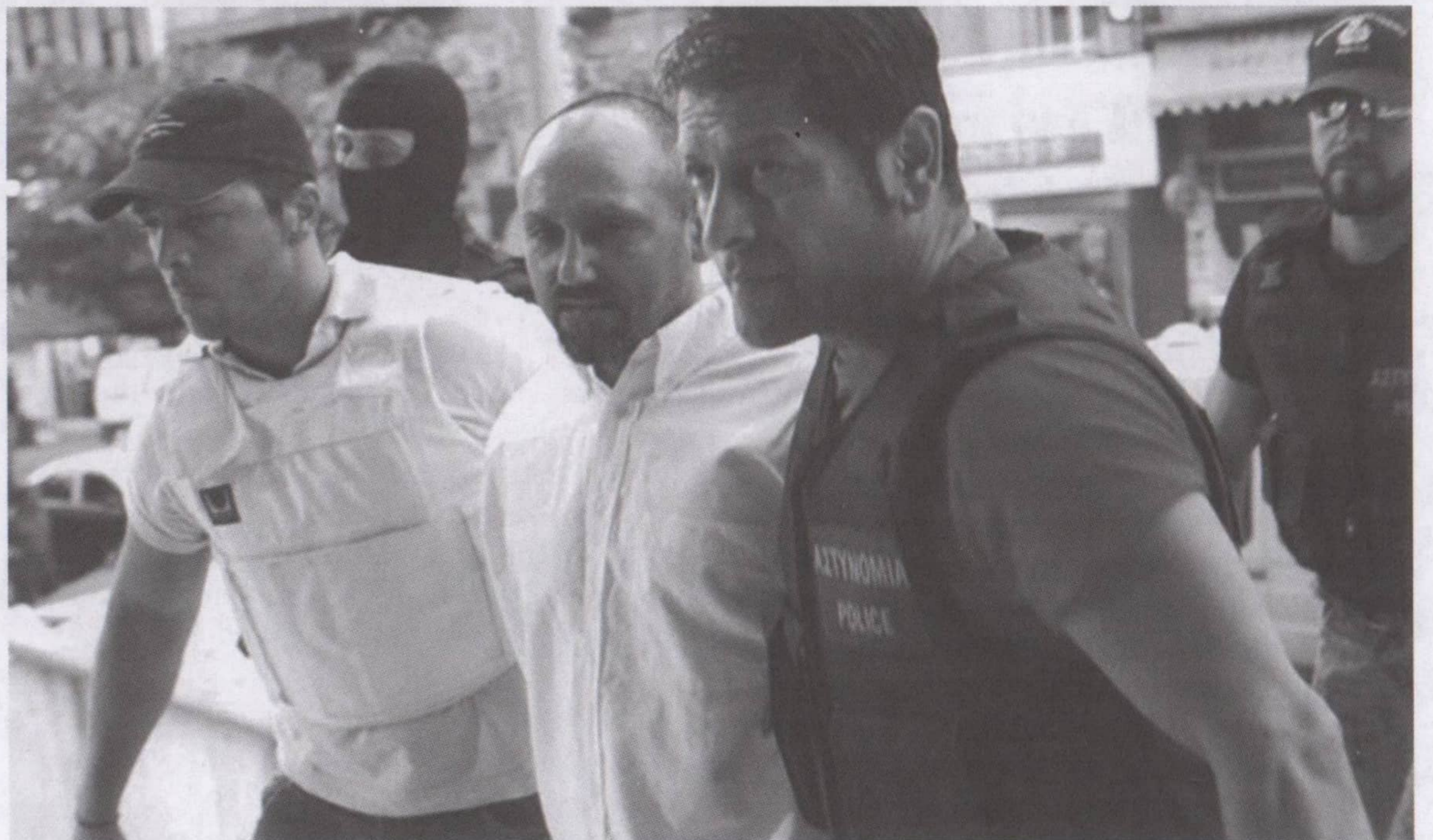
But what has been largely ignored by the media is that this armed robber, kidnapper of industrialists and all-round bad boy is known in his hometown as an anarchist Robin Hood – who has given most of the proceeds of his crimes to the poor.

Vasilis, now 42 years old, is one of an armed crew which has built a reputation as a new Bonnot Gang, armed to the teeth with Kalashnikovs, RPGs, bombs, bulletproof vests and recently of course, helicopters.

He, his brother Nikos and several others are well-known in the Greek anarchist scene as having helped pull off some of the most spectacular illegalist activities of the last 30 years, both for their robberies and for freeing each other when one was caught – the pair have been in and out of prison since the '80s.

Among their biggest capers were two kidnappings, one of the president of a halva factory, netting 750,000 euros, the other of an aluminium magnate which brought in a reputed 10 million euros, alongside dozens of robberies.

Friends in the anarchist scene insist this money has gone exclusively to needy causes. In a recent communiqué about the Paleokosta group, supporters noted: "They made robberies, car thefts and escapes from prison, but have never had fancy clothes,



Vasilis Palaiokostas being taken to court in Thessaloniki

driven expensive cars or lived in luxury houses. Indeed they have been known to throw money back on the floor of the bank, because that little amount wasn't what they needed. Everything was always sent to where it was needed and shared with the people who protected them."

The first time the gang used a helicopter in a breakout was in 2003, when Nikos used one in a spectacular prison break and went on the run for three years before his recapture in 2006. He is currently still inside.

Later that year Vasilis, who had originally been arrested and jailed for robbery and the kidnapping of aluminium tycoon George Mylonas, made his own helicopter getaway when supporters held a helicopter pilot at gunpoint and dropped the copter directly into

the prison yard – guards thought it was an inspection from the governor.

He was recaptured in August of 2008 after two years on the run, betrayed by an accomplice who was caught spending money on luxuries in Crete.

He was locked up in Athens' Korydallos prison but mere months later, was rescued again in exactly the same manner, much to the incredulity of the press and to wild cheering from his fellow inmates.

Vasilis, Alket Rizai, 34, and Guido Dassori, 27, were taking a Sunday afternoon constitutional in the courtyard of the prison when the aircraft flew over and a female passenger threw down a rope ladder for them to climb up. Gunfire was belatedly exchanged, but it was too late – they were away.

## Notes from the Unites States

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any arrests will have to be mass arrests and hopefully at least attract embarrassing media coverage.

Since an unusually high number of people in the United States are facing the same predicament, ACORN hopes that the campaign will tap into and build on widespread resentment. A recent such 'Home Staying' action took place in Watts, Los Angeles, at the home of Tommy and Debora Beard; they work as a teacher's assistant and a hospital cook. They have lived in their home for more than 20 years but lost it recently to foreclosure, due in part to a predatory loan. Debora Beard said she would not leave unless she was "led out by the sheriff ... I am not leaving without a fight."

In a parallel development, at the same time as Obama's new budget seems likely to direct Federal resources not to the people who need relief but to mortgage companies, the

Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America is transporting homeowners who face foreclosure to the homes of chief executives of financial institutions physically to protest outside them.

In Minneapolis the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign has a project to move homeless people into some of the homes already foreclosed and vacant in Minneapolis' North and South Sides. From 11th March the group begins organising people in St Paul and Minneapolis to stop and/or disrupt sales of repossessed homes by repeatedly holding sit-ins.

Further, as part of the Underground Railroad project, the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign is arranging emergency response teams; these go in and remain with families that are in the final stages of foreclosure and refusing to leave.

Louis Further

## Iran: arrests and floggings

A number of arrests have followed a mini-crackdown on dissent in Iran which has seen more unionists arrested and women's rights activists flogged or intimidated.

In the most brutal episode, female labour activists Shiva Kheyraadi, Susan Razani and two others were flogged last month after they were arrested while taking part in a May Day rally in Sanandaj. Kurdish student Hana Abdi, meanwhile, was released at the end of February after nearly 16 months in detention. She was charged with 'enmity against God' and 'gathering and colluding to harm national security'. She is a member of the Campaign for Equality, aimed at equalising women's legal rights in Iran. Finally, Ali Nejati and Reza Rakhshan, both of the Haft Tepeh Sugar Can Company Workers' Syndicate, have been arrested for their refusal to deal with the Islamic Labour Council and demand to be represented by their own union.



# Circling the changes over a decade of protest policing

Rob Ray interviews Legal Defence and Monitoring Group activist Andy Meinke

It is not overstating the case to say that without the Legal Defence and Monitoring Group, a large number of people who disagreed with the policies of Her Majesty's Government are walking free today who might otherwise be serving a lengthy stretch.

The group have for over a decade been at the forefront of protest in the UK, making sure that when people exercise their right to free speech, they aren't simply spirited away to the extensive dungeons of democracy's cradle.

Andy Meinke, a tall and focused character, has been involved in the organisation in London since 1998, and is part of a half-dozen strong group of legal observers in the capital, with a much larger group of casuals supporting them.

Over the last ten years, while the basics have not changed significantly, Andy has seen an evolution of the policing of dissent as police techniques, and law use, tighten.

He said: "Fundamentally British public order policing tactics have remained unchanged since 1974 and the Red Lion Square riot, where a student called Kevin Gately was killed by police, who had an inquiry and were duly exonerated by Lord Scarman. Out of this came the plan not to chase through the streets whacking people.

"Since then they have been practicing an ever-tightening form of containment, which as most of your readers will be aware is very different from the tactics used elsewhere in

Europe, which is designed to disperse crowds.

"It's based on a psychological theory of a hierarchy of needs, whereby if people are kept long enough and bored their desire to go home, eat and go to the loo will outweigh their rage at civil liberties being breached.

"What we've seen in the last ten years though is much more common and longer-term kettles, or bubbles as they're sometimes called, designed to hold demonstrators in a cordon of police before eventual release, of up to seven and a half hours – like Oxford Circus in 2001 – and a complete failure by the anarchist movement to find a way around it."

The differences between such tactics and older styles of policing, which are still used on the continent, came to the fore in Gleneagles 2005 in Scotland and Heiligendamm 2007 in Germany, when the anti-G8 demonstrations came to town. The styles of policing, and approaches from activists, were very different.

"Comparing the German and Scottish G8s, the activist movement there is a lot stronger in Germany which made a difference, and they are more professional in their approach to dealing with police, which we are not.

"The closest we have had tactically were the Wombles group in the UK. They were put under a lot of police attention when they started to take this more tactical approach, members were followed home, intimidated, etc.

"More generally, part of the culture in our movement is a suspicion of paramilitary tactics, which has good political reasoning but does hamstring us.

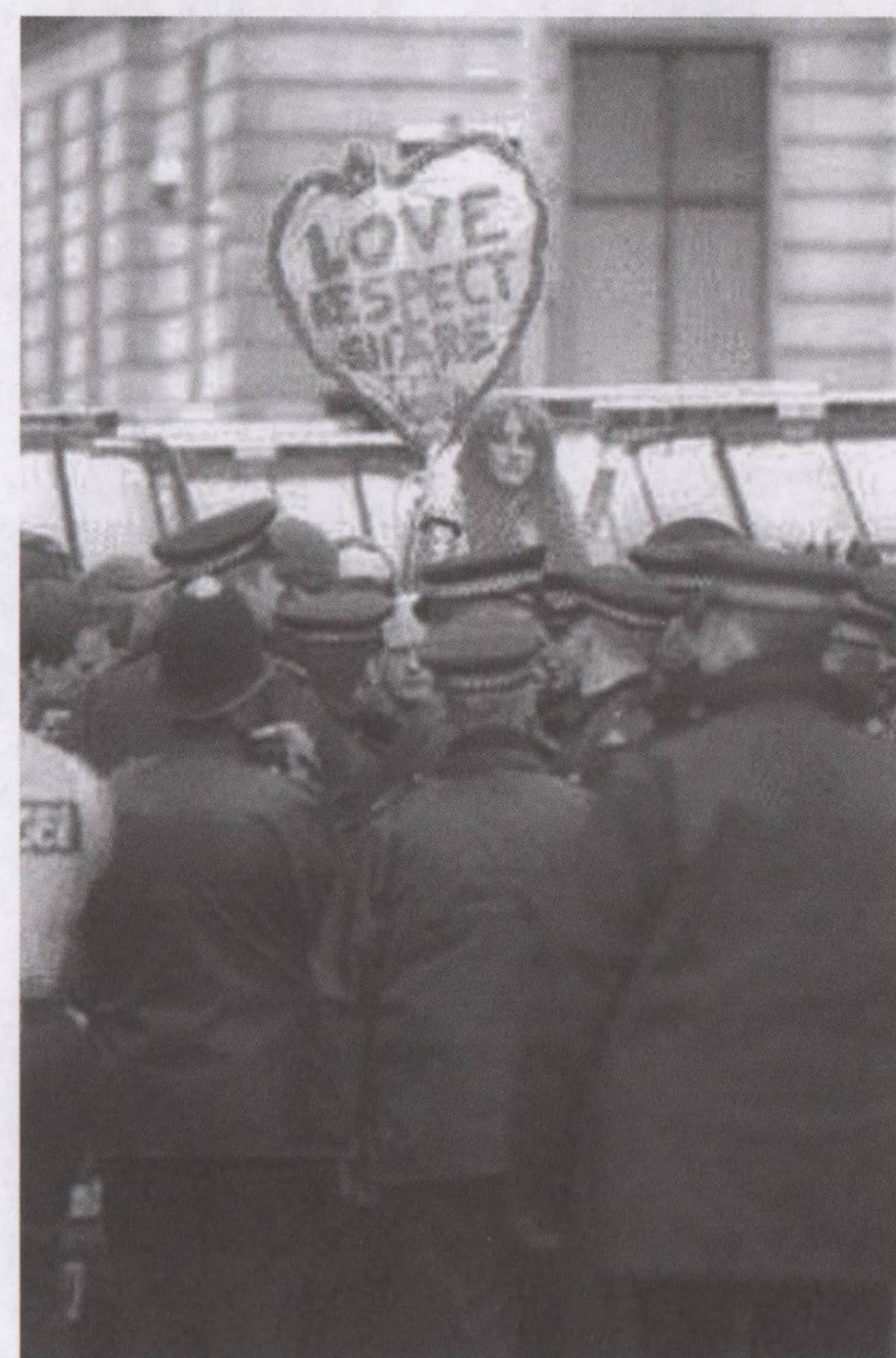


Photo: Simon Chapman

Above left, Mayday 2001, London; above right, Climate Camp in August 2008; below left, Brighton, August 1996; below right, London's J18 in 1999.

"The tactics from British police see almost no use of tear gas except in violent circumstances – it has only been used once in Toxteth, 1981. They don't use water cannon. There are plans to use acoustic devices but it's mostly just batons, which while it is dangerous looks less so and even this is becoming less frequent, extendable batons mean you can hurt people without causing brain damage, horses are used much more widely to intimidate.

"It's a much more psychological approach, because the number of riot-trained police is actually very low, for example the Met have 3,500 out of 30,000 who are riot trained and the others aren't allowed to even be there because of health and safety laws. Even a small demo of 35,000 people vastly outnumbers them so it has to be mostly psychological."

But smart policing has not been the only tool hitting effectiveness in demonstrations. A raft of new laws have been highly noticeable in the last few years attached to anti-terror legislation. Andy believes that in many cases the practical danger of some of these has been overstated, with less notorious laws actually doing more damage in many cases.

"As with so often, the high-profile laws, like the terrorism act stuff and section 58a [anti-photography] are less damaging than some of the more seemingly innocuous ones, for example Section 50 of the police reform act gives them the power to demand the



Photo: Indymedia.org.uk

name and address of people who they believe to be acting in an antisocial manner.

"That was designed to be used against juvenile delinquents, but is now routinely used to obtain the names of protestors. It's an example of a law that has not been tested in the courts and for the majority of the people who have been arrested over it the case has been dropped, but it has brought a lot of results for the police because the psychological aspect of it is, according to the European Court of Human Rights, a 'chilling effect on the right to protest'.

"The so-called photography law that has been brought in really won't stop people photographing police as far as the higher courts are concerned, but loads of people will be stopped by police and intimidated out of doing so.

"Another feature is there are so many laws that people find it hard to keep up. The police themselves often can't follow the amount of laws. To become a sergeant you have to pass a multiple-choice test on the laws as they stand, for which until 2004 they had a 75% pass rate. Since then they have refused to say what the pass rate is."

Surveillance, in the form of both CCTV cameras and the hated Forward Intelligence Team – a police squad dedicated to profiling activists – has also been a major difficulty in building any kind of movement capable of taking on police lines.

"The camera system is just overwhelming. You have to just about mask up when you

leave your home and keep it on until you go to work on Monday morning. And it makes it impossible for anyone who is regularly active to not be known. For the last eight years I've been regularly followed by Forward Intelligence Teams, who know me by name on any major demo I've been on, and the same is true for upwards of 50 regular activists in London.

"It's strange how it gets to you after a few days of it. During the European Social Forum they followed me into the Royal Courts of Justice when I went in for a case and stood outside the courtroom until I left. When we were going they arrested Helen Steele (who became internationally famous in 1997 as one of two people involved in the McLibel trial) for jamming a revolving door and obstructing police in following me. She was acquitted."

As is the case with many long term activists, Andy is unsure as to how protest can progress against today's police tactics.

"The obvious thing is we need a way to push through lines of riot cops who are hitting people, for which you'd need a barrier, or padding. Legally, the House of Lords has said this year that kettling people is perfectly legal, for up to seven and a half hours – the Oxford Circus test case. The other solution is to keep mobile and keep watching for them doing that."

To contact the Legal Defence and Monitoring Group, email [ldmgmail@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ldmgmail@yahoo.co.uk).

## DEMO STORIES

Andy has seen a wealth of weird and terrifying incidents over the last ten years. Here he recounts two – one brutal, one ridiculous:

The most horrifying arrest I've seen was on Mayday 2001. There was a group of people sitting on the ground ten yards away from a line of police, who were forming up for a baton charge. I was screaming at them to get up. Then the baton charge came and one of them was kicked unconscious and left in a pool of blood. They eventually got picked up by police and carried away but no-one knew what had happened to them afterwards, and it didn't come up as a complaint against the police.

Then there's the silly stuff. In the LDMG we give names to particularly funny defendants, such as the 'paint-filled balloon woman'. She was arrested with a large number of balloons, uninflated but filled with some paint. Instead of giving a 'no comment' interview, when she was asked by the police what they were for she said "last year at Mayday you put us all in a kettle. This year I thought if you did the same we'd fill up these balloons, float them over your lines and burst them." She was convicted of having items with intent to cause criminal damage.

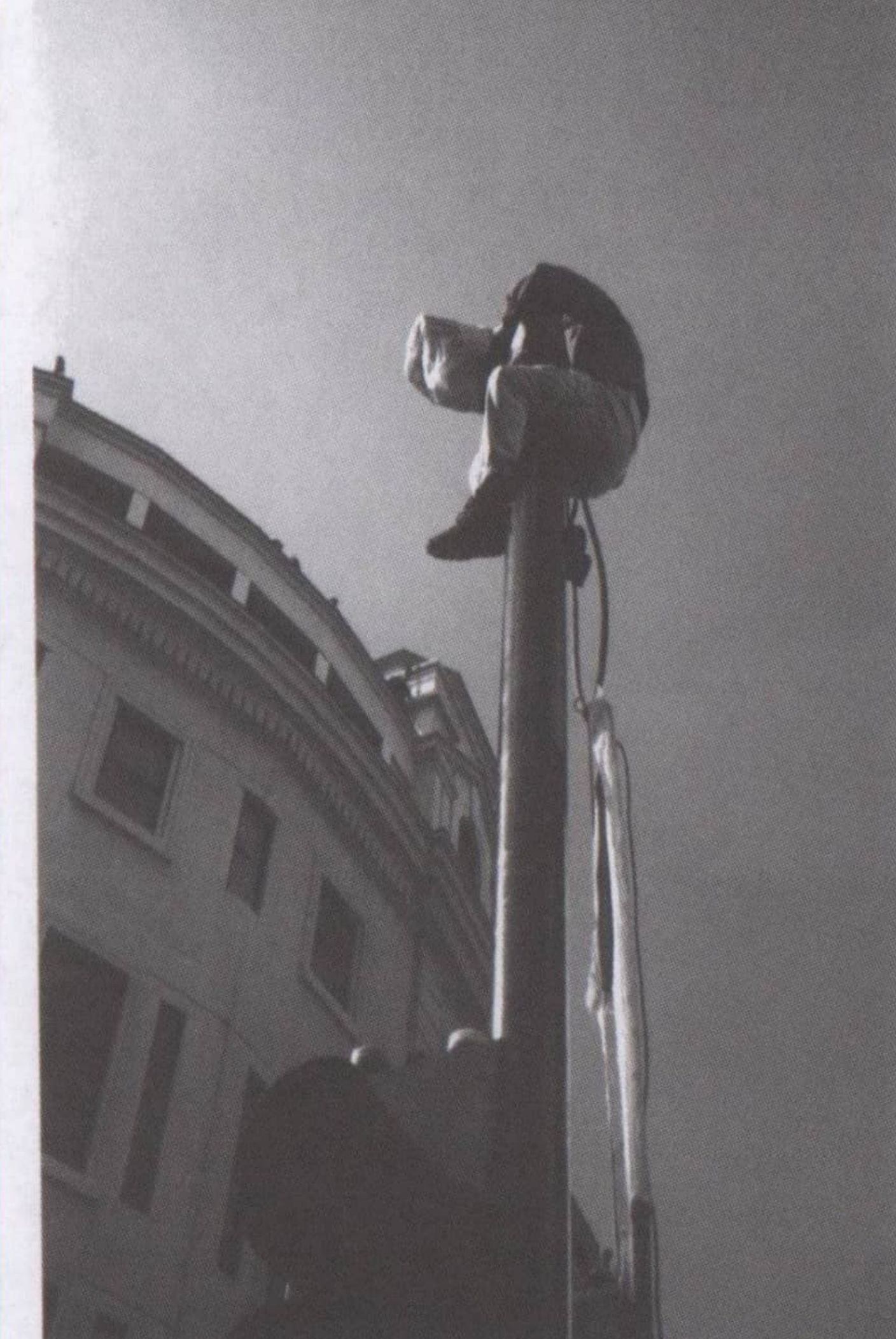
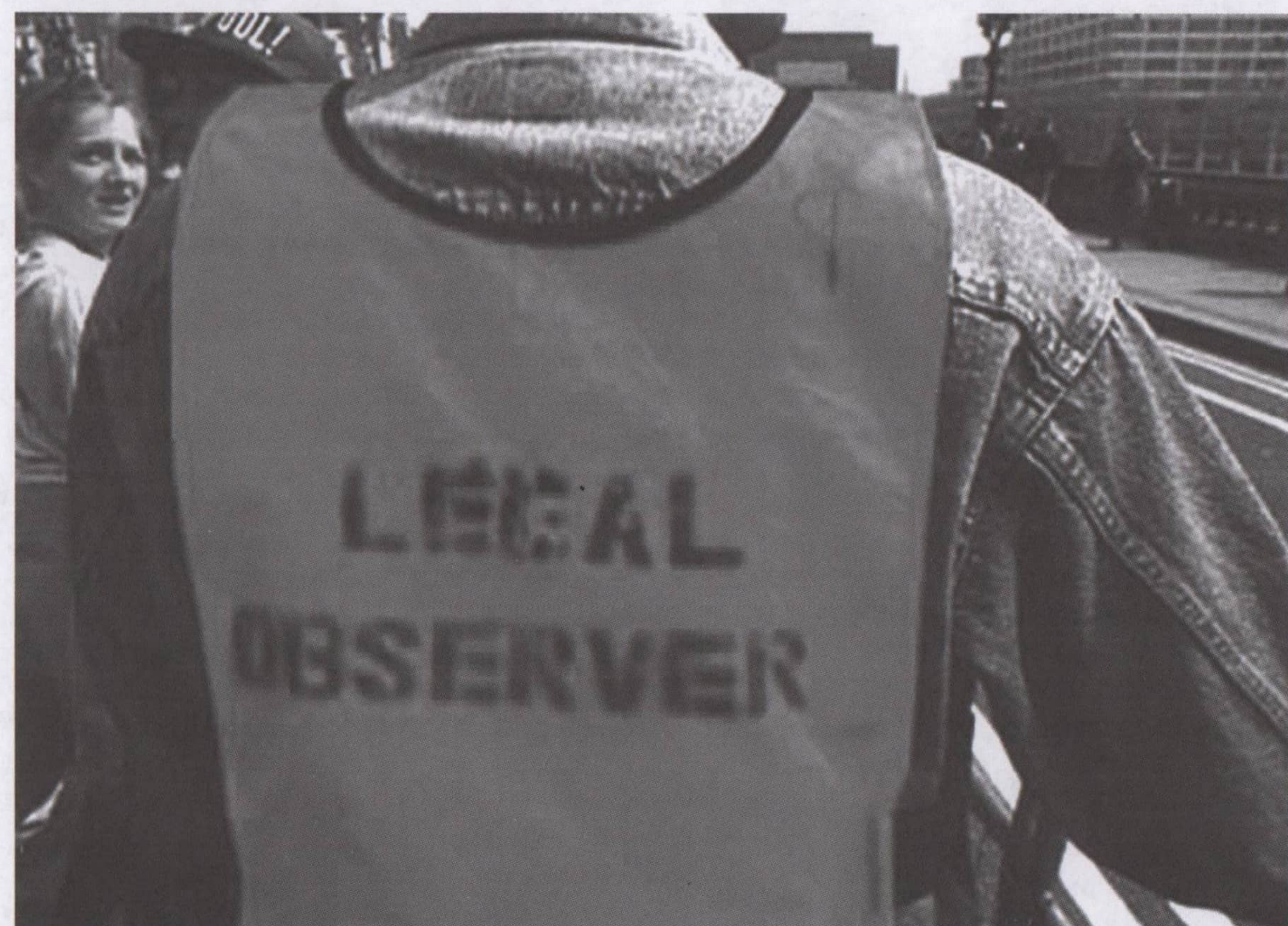


Photo: Jayne



## COMMENT

## ABOUT FREEDOM

## ANGEL ALLEY

As ever, the tedious bureaucracy of the Freedom collective ticks on with meetings, more meetings, working groups, punctuated by the occasional booze up. More events are happening in the shop (see our website at [freedompress.org.uk](http://freedompress.org.uk) for the latest news) and sales remain up on last year despite the credit crunch.

We've been busy drawing up a publishing programme for 2009 and will be reprinting Malatesta's *Anarchy* followed by Max Stirner's *The Ego and It's Own*. More will follow if we succeed in flogging you lot these and the back list on the website. All books sent post free, though donations are extremely welcome.

Building work continues with the toilet tiled and the construction team is about to move on to the sink. April will bring the great job of repointing the walls.

Lastly we report the sad demise of 'Bakuno' the Angel Alley rat who was found dead at the end of February of a surfeit of KFC and Burger King leftovers. Tragically Bakuno is survived by a large family of equally verminous rodents we could well do without.

Andy

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

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## NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 28th March 2009 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 19th March. You can send your articles to us by email to [copy@freedompress.org.uk](mailto:copy@freedompress.org.uk) or by post addressed to 'The Editors', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

## A sideways look

by SVARTFROSK

The government intends to part privatise the Royal Mail. Its justification is the deficit in the staff pension fund, currently running at £5.9 billion, though the authorities leaked a letter from a pensions trustee claiming it could be significantly higher.

As part of the deal, 30% of the Post Office will be sold to a private mail company and the government will guarantee the pension fund. Postal workers and their union leaders are up in arms about it; and it has proved a useful theme for the tabloids to talk about the divide between 'public and private'.

The latter claims from tabloid editors and their staff can be taken with a pinch of salt. The editors, while not Sir Fred Goodwin, have the sort of pension that us mere mortals don't get, as we are told that 'final salary pensions are no longer standard'. Of course, this doesn't apply to the sort of talent who have brought the economy to its knees, nor indeed to the Royal Mail boss Adam Crozier, who has a pension pot worth £1.1 million. The crucial thing to remember about most public sector pensions is that they may be final salary schemes, but look at the final salary it's based on! Yes, dustmen and library assistants might get pensions based on what they earned, but a proportion of not a lot isn't going to buy a lot of cruises. And the lack of private pensions is a lot more to do with management knowing they can get away with raiding it, and taking contributions holidays when times are good.

The average pay for a postal worker is £18,000. This isn't good money by anyone's standards and a pension after 30 years service would be merely £7,800. The privatisation push comes with the promise

of cutting wages even more. As it's only a couple of quid above minimum wage already, you can see where this is going. In addition, the dreaded time and motion idiots have told management that posties can do a round at more than four miles per hour, including time to put the letters through the door, and avoid the dogs, all the while carting around up to thirty five pounds of cards and junk mail.

One thing absent from the pronouncements by Mandelson and Brown has been any recognition of why Royal Mail is in such a pickle financially. Can you guess? Yes, a lot of it is down to government policy. The EU decided that all countries had to allow private mail companies to compete. In Britain, they only want the lucrative business post, which is delivered to their depots pre-sorted and can be processed automatically. Your bills might say they are delivered by TNT or DHL, but they are carried over the 'final mile' from the local sorting office to your door by a regular postman. The Post Office charges the private delivery companies 13p per letter for this, but it costs them more. The charge is set by the government's regulator. In effect, private companies are being subsidised by Royal Mail. And to complete the circle, the reason the Post Office has to be teamed up with a private company is because it needs investment. That would be the investment it could have made if it wasn't forced to subsidise its competitors.

Good luck to them in their fight to defend their pensions. Those of us with worse, or no, pension, should be looking to fight with them and gain one ourselves. Pensions shouldn't just be for the bosses.

## Blog Bites

(from [davidosler.com](http://davidosler.com))

One of the following gets paid far too much pension at far too young an age, and is therefore an unacceptable drain on the public purse; choose the correct answer from (a) Fred the Shred or (b) a nurse in the National Health Service.

It hardly takes a brain the size of Gail Trimble's to work that one out, one would have thought. After all, Sir Fred Goodwin – who is just 50 years old – is picking up a pension of £650,000 a year from a bank that had to be bailed out with £45 billion of public money.

Even the congenitally timorous Alistair Darling has politely asked for a refund.

But thankfully, those frightfully clever chaps who write the editorials at the *Daily Telegraph* have uncovered the real pension scandal. Yes, the problem is all those overpaid teachers and hospital porters:

"People on the public payroll retire earlier and with far more generous index-linked pensions than their counterparts in the wealth-creating part of the economy."

I suspect that the *Telegraph* is operating on a different definition of "wealth-creating part of the economy" than most of us would.

While few public sector employees directly generate surplus value, education and healthcare workers, and many others, are essential to its realisation. Those employed in financial services, on the other hand, are superfluous.

"The Office of National Statistics says that median full-time earnings in the public sector last year were £523 a week compared to £460 a week in the private sector," say the *Telegraph*.

I'd like to see how the ONS calculated that one, given the earnings of many in the City. It must take huge numbers of burger flips and cleaners to offset those multi-million pound wedges. In any case the comparison is irrelevant, given the vastly differing make ups of the two main parts of the economy.



## Carruthers corrections

I was saddened to read of the death of Dave Carruthers (*Freedom*, 31st January), as I knew him in the 1970s when he was a member of the Anarchist Workers Association (AWA).

However Jim McFarlane has got a bit confused about events and organisations (okay, it was a long time ago). With the regrettable split in the AWA when a minority were expelled and others left in disgust at this, the Provisional AWA was formed (yes that really was what they called themselves). This later changed its name to the Anarchist Communist Association. Those left in the AWA then changed the name of the organisation to the Libertarian Communist Group. However, Jim is wrong in thinking this joined forces with a Trot group and with Lotta Continua. Most of its members did end up in Big Flame, but the LCG never had anything to do directly with Lotta Continua. Anyway, it would be more true to say that Big Flame was influenced by the ideas of Lotta Continua than vice versa.

Looking back now, it would have been better if the split had been avoided as it weakened British anarchist communism for many years.

Nick Heath

## Financial accountability

The banks have set breathtakingly new lows for corporate irresponsibility. When any other private company has become insolvent, its assets have been sold off, and subject to legal process, its creditors are paid what they are owed.

In the case of the banks however, those mainly small shareholders not quick enough

## Blog bites

### ◀ page 10

“The Government itself recognises the position to be unsustainable: three years ago, it sought to increase the retirement age of state workers from 60 to 65, only to back down at the first whiff of grapeshot from the unions.”

As I remember the agreement the retirement age for new entrants to the public sector is now 65, just as the *Telegraph* counsels. Only those who joined on the basis that retirement was at 60 hold on to that privilege.

Throughout this rant, one point is altogether missed. All workers earn their pensions, through their labour and their contributions. They are deferred wages. It is up to employers to stick with their side of the bargain.

From the social point of view, a nurse who puts in decades of graft has got rather more moral right to a decent pension than Fred the Shred.

on their feet have taken the most horrendous losses; the government, feeling unable to let the banks fall, has bailed them out with vast quantities of our money, the full extent of which seems to grow by the week.

Meanwhile ex-chief executives of the failed banks have been hauled up before a Treasury Select Committee of MPs, where they all said ‘sorry’ before walking away to enjoy the proceeds of their grotesque salaries, bonuses and pensions.

And still the government has offered nothing specific to tighten up the regulatory regime, which they themselves have loosened!

When push comes to shove, it seems that only you and I are accountable for shovelling in hundreds of billions in the form of future tax rises and benefit cuts. All of which prompts questions as to how an anarchist society might manage the problem of accountability, but first the here and now...

### Nationalisation, mutualism

Alongside all that Thatcherite zeal for privatisation shown by Brown and Darling, the Marxists must have been full of glee when our dynamic duo were forced to nationalise banks as part of their remedy for the developing ‘global economic crisis’ (Brown keeps using this phrase to smudge over his part in creating the UK’s economic crisis – it’s like a virus that’s mysteriously infected the entire planet, or so you might think when you listen to him).

They soon made it clear however, that having nationalised banks, the latter would be would be privatised again once ‘stability has returned’. And furthermore, they started pushing on with privatising Royal Mail, just in case some Labour MPs still hadn’t got the message!

For the politicians, accountability ends at the ballot box, by which time it is too late to do anything anyway.

There have been suggestions in the press of the need for a real ‘people’s bank’, but we can be sure that something like Proudhon’s ‘People’s Bank’ is not on the agenda. Nevertheless, that shouldn’t stop us advocating mutualist alternatives, and contemporary mutuals make a good starting point for our deliberations.

Open a building society account, and you will automatically become a shareholder with the right to elect board members, and vote at the Annual General Meeting.

This is fine in principle, but these societies have become so huge that few people will have knowledge of the directors beyond the bland reasonableness of their electoral addresses – just like the politicians.

Compared with banks, building societies are more closely regulated, and so far, non have overreached themselves financially. Aside from that little bit of democracy, and being smaller, the building societies have the same feel as high street banks, they are hierarchical and sell their financial ‘products’ in pretty much the same way.

Anarchists of a more ‘fundamentalist’ nature reject all forms of economics which

involve monetary exchange. Those with more practical interests have followed Proudhon and accepted a need for money, seeking ways of distributing it more fairly and making enterprises democratically accountable.

I have criticised the building societies, but it is important to remember that they are overgrown credit unions. The lesson to be learned is that mutuals work perfectly well, provided they do grow to such an extent that accountability becomes a problem.

And accountability is not only a question of size, members must accept and exercise their responsibility to retain democratic control, otherwise hierarchy will emerge.

Anarchists advocate localised small-scale activities under direct control of people in face-to-face contact, although modern technologies tend to demand solutions which are large and complex.

Gas, piped water, electricity and the rail network are for instance necessarily large, centrally-organised industries which need to operate over the entire country; they are highly resistant to being made small and simple. That said, it is possible that technologies may yet be evolved which are more responsive to social needs, although I doubt this in the case of public utilities.

If it were possible, it would be interesting to see how a largely non-monetarised pre-industrial anarchist society would have dealt with these problems: would technical innovations, like steam power - for instance – not not have been proceeded with because they required facilities which went far beyond the local blacksmith, carpenter, waterwheel and windmill?

What would have happened if one or more communities, with locally sourced coal and iron ore, went on to produce steel, one of the most important commodities for contemporary technology? Would there have been conflict? We anarchists are often short of the answers, but we are unique in at least starting off by asking the right questions!

We are where we are, or more to the point, where we have been led, and things are getting distinctly scary. All of the current panic over money has tended to push deep questions like that of ecology onto the sidelines, but this ultimately is the real stuff of economics.

Even in ‘recession’, we humans are still doing more than enough to destroy our habitat; the only difference is that since the ‘credit crunch’ we won’t be taking on so much debt as before to do it even faster. Present company is always excepted, comrades, but we are all responsible if not accountable.

John Griffin





## GETTING ACTIVE

### PRISON NEWS

#### Critical time for Albert Woodfox

Campaigners are asking for support as his trial reaches a critical phase. In July 2008 a Federal Judge (Brady) overturned Albert's murder conviction after a State Judicial Magistrate found his trial was unfair due to inadequate representation, prosecutorial misconduct, suppression of exculpatory evidence, and racial discrimination in the grand jury selection process.

The State appealed this decision to the 5th Circuit Court of appeals on March 3rd, and a final decision is likely within the next few weeks.

If the 5th Circuit upholds Judge Brady's ruling, then the State has 120 days to either retry or release Albert. If it agrees with the State, then the conviction is reinstated.

Supporters believe Albert's prison activism in the 1970s is responsible for his 36-year incarceration. In the early 1970s, Albert and two other young black prisoners, Herman Wallace and Robert King, were active in Angola, the biggest prison in the US set in an 18,000-acre former slave plantation.

Peaceful, non-violent protest in the form of hunger and work strikes organised by inmates caught the attention of Louisiana's first black elected legislators and local media. State legislative leaders called for investigations. In 1972 and 1973 prison officials, determined to put an end to outside scrutiny, allegedly charged the three with murders they did not commit and threw Albert into solitary confinement. Robert was freed in 2001, but Herman and Albert remain behind bars.

For more info go to [angola3action.org](http://angola3action.org)

#### Eric McDavid hit over jail bomb

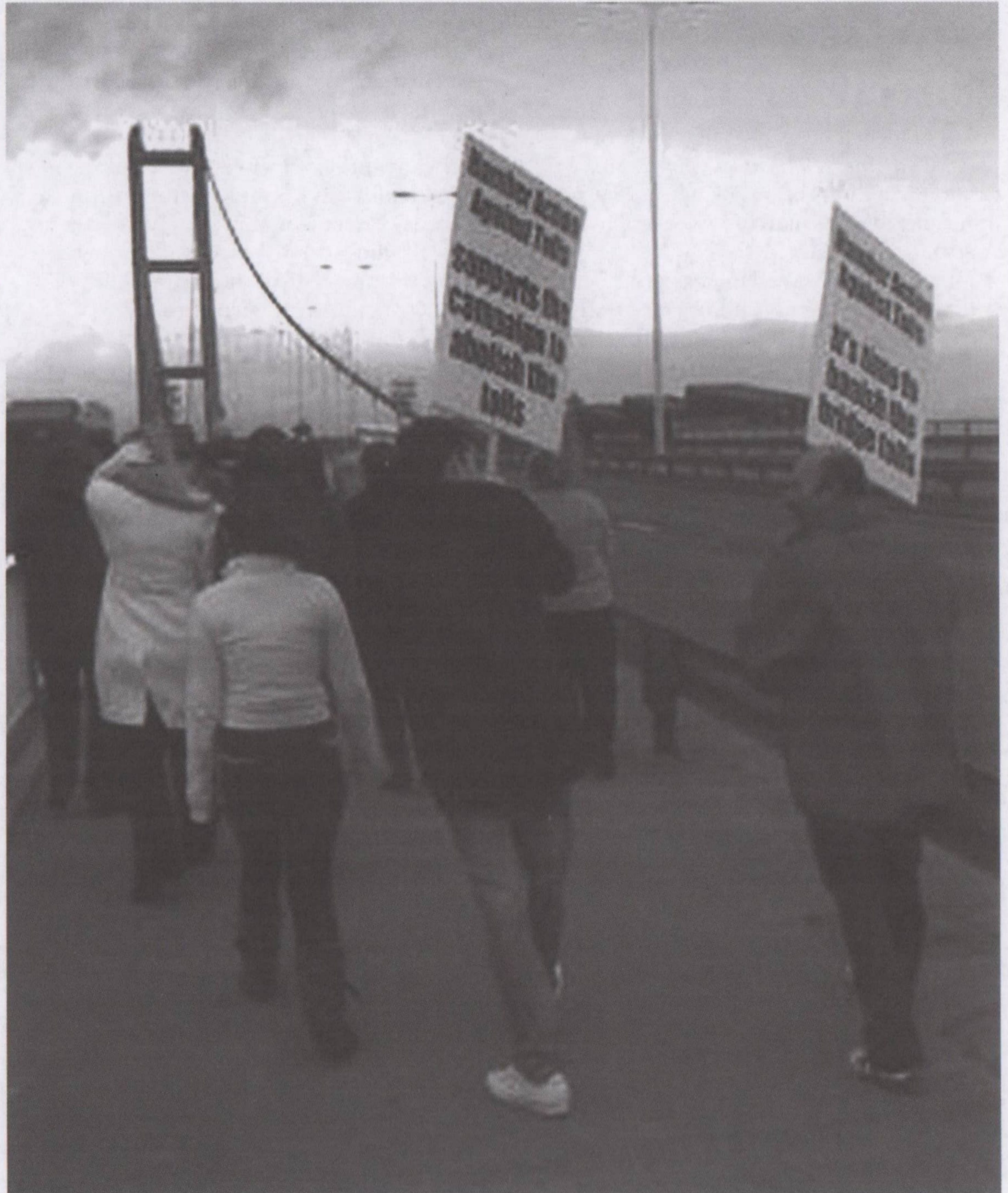
Green scare prisoner Eric McDavid has been picked out by the FBI for interrogation and surveillance after a bomb exploded at Victorville's Medium II prison in the US.

The improvised explosive device detonated on Friday 13th February, prompting an immediate lockdown of the facility. The day after, Eric was pulled out of his cell by guards in full riot gear and was made to strip down to his boxers. He was then taken to a room where he was interviewed by two FBI agents, who demanded DNA samples from him as part of their investigation.

Eric denied their request and they threatened to get a court order. At that point he gave them his lawyer's information and they stopped questioning him and escorted him back to the cell. There is a sign taped to the door of the cell saying that he has a 'three man hold' – which apparently means he must be escorted by three guards any time he leaves the cell.

Supporters are asking people to write to Eric, though they stress he may not be able to write back:

- Eric McDavid 16209-097, FCI Victorville Medium I, Federal Correctional Institution, PO Box 5300, Adelanto, CA 92301, USA To find out more about him and his case, visit [supporteric.org](http://supporteric.org).



● **Protests against the Humber Bridge toll** (pictured above) have been stepped up in the aftermath of the successful repeal of tolls in Scotland. Groups from the north and south sides of the bridge met there on 28th February to make their voices heard over the unpopular system.

In Scotland, the campaign saw 130 people get criminal convictions taking action before the tolls were dropped.

● **The Common Place social centre in Leeds** has lost the battle to keep its entertainment licence, placing its future in jeopardy as the centre is mostly funded through providing affordable gig and party space.

The volunteer-run community space had its license withdrawn after three-years of trouble-free operation in July 2008, with Leeds City Council saying it was not a members club as it is open to huge variety of events and types of people. This openness had also led to lax procedures when signing non-members in, a condition of the licence.

Carl Gallager of Zermansky and partners, acting for The Common Place estimates that Leeds City Council have spent in excess of £50 000 bringing this case to court in a attempt to shut down the centre, despite a chorus of support from dozens of groups who

use the centre and over 1,000 messages of support.

Common Place Volunteer, Amy Stephenson, said "It beggars belief that despite the deepening recession and the lack of affordable, social city centre venues that the council has spent so much time and effort on the closure of this much-loved resource."

Contact: Paul Chatterton 07894 340531

● **Students at the University of Plymouth** have called off their occupation saying they have achieved most of what they were looking for through the action.

They noted: "We acknowledge that this is inevitably only the beginning. We, as students, intend to work with the Students' Union to ensure that the university management will keep their word."

The university will set up a humanitarian scholarships scheme, for students that for reasons of war, natural disaster or other calamity, are unable to continue to study at their home university. This will be a yearly recurring scheme, and the first six scholarships will be offered specifically to students of University of Gaza for the next academic year.

There will be no legal, financial, or academic measures taken against anyone involved in or supporting the occupation.



# Notes on the miners' strike

The miners' strike of 1984–85 will always be remembered in British working class history as the most significant turning point in the power relationship between the working class organisations of the trade unions, and the state representing the interests of the privileged minority in the late twentieth century. The losses endured by the working class and their organisations as a whole with the defeat of the miners are still to this day attempting to be rebuilt, as are the shattered communities of the ex-pit towns.

In 1974 the then Conservative government had been replaced with a Labour one, brought down by the miners' strike of the same year. The Labour government realised that the working class, particularly the miners, had political power to exercise, and that if exercised correctly could force change in even the leadership of the country. Obviously wanting to avoid this, Labour set up think tank groups to decide the best course of action to stop this happening again. The think-tanks set up pinpointed the idea of national pay bargaining as a main factor in the power that the miners wielded. Labour introduced 'Area Incentive Schemes' alongside the structure of national pay bargaining and against national ballots in an attempt to split the miners. This meant now that wages and conditions would be decided locally, and the area was given the higher degree of importance than the national.

In early 1984, the government declared the agreements reached during the 1974 miners strike obsolete and its intention to shut 20 mines considered uneconomical. Twenty thousand jobs would be lost. In early March many miners in the affected areas began strike action. A local ballot for strike action was held on 5th March in response to the Coal Board's announcement that a further five pits were to undergo a program of 'accelerated closure' within just five weeks. It is worth noting that there were already 6,000 miners on 'unofficial' strike before the ballot was taken. By 12th March Arthur Scargill, leader of the NUM had declared the intention of making the local strikes national and called for strike action by all NUM members across the country.

Solidarity with the miners from workers in other industries was few and far between, however, there were some instances of action coming from the dockers and the railworkers, who risked dismissal if they refused to handle coal. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) didn't support the NUM and an electricians union, the EETPU actively opposed it. Another source of great antagonism for the miners was the lack of support from the leadership of the steelworkers' unions after the support that they had given them during the steel strike of 1981.

The government, tightly observing the contingency methods suggested in the 1974



report into nationalised industries known as the Ridley Plan in the event of a strike, mobilised tens of thousands of police who were drafted in from all over the country. While their official role during the strike was to 'employ riot tactics in order to uphold the law against violent picketing', they often initiated unprovoked baton charges against pickets, such as happened at the much publicised 'Battle of Orgreave' (pictured) and such that are widely believed to have caused the deaths of pickets David Jones and Joe Green. Members of the British Army are also widely believed by miners to have been present at the picket lines, and there exists film footage of 'policemen' wearing tunics missing any identifying numbers on their lapels.

The strike began to fall apart in the early months of 1985. The winter had been particularly harsh that year and most families were unable to afford heating as the NUM's funds had been seized by the government in October '84 and miners were unable to claim state benefits because the action had been declared illegal. The hands of Thatcher were strangling the mining communities and the families that lived in them were essentially living on nothing. By early March '85, 60% of miners were still on strike across the country, compared with 74% that time the previous year. A ballot was taken on 3rd March and, by a tiny majority, the miners

decided to return to work, defeated, without a new agreement with management.

Soon after, the government's programme of 'accelerated closure' was put into practise with no regard for the devastation this would wreak upon British mining communities.

The degradation that is now rampant in the ex-mining communities has been well documented. As well as the obvious factor of unemployment, suicides rose significantly, particularly in 1984. After months of strike pay, many miners and their families were heavily in debt and had to emerge during the years after the strike jobless because of the closures, which was a strain that many, understandably, could not handle. The average heroin use in ex-mining communities is also documented as being 27% above the national average.

Throughout the second half of the 1980s Thatcher continued her policy of de-industrialisation in favour of imports from abroad, effectively destroying British industry at the cost of thousands of jobs, with unemployment reaching over 11% in the UK and about 50% in mining communities by the late '80s. The potential for change had been defeated with the miners, as had the power of the trade unions and the state had been left to consolidate its free market agenda.

Alex Aspden



## REVIEWS

## WHAT'S ON

## 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](http://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](http://squatmeet09.wordpress.com) for details.

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

23rd Pogo Projections will be showing *The Internationale*, which chronicles the fascinating history of the legendary song featuring rare footage from the likes of Billy Bragg and Pete Seeger, starts at 7.30pm at Pogo Café, 76a Clarence Road, Hackney, London E5 8HB, for more see [pogocafe.co.uk](http://pogocafe.co.uk) or call 020 8533 1214.

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](http://ethicalsoc.org.uk/events.htm)

30th Pogo Projections will be showing *After Stonewall: from the riots to the millennium*, which chronicles the gay and lesbian experience since the Stonewall riots, starts at 7.30pm at Pogo Café, 76a Clarence Road, Hackney, London E5 8HB, see [pogocafe.co.uk](http://pogocafe.co.uk) or call 020 8533 1214.

## 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](http://fossilfoolsday.org)

1st and 2nd G20 Meltdown, meet at 12 noon on 1st at Bank of England, Threadneedle Street, London EC2R 8AH to reclaim the City and party, then early morning on the 2nd at the Excel Centre in Canning Town, see [g-20meltdown.org](http://g-20meltdown.org) for more information.

3rd to 5th Fifth Anarchist Bookfair in Zagreb, for all your anarchist and libertarian needs in Croatia, for more details see [ask-zagreb.org/englistki.htm](http://ask-zagreb.org/englistki.htm)

6th Pogo Projections an evening in the company of 'Mr Critical Mass' with a slide show, talk, film and a question & answer session, starts at 7.30pm at Pogo Café, 76a Clarence Road, Hackney, London E5 8HB, for more see [pogocafe.co.uk](http://pogocafe.co.uk) or call 020 8533 1214.

## MAY

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

## MAGAZINES

**A Climate of Mistrust: thr working class and Climate Camp**

by Rachel Whittaker

The year of 1984 saw peace activists and others support the Miners' Strike demanding 'Coal not Dole' and 'Coal not Nuclear Power'. We hoped that it was possible to eliminate the bad effects of coal-fired power stations whilst protecting jobs in the mining industry but 'Carbon Capture', as that process became known, still remains just a hope 25 years later. Meanwhile, the threat of pollution-caused climate change has forced a shift in the thinking about coal mining.

In October 2007, *Freedom* reported on a Northern Anarchist Network meeting in Shropshire, where Dave Douglass of the NUM (and Class War) and Rachel Whittaker, a local activist and (not uncritical) supporter of Climate Camp, debated the issue. Dave defended his letter in *Freedom* (16th June 2007), which attacked the Climate Camp at Drax coal-fired power station, claiming that it was against working class interests to have what he called 'a pristine environment'. While denying such a utopian goal, Rachel argued that radical changes are needed to stop or at least slow-down the effects of climate change. Especially as the worst of them strike hardest against the poor and working classes at home and abroad whilst others are able to pay for healthier lifestyles (just compare the mortality rates).

It was therefore unsurprising that Dave was incensed by the decision to hold the 2008 Climate Camp at the Kingsnorth coal-fired power station in Kent, using the broad slogan 'Leave it in the Ground'. He criticised the camp and its participants on Indymedia (11th July 2008, see [indymedia.org.uk/en/2008/07/403441.html](http://indymedia.org.uk/en/2008/07/403441.html)).

The Climate Camp responded by inviting the NUM to take part in the Kingsnorth action, and both Dave and Arthur Scargill attended. However, relations remained strained and whilst both sides were guilty of single-mindedness on the issues involved, Dave's behind the scenes attempts to organise a 'workers contingent' to march on the camp in protest (after accepting the invitation to speak) probably didn't help to establish an open dialogue. Rachel's personal response was a paper detailing the 'green' case in this debate, which, whilst fully respecting the

miners' position rejected the assertion that "anyone who actually advocates the ... change required ... is anti-working class". A stance widely promulgated by Class War on this and other issues like smoking and animal rights.

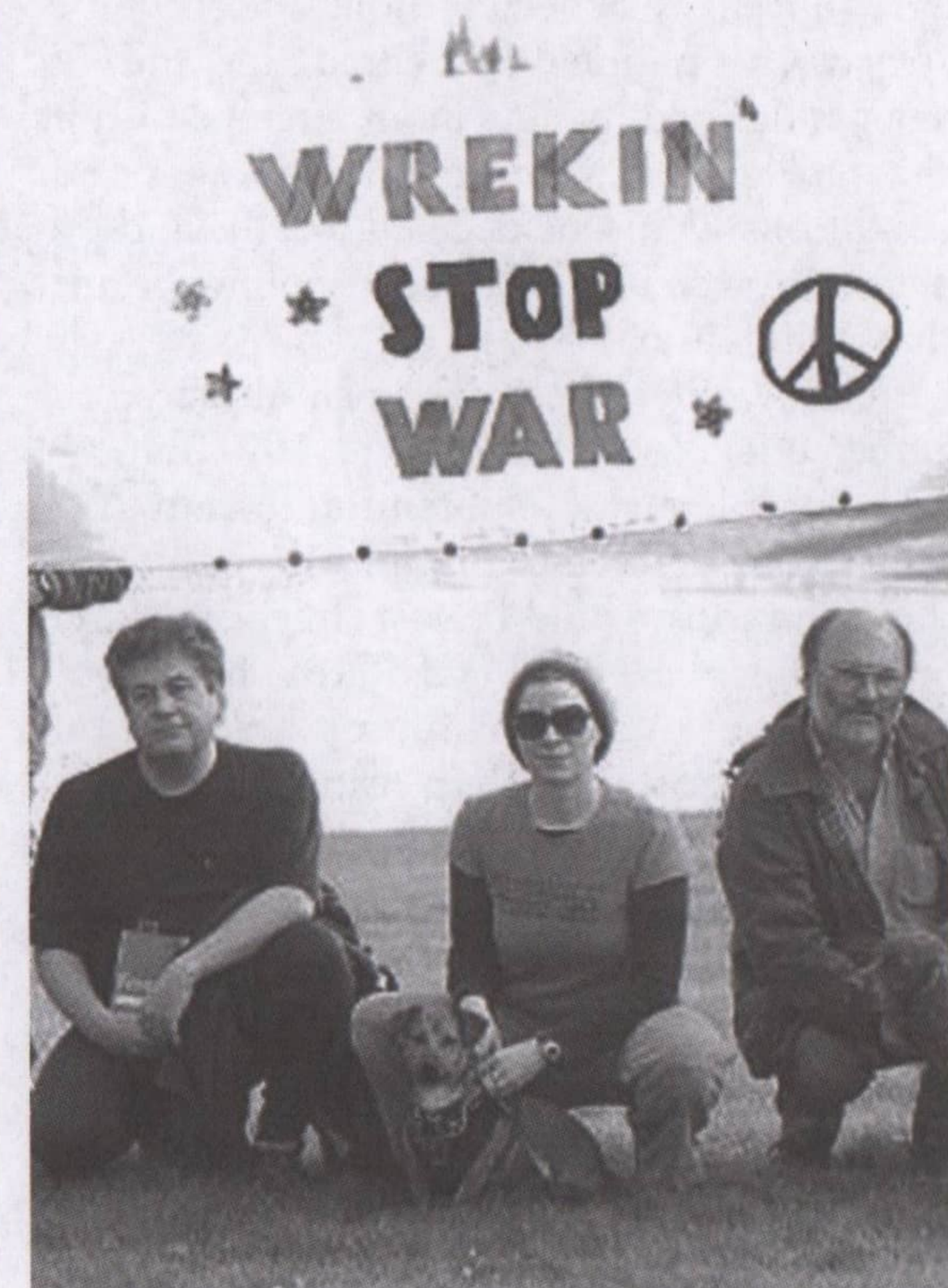
Ultimately, the Government offer only lip-service to concerns about climate change whilst their rush to nuclear power and relationship with the energy industry has slowed the development of viable alternatives to fossil fuels. Meanwhile, carbon capture remains just a good idea.

Rachel has stressed in the text that her paper was itself intended as a tool of debate and subsequent editions of the document include contributions from individuals who disagreed with some or all of its original content. The NUM also invited Rachel and other climate change activists to speak at a conference in Newcastle in November 2008.

There's always light at the end of the tunnel but we also need to remove our blindfolds.

Martin S. Gilbert

For copies of *A Climate of Mistrust* (by post or email in PDF format) contact: [admin@wrekinstopwar.org](mailto:admin@wrekinstopwar.org). Wrekin Stop War and Wrekin Anarchist Group website: [wrekinstopwar.org](http://wrekinstopwar.org) (currently being updated but archive articles still available).



Rachel Whittaker, centre, in Telford Town Park, September 2008.

## QUIZ ANSWERS

1. It turned out it was part of a Polish squadron attached to the RAF. The BNP defended it as a 'symbol of the battle of Britain', and bleated about Polish workers taking 'our jobs'. Like those fighter pilots in 1940.
2. Because they were editors of non-IWW publications and the constitution forbade it.
3. C. Wright Mills, as quoted in the Afterword by Todd Gitlin on page 232 of the 40th

anniversary (2000) edition of *The Sociological Imagination*, New York: Oxford University Press.

4. In 1914, the Colorado National Guard attacked a tent colony of striking miners and their families in Ludlow, Colorado. Twenty were killed, including eleven children, and three miners who were captured by the Guard were later found shot dead.



# A flux in state

The Baltic's recent Fluxus show can't entirely conceal the radical ambition and potential of avant-garde art, finds Tom Jennings

Following in the footsteps of the original modern art tricksters of Dadaism and Surrealism, 1950s Fluxus – hinting at fluid transience and dynamic change as well as connotations of bodily excretion – began as a loose collection of iconoclasts, opportunists and misfits envisaging a worldwide project subverting the privileging of art as products of individual genius invested in by high culture elites. They strongly influenced Swinging Sixties avant-garde cultural trends, 'happenings' and street theatre and laid groundwork for subsequent movements in conceptual and live art, minimalism, installation and multi-media as well as cementing the enduring appeal of DIY ethics. A prime mover was Lithuanian emigrée George Macuinias (1931–1978), who devoted his life to mobilising Fluxus groups, events and production in Europe and America. Some of the detritus of his activity is presented in a major 'historical exhibition' at the Baltic, borrowing the Detroit collection of the Gilbert & Lila Silverman Foundation for *The Dream of Fluxus* to tie in with a book by co-curator Thomas Kellein.

The show's publicity pooh-poohs Macuinias' efforts as "the funniest and saddest episode in twentieth-century art" but then describes his "global network of influential and vibrant artists who shared a unique, if not united, aspiration to revolutionise the avant-garde. Through the introduction of concept art, intermedia, and radical performance practices, Fluxus pioneered an aesthetic appreciation for the everyday". These mixed messages exemplify the disdainful fascination of art ideologists wishing to domesticate and exploit innovative methods blurring boundaries between different forms and disciplines, while trying to bury the radical political insights they consistently throw up concerning alienation and the separation of creativity from 'normal' existence. Contradictions between grandiose claims and the humble human raw material of daily life the exhibits employ, along with shamanistic inspiration and a democratic encouragement of general participation, also help explain why Fluxus persists in nourishing collective grass-roots alternative art practices – albeit often accompanied by quietist philosophical or mystical individualism – while also generating celebrity careers with or without political poses, from Yoko Ono<sup>1</sup> and Joseph Beuys to many contemporary art 'stars'.



Of course, the Fluxus artefacts in the exhibition are actually traces left by the ideas and social engagements that preceded (and followed) them. Authorship becomes hazy as the contents of many of these glass cases were made for and not by Macuinias in a gift exchange of free (or at least inexpensive) items often distributed by post (elaborated in later Mail Art networks). Furthermore a substantial proportion are written accounts or visual records of plans and public experiments, or instructions for performances possibly never acted on – the iconic 'event scores' first developed by George Brecht influenced by avant-garde musician John Cage. Even the recognisably physical 'artworks' usually represent mere documentations of exuberant impulses, playful concepts and passionate interactions rather than themselves materialising sublime 'beauty'. So, whimsically witty and carefully-crafted cheap artists' multiples, arrays of year's-worths of household commodities, artfully-arranged collections of ephemera and found objects, and classical musical instruments botched into monstrous twisted functionalism now languish, utterly abject and drained of energy, wallpapering a mausoleum and demonstrating the art gallery's institutionally murderous commodification of creativity.

## Avant-garde nightmare

Whereas Fluxus festivals and art spaces intended to create "utopias containing more breadth and visualisation of present-day thought than the repressive architecture of bureaucracy and luxury that imposes restrictions on people. Everything is forbidden. Don't touch! No spitting! No smoking! No thinking! No living! Our projects – our environments are meant to free men – only the realisation of utopias will make man happy and release him from his frustrations! Use your imagination! Join in ... share the power! Share property!"<sup>2</sup> Similarly, according to Macuinias in the early 1960s, the overall

political motivations of the movement were to "Purge the world of bourgeois sickness, 'intellectual', professional and commercialized culture, purge the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art ... Promote a revolutionary flood and tide in art, promote living art, anti-art, promote non art reality to be grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes and professionals ... Fuse the cadres of cultural, social and political revolutionaries into united front and action". And even if these heroically naïve, vexingly superior proclamations seem pass now, the salience for contemporary autonomous social/cultural centre initiatives in particular, as well as left-libertarian thought in general, seems clear.

Nevertheless avant-gardes primarily speak to the establishment and its loyal critical discourses, despite rhetorically addressing ordinary folk. So even effective situationist detournement – such as in Paris 1968, punk and adusting – effortlessly waters-down into advertising, art institution and academic fads and fashions. Fluxus bandwagons likewise flatter latterday followers otherwise talking amongst themselves and invisible to the outside world, opting-out from challenging trends in art, culture and society. Not only is innocuous quirky hobbyism perfectly compatible with commercialised lifestyle taste hierarchies, but insipid claims to Fluxus inspiration now also bolster community/social-inclusion grant-funding governance credentials. But at least the Baltic curators gestured towards audience involvement – restaging Knud Petersen's *Three Star A La Carte* ('dinner'-courses of old and new Fluxus event-scores) and performances by Tyneside artists spicing up their recuperation. Sally Madge's *Avant-Guard* even explicitly questioned "the official art world's recognition of Fluxus ... [which valued] the creativity of ordinary everyday activities rather than





## Review

◀ page 15

unique artefacts made by special individuals – but now these revolutionary efforts are fossilised in museum showcases. So, appropriately dressed and accredited in her 'Fluxuniform', the artist patrols the gallery and tends to the exhibits, inviting the participation of viewers as a gentle reminder of the movement's early collective ethos and intention to dissolve artificial hierarchies separating artists from audiences".<sup>3</sup>

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

Notes

1. whose blockbuster retrospective *Between the Sky and My Head*, also at the Baltic until 15th March, includes all the expected pretentious lightweight Zen, but also the great Fluxus-phase

films *Cut* (1966; audience members scissoring off her clothes; plus a recent restaging), and *Fly* (1970; six-screen intimate close-ups of a bluebottle exploring a woman's prone naked body).

2. Wolf Vostell, in Dick Higgins & Wolf Vostell (eds.), *Fantastic Architecture*, Something Else Press, 1969. Re: Fluxus' radical aspirations, see Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture: Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War*, AK Press, 1991, Chs. 9-10; and for standard neo-Fluxus bourgeois triumphalism see, for example, Owen Smith, 'Avant-gardism and the Fluxus Project: A Failed Utopia or the Success of Invisibility?' *Performance Research*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2002, pages 3-12.

3. *The Dream of Fluxus*, exhibition leaflet.

*The Dream of Fluxus*, by George Macuinias, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, November 2008 until February 2009

## THE QUIZ

1. How did a spitfire plane chosen by the BNP for a poster campaign against immigrants backfire?
2. Why weren't anarchists Carlo Tresca and Bill Shatoff eligible to join the IWW after it was formed?
3. Which legendary American sociologist wrote: "way down deep and systematically I'm a goddamned anarchist."
4. What was the Ludlow Massacre?

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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