

## SWINE FLU ALERT

If you haven't died by the time you read this then it probably shouldn't have been the lead article this issue. But guessing that you have no more than a sniffle and can read on, compare the statistics now with where we were when we went to press on 6th May.

Across the globe there had been more than 1,500 confirmed cases of the strain, which have killed 31 people with a total of 32 confirmed cases in the UK. In a world of six and a half billion, that's not very much and it's unlikely that this is the 'big one' that scientists fear. Why the fuss?

Again, it's about how we respond to these things as a global community and, as anarchists, working for a saner way to run the planet.

Readers will find no surprise in *Freedom* laying the blame for pandemic disease at the feet of capitalism or pointing out that its very nature prevents an effective response to large scale or long term problems – climate change again springs to mind. But judging what should be done will always be difficult for, at the end of the day, experts can only say one of three things about any impending crisis: 'Don't worry about it', 'We're doomed, party hard now' or 'only we can fix it – hand over the cash', and that is why the anarchist idea of everyone participating in societies decision is so vital.

### LENS CAP CORUS



Steelmaker Corus is to mothball its Teesside plant, threatening the jobs of nearly 2,000 workers. Workers at the Teesside Cast Products (TCP) plant in Redcar were told the news ahead of a 90-day consultation. Let's hope they have learnt the lesson of Visteon that direct action works.

## LOCAL NEWS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE

A short report from our Whitechapel Anarchist Group giving some info on what's been happening in our own area.

In the wake of the G20 protests, and her majesty's police raising their game to that of caught-on-candid-camera murderers, the local area has been getting busy.

A couple of very well-attended marches have kicked off from Bethnal Green and walked into the city, in memory of Ian Tomlinson, who the police killed. Apart from being co-opted by a minority of socialists, these have shown how the East End is still a politically charged and active place to be.

Well connected readers might be aware of the raiding of Ramparts Social Centre

in Whitechapel, on the day following the G20 protests. This followed numerous attempts by the police and authorities to remove the good people of Ramparts and clear the building for imminent gentrification. But the spirit lives on, and last week there were no less than three political benefit gigs going on along Commercial Road, the biggest of which was held at Ramparts.

This demonstrates that there is a need for alternative social spaces, and that there is an audience for radical politics in the East End. The summer's going to be a hot one, and we suggest you hang around Whitechapel and get involved in some of the upcoming activities.

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## NEWS

## IN BRIEF

**SEA ICE:** Here's an update from the National Snow and Ice Data Centre on 4th May.

"Arctic sea ice extent declined quite slowly in April; as a result, total ice extent is now close to the mean extent for the reference period (1979 to 2000). The thin spring ice cover nevertheless remains vulnerable to summer melt." Attentive readers will note the situation has improved since it was featured in the last issue of the paper and, should any climate change deniers get hold of a copy, they will smirk at the egg on the editors' faces. However we are not a whit abashed thinking that in the long run there is an underlying tendency for the extent of Arctic sea ice to fall, or was that the rate of profit.

See <http://nsidc.org/arcticseaicenews/> for the latest news.

**ID CARDS:** Not dead yet. Manchester will this autumn become the first city where people can sign up for an ID card, Jacqui Smith is to confirm. Anyone over 16 in the city who holds a UK passport will be able to apply for a card at a post office or pharmacy. The home secretary's speech signals her determination to push ahead with the cards – expected to cost people between £30 and £60 each. Psychiatrists will be monitoring this trial to provide instant treatment to anyone mad enough to sign up to the scheme.

**PENSIONS:** The last member of former RBS boss Sir Fred Goodwin's failed top team is set to leave the group with a £517,000-a-year pension. Deputy chief executive Gordon Pell, who earned £908,000 last year, will retire from the part-nationalised bank early next year at the age of 60. The bank, which was bailed out by the government last year, said Mr Pell's pension pot was worth £9.8m. RBS lost £24.1bn in 2008.

**WHOOOPS:** The boss of a speed camera firm has admitted driving at more than 100mph on a 70mph road in Suffolk. Tom Riall is a chief executive of Serco, which has provided more than 5,000 speed cameras to the UK. He appeared at Sudbury Magistrates' Court to face the charges and pleaded guilty to driving at more than 100mph along the dual carriageway. Riall was caught speeding by a camera on a dual carriageway in Newmarket, Suffolk, on 4th January. On Serco's website it states the company prides itself on providing 'robust evidence' of drivers' speeding.

**WALES:** Rob Williams, the convenor at Linamar car parts factory in Swansea, has formally been sacked despite being reinstated after fellow workers rallied to his support. Williams was originally dismissed for talking to sacked Visteon workers in what management called an 'irreversible break down of trust'. On hearing the news, the whole day shift stopped production and surrounded Rob's office preventing him from being forcibly removed.

## LENS CAP VULTURE AID



Farmers are to be allowed to leave dead livestock in their fields in parts of Europe – to help starving vultures. MEPs voted for a change in the law after the hungry birds, most often found in Spain, had been spotted as far away as Brussels, scavenging for food. .

## Tomlinson follow up

In the aftermath of Ian Tomlinson's death we will try to keep readers abreast of the manifold developments and omissions that have been going on.

On the campaigning side, a broad-based alliance called the United Campaign Against Police Violence had its launch at a rally in Friends Meeting House in Euston on the 5th May. To give you a flavour, the speakers included Jenny Jones (Green Party), Anna Fairclough (Liberty), Sam Rigg-David (Sean Rigg Justice and Change Campaign), Andrew Murray (Stop the War Coalition, chair), Deborah Coles (Inquest, co-director), Andy Meinke (LDMG), Brenda Weinberg (United Friends and Family Campaign), Martin Smith (SWP), but sadly not Bob Crow (RMT) who was called to a last minute union meeting (cooking up more strikes we trust). Now this is a heady mixture of trots, liberals and the bereaved but it is worth anarchist input both to help people not only "wake-up to police violence", as Sam Rigg-David put it, but also with our experience of police tactics to save people from tactical mistakes. Anyhow the immediate upshot is a demo and 'kettling' of New Scotland Yard on Saturday 23rd May. The start point is Trafalgar Square at 3pm.

Inquiry wise, we have more than the Met has missing shoulder numbers and less easy to work out what they stand for. The HMIC (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary) are reviewing public order tactics. There are

two Parliamentary committees not on the case. The Joint Committee on Human Rights (UK Parliament) has already looked into the policing of the Kingsnorth Climate Camp last year and there is a move underway to get a judicial review of police action at that. The IPCC are still investigating and a Coroners Inquest will have to be called at some point, with a jury we hope. Complaints are deluging in to the IPCC and MPs. Climate camp legal team are probably the best people to talk to on this and can be contacted on <http://climatecamp.org.uk/node/570>.

Meanwhile the cops have been bluffing it out before the Metropolitan Police Authority. Assistant Commissioner Chris Allison took most of the heckles from some spirited folk who attended the meeting (not the members of the authority it should be added). Unusually for a cop of such high rank (the few with brains are normally detectives), Allison has a lot of public order experience, being a bronze commander of TSG on Mayday 2000 and 2001. While his statement has some interesting details for cop spotters, it's just the sort of managerial blabble that lets the incompetent decide that black is white or, in this case, blue. As ever the real test is whether the cops can be tamed on the streets not by committees, unless Joanna Lumley announces that she's had a chat with the Prime Minister and he's agreed to abolish the police within the month.





The cops lash out at protesters' ankles

# Mayday! Mayday!

## Police behaviour under the microscope at Brighton's Smash EDO march

Monday 4th April brought large crowds to the south coast town of Brighton to enjoy an overcast drizzly bank holiday Monday. But, as promised, many had come for a more serious purpose. Gathering at the roundabout in front of the palace pier at 12 noon, the carnival wound its way round the streets of the city until early evening, letting people know that the producers of weapons of death and destruction were but a few miles up the road.

But what of the constabulary, we hear you ask? What would they be like on a post-Tomlinson demonstration? Well, firstly the Met were noticeable by their absence, save a few prominent members of the public order intelligence unit. Sussex police were reinforced by serials from Kent and Hampshire, a

sprinkling of FIT from as far away as Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire, while the British Transport Police stuck to their role of guarding the station. Thames Valley provided four of the eight horses on show. These poor animals have been cruelly and embarrassingly branded with the letters 'TV' and a number – in case they get stolen? The horses were, as always, dangerous to pedestrians in crowded streets and the focus of provocative incidents, such as blocking the pavement outside McDonalds trapping people inside. The police had an embedded Channel Four film team with the Chief Inspector in charge on the ground and he was making a big show of explaining everything to them as he went along. Most noticeable was no attempt on the police side to kettle the crowd, despite frequent confrontations. This did not stop them having a good old fashioned bash though. Chloe Marsh, from protest group Smash EDO which organised the action, said at least thirty protesters had reported injuries sustained during the day.

Smash EDO estimated about 1,000 protesters had gathered on Monday, but Sussex Police put the number at 500. Our own correspondent, who brought a clicker for more accurate assessment, put the total attendance higher still at some 1,500 with 440 in the group that returned to town after four hours of walking up and down some very steep hills indeed.

But was the quantity transformed into quality you ask? We are pleased to say, yes indeed! The provision of a reinforced banner protected many from injury, while work which had gone into making a plan for the day paid off with a crowd quick to pick up on police manoeuvres and take swift action to prevent and repulse attacks on the demo. Praise should also go to FITwatch, the street medics, legal observers and the rinky-dink sound system. No action is perfect but, as a model of solid organisation combined with bold enactment, this was a welcome advance over G20. Let's hope that these lessons stay learned and bear fruit on demonstrations to come.

## Errors and corrections

Last issue's deliberate error in the Svartfrosk column was to call the TSG the Tactical Support Group, not the Territorial Support Group.

The 'Pirate ship' was the USS Ronald Reagan which disappointingly, given the list in the photo, was not sinking but making a hard turn to port.

Answers to the crossword will be in the next issue, so there's still time to send in your

answers – a copy of *William Blake, Visionary Anarchist* to the first correct answer out of the hat (entries marked 'Crossword 7008' and sent to Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX, or emailed to [copy@freedompress.org.uk](mailto:copy@freedompress.org.uk)).

This week's deliberate error is in one of the 'Lens Caps' and the prize will be a copy of the excellent *Anarchist Quiz Book* by Martin Howard.

Some comrades have pointed out that the Lens Cap in Freedom 7007, dated 11th April, depicting the Climate Camp being attacked by the police, contains the line "the crowd is too thick" and is a slur upon good folk of Climate Camp. We would like to make it clear that the phrase was entirely inadvertent and we stand in complete solidarity with all those attacked by the police on 1st April or at any other occasion.



## PUBLIC SECTOR

# 'This community will not be beaten back'

## Rosspport campaigners defiant after hospitalisation of Willie Corduff

Efforts to stop the controversial building of an offshore gas facility and pipeline in Rosspport, Ireland, are continuing despite recent violence, with a dismantling campaign tearing down swathes of new equipment.

A coalition gathered around the Shell to Sea campaign has removed nets placed across nearby Glengad beach (pictured, right) by energy giant Shell just days after a similar deconstruction campaign at the company's compound led to the vicious beating of campaigner Willie Corduff.

The nets, installed in a failed attempt to displace protected wildlife so construction can begin, were shredded and returned to Shell's construction site in the third such incident in recent weeks.

The Shell to Sea campaign has pointed to the activity as evidence that their community will not be physically intimidated by recent events.

Late last month, Willie Corduff, one of the Rosspport Five who were jailed in 2005 when they refused to allow Shell to build through their land, was hospitalised in a night-time attack in which six men held him down and hit him with batons.

Willie was taking part in a non-violent action where for the previous 16 hours he had crawled under a truck, refusing to come out and disrupting building work.

At 3am, he got out to stretch his legs, and was ambushed by men the protestors believe to be Shell employees.

Campaigners have been outraged by mis-reporting of the attack in the Irish media, which focused on a piece of property damage that had been done hours before, suggesting



that the 'men in balaclavas' had done it in a night-time raid while largely ignoring Willie's beating.

The Shell to Sea campaign was begun after political wranglings which allowed Shell to ride roughshod over local opinion and win planning permission for a gas extraction plant and pipeline in Rosspport, County Mayo.

Despite serious concerns over the safety of local people, as the pipeline is due to be laid through unstable peat bog, and major environmental issues, national and local government pushed through a Yes vote in circumstances which have prompted widespread accusations of bias.

The issue gained international attention after the imprisonment of the Rosspport Five,

who were jailed for obstructing the building of the pipeline through land of theirs which had been marked for compulsory purchase.

The incident was a PR disaster for Shell as activists highlighted parallels between the incident and similar jailings in Nigeria.

In the years since, a series of clashes have led to a stalemate, with Shell's building work slowing to a crawl but campaigners struggling against the company's vast financial resources.

At present, alongside local campaigning there is a Rosspport Solidarity Camp to which all are invited to help scupper the project.

**Rob Ray**

Go to their website at [shelltosea.com](http://shelltosea.com) for more information.

## Jolly news for protestors

Many readers will have seen the news that five protestors who were assaulted by officers and kept in police custody for two nights have been paid tens of thousands of pounds in an out-of-court settlement. The five have received £85,000 in compensation plus costs, together totalling more than £100,000, in a settlement recorded at the high court this week. statement released this week.

The peaceful rally outside the Mexican embassy in October 2006 was attended by about twenty activists calling for action over the murder of an American filmmaker, Bradley Roland Will, during a teachers' strike in the city of Oaxaca. The shooting was blamed on local state officials. The vigil was part of a worldwide day of protest outside

Mexican embassies. Eight people were arrested in London. All were refused legal aid and had to defend themselves in court in a four day trial where they were acquitted of offences under the public order act. Well done to all of them.

Tony Murphy, the solicitor at Bhatt Murphy who brought the claim, said: "This case shows that policing protest unlawfully carries a high cost. This includes the severe human cost to protestors, but also the cost to the public purse and more worryingly to public confidence in the police. The implications for those I am advising in relation to G20 are clear."

Too right Tony! Let's hope more people do the same.

## ... and not so jolly

Fifteen people were arrested in London (and possibly in other parts of the country) on 7th May under the Terrorism Act.

The arrests were apparently in relation to the demonstrations in support of Gaza in January this year.

Some of the arrests could also be related to demonstrations against the G20 at the beginning of April.

The raids were carried out at separate addresses. People were detained and given the possibility of taking clothes with them; their houses were searched and computers, mobile phones, papers and other items removed by the police.

The arrestees were held in West End Central Police Station, London.



## IN BRIEF

**SUBMARINE WATCH:** The Faslane naval base on the Clyde is to become home to the UK's entire submarine fleet.

On 6th May it was announced that the nuclear powered submarines based at Plymouth and Portsmouth would soon swim north to join their nuclear armed (and powered) relatives in Faslane.

Although the job losses that this entails will cause much hardship, the people of Portsmouth and Plymouth may feel they have got the better end of the deal given the recent spate of leaks from the UK's submarines.

In August 2007, the nuclear-powered submarine HMS Superb discharged water, potentially contaminated with radioactive Tritium and Cobalt-60, directly into Gare Loch. In February 2008, it happened again. This time HMS Torbay was warming up its reactor when a tank overflowed, pouring more radiation into the sea. Now if they can avoid another crash... (see *Freedom*, 28th March).

**BALLS:** The government announced a £58m plan to 'transform' social services in the wake of the 'Baby P' scandal.

Announcing the plan, Ed Balls, for it is he, said: "Our ambition is for social work to be a high-quality profession, with the confidence and support of the public, but to do this we must give social workers the training and support they need to develop."

Balls said events in Haringey, north London, displayed how "clarity" had become a priority, adding that he had been advised to make the system less "clunky". Balls said best practice needed to be made "common practice" across the country. Social workers were rightly heavily criticised when things went wrong, but their successes should also be "celebrated", Balls added.

Cliché, cliché, cliché, all for less than £1 per person in the UK to overturn generations of deprivation and neglect. Atheism forbid that something serious should happen, like the banks going bust – where would the money be found to bail them out.

**CHESS:** After sudoku and a crossword puzzle (see also page 3 for your chance to win), we are thinking of having a chess column. However the picture of the board is quite difficult to fit in the paper and we don't know much about chess. We have got a chess board in the shop and are feeling confident, after a surprise win over the Whitechapel Anarchist Group on 30th April, so if anyone is keen (but not too good) it makes a change from dusting the shelves.

Here we should note *Freedom's* decline, as ex-editor of *Freedom* John Retey was one of Britain's top players and, at the age of 78, still has a FIDE ELO rating of 1903.

# Cut to the Bone

There's a tragi-comic moment in the Irish Easter rising in 1916, well described by Thomas Coffey in his book *Agony at Easter*. On the third day of the rising, James Connolly is making his military dispositions in the Dublin Post Office when three Citizen Army Volunteers approach him and offer him their rifles. A perplexed Connolly asks their reasons. "The Easter holiday is over" say the Volunteers "we have to go back to work tomorrow". Whether Connolly laughed or cried, Coffey doesn't say.

The Volunteers action strikes me as very similar to that of anarchists post G20 – back to life as normal, no inkling as to the possibilities to be seized. We won the war at G20, but lost the peace. Unlike the poll tax riots when people had good reason to keep their heads down – Operation Carnaby – this time it was the cops whose faces were beamed out from television screens and newspapers caught doing acts of violence. The public mood turned decisively against the police. If ever there was a moment to ram home the political advantage of police bungling and cover up it, was in the days after G20. But where were the anarchists? No initiative was taken, no urgent meetings held over the midnight oil to hammer out a strategy – just people going back to life as normal before G20. Only the much-maligned Chris Knight attempted to seize the time – contacting the Tomlinson family, organising the memorial march the Saturday after and the leafleting of Millwall football club. And what did he get for his pains – a suggestion

on a discussion list that he be excluded from anarchist circles! Predictably into this vacuum have stepped the SWP, setting up a front organisation and organising the anti-police violence demonstration on 23rd May. The anarchists whinge about the SWP, but they are only able to fill the vacuum because we let them. And in the many voices to be heard in the media on police violence can we hear any anarchists trying to get their views across? No of course we fucking don't, comrades, because we 'don't talk to the enemy'. So we leave the field to Chris Knight then we whinge even more 'cos we don't like what he says.

'Events, dear boy, events'. We seem capable only of organising an event every decade then retreating with exhaustion. I sometimes seriously wonder if all anarchists are vitamin deficient. We are seriously the only people in the entire world capable of doing only one thing at a time. A juggler with one ball. It's either a trip to the Visteon picket line or a G20 meeting.

To respond to the post-G20 situation we should have had emergency London anarchist meetings all fucking week, nutting out a strategy with the kind of high media visibility we had before G20. We should have been able to instantly respond to events and seize the initiative. I suggested this to one incredulous anarchist. "But I've got a job" he replied, as if it was a cast iron reason for inaction. Try telling that to Comrade Connolly – oh shit, they did!

Ian Bone



In 1916 Padraig Pearse and James Connolly, leaders of the Easter Rising, proclaimed an Irish republic from the steps of Dublin's post office. In the ensuing siege, the republicans sheltered and fought from within the building. A fire broke out, destroying most of the interior, and the post office remained closed for renovations until 1929.



## INTERNATIONAL

## IN BRIEF

**POLAND:** Members of the radical Sierpień '80 (August '80) trade union occupied six regional offices of the conservative Civic Platform party (and majority party in government) demanding 'a change in the anti-employee and anti-social policies of the government'. They posted up 21 demands in each office concerning welfare and wage reforms. Deputy speaker of the Civic Platform responded: "This is political hooliganism".

**IRELAND:** Dublin coroners fear the suicide rate in the city is being under recorded, leading to concerns that the rate is much higher than official figures. There are concerns that suicides are being misclassified by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) as 'undetermined', based on information supplied by the police following the inquest. According to the National Office for Suicide Prevention, Ireland has the fifth highest youth suicide rate in Europe.

**SPAIN:** The health of anarchist prisoner Amadeu Casellas is deteriorating faster than anticipated after starting indefinite hunger strike on 20th April. He is demanding his freedom after the state reneged on the promise of a release date plus his continued poor treatment by prison authorities. Casellas has spent over 25 years in prison for armed robberies financing working class struggles during the 1970s.

**VIETNAM:** Human Rights Watch has issued a report documenting the increasing suppression of the independent workers movement by the Vietnamese government. The last few years has seen an unprecedented rise in wildcat strikes and since the formation of the autonomous United Worker-Farmers Organisation of Vietnam, and the Independent Workers' Union of Vietnam lawful union activists have been detained, imprisoned and abducted by state forces.

**CHILE:** Workers in Chile have organised the first ever union of Starbucks employees in South America. Sindicato de Trabajadores de Starbucks Coffee Chile SA aims to give voice and support to all those employed in non-managerial roles. The Mexico based fast food giant Alsea owns the franchise to the 22 Starbucks outlets currently operating in Chile.

**CHINA:** Local government workers in the Chinese province of Hubei are being forced to smoke, or face being punished. The local government has ordered all its employees to smoke at least 23,000 packets of locally produced cigarettes a year to boost the ailing regional economy. Failure to smoke the required amount, or smoking 'unauthorised' brands, can result in a fine and government departments losing their smoking allowance.

# Round up of Mayday

As the global economic crisis deepens and social unrest becomes a daily and increasing reality the symbolic nature of Mayday in the current climate takes on an even greater significance – both as a catalyst and a timely reminder that we are living in strange and interesting times. *Freedom* takes a look at the various Mayday celebrations and protests around the world as a re-emergence of a militant class consciousness.

## CZECH REPUBLIC

This year's Mayday festival in the Czech Republic was the biggest in its history. Organised by Antifascist Action (AFA) and involving such groups as Czechoslovak Anarchist Federation, there was almost 8,000 people in attendance throughout the day to listen to live music from such bands as Propagandi, with discussions and workshops including 'Anarchism for the 21st century', 'Antifascism' and 'Crisis and Czech working class' along with numerous stalls, exhibitions and vegan food. Organisers were said to be surprised but delighted with the turnout.

## GERMANY

An estimated half a million people turned out for the Mayday protests across Germany this year. Riots in Berlin began on Thursday night when cars and rubbish containers were set alight. On May Day morning 3,000 anarchists and anti-fascists blocked a railway station successfully sabotaging a rally by the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party of Germany. 15,000 people attended the radical Mayday march later in the day with autonomous, communist and anarchist groups along with militant student and youth groups converging under the slogan 'War is capitalism and crisis!' It was a scene of celebration and partying during the day with live bands on many different stages and tens of thousands of people eating and drinking in the sunshine. Only later police began attacking protesters ending with five hours of rioting in the

notorious Kreuzberg area of Berlin.

Overall, 289 people arrested and 273 injured policemen. A police spokesman described it as the worst Mayday riots in Berlin for several years.

## FRANCE

Worker solidarity was on display most visibly in France, where the eight main unions marched together for the first time. In Paris, the two largest unions – the General Confederation of Labour and the French Democratic Confederation of Labour, were joined by the other principal unions, as well as an array of left-wing parties, anarchists, civil liberty and human rights campaigners.

The General Confederation said that it had registered more than 283 events, protests and marches across France, double the number of events last year. It estimated the national turnout at around 1.2 million, five times larger than a year earlier, and at 160,000 in Paris.

## GREECE

Athens saw thousands of anarchists and anti-authoritarians march in defiance of the government's attempt to introduce legislation allowing police to arrest anyone wearing masks or hoods. The headquarters of the state-owned Athens Piraeus Electric Railways (ISAP) who employed Konstantina Kouneva the militant syndicalist and general secretary of the cleaner's union in Athens who was attacked with sulphuric acid for organising at her workplace.

## BULGARIA

Up to 150 anarchists staged a Mayday rally at Garibaldi Square in Sofia leading to minor clashes with police and provocations by fascists. Organised by Federation of Anarchists in Bulgaria (FAB), autonomous collective AnarchoResistance (Anarchosaprotiva) and 23 September (a small leftist group) it included 70 invited Greek comrades to show solidarity with Konstantina Kouneva, who



Bulgaria



# around the world

was originally from Bulgaria. One of the buses from Greece was held at the border for four hours, but the police were forced to allow them to continue after a spontaneous 'No Borders' protest developed.

## TURKEY

In Turkey, May Day protests have often been violent in the past, and a number of clashes were reported Friday. Taksim Square in the centre of Istanbul was opened by the authorities to unions and other groups for the first time in decades, and an estimated 5,000 protesters gathered there, chanting slogans, singing and waving flags.

On side streets, youths threw rocks and Molotov cocktails at the police, who responded with volleys of tear gas and water canons. Istanbul was virtually shut down, with most of its main roads blocked, and its metro and tram services shut down. Eight people were injured, according to NTV, a private television network.

## CHINA

On 1st May, hundreds of coal miners in Jiangsu province staged a wildcat strike and demonstration demanding pay rises and more investment in mine safety. The workers' action was in defiance of extensive attempts by police, mine managers, and the government of Jiangsu to prevent the protest. This comes in the wake of figures emerging that in the first three months of this year China was subject to a staggering 58,000 'mass incidents'. Mass incidents is a government euphemism for social unrest be it strikes, street protests, or any form of organised dissent or discontent involving more than 25 people.

## RUSSIA

Around 36,000 people took part in Mayday celebrations, from all political persuasions. In St Petersburg over 130 anarchists are



Istanbul

arrested en masse to prevent them, according to police, attacking nationalists during the Mayday celebrations. Early on Friday dozens of special taskforce police in full body armour brutally attacked a 250-strong group of anarchists and anti-fascists claiming they had information they were preparing violent attacks on ultranationalist groups. The anarchists were in fact organising a street party in solidarity with the Pirate Bay website whose organisers were recently sentenced by a court in Sweden. The anarchists brought musical instruments, pirate paraphernalia, and anti-copyright slogans. Despite police claims most of those arrested have been charged with 'jaywalking'. Those detained were later taken to four police precincts, although a reported thirty anarchists managed to escape when the bus they were being transported in got lost and the police officers were busy asking passers-by for directions.

## INDIA

Hundreds of sex workers in the state of West Bengal paraded through the streets with torches in the early morning hours, calling for the legalisation of their work. About 500 sex workers marched through the streets of Sonagachi in Kolkata as part of a May Day rally organised by a local NGO. Sonagachi is home to more than 15,000 sex workers and is one of India's largest red light areas. Demanding social rights and regular worker status for millions of Indian sex workers, the marchers asserted that they are labourers and sex work is a profession just like any other. They also demanded the overturn of the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act – a law they say criminalises most aspects of sex work by equating voluntary adult sex work with trafficking. Despite being illegal, prostitution is a thriving underground industry in India with more than two million sex workers earning their livelihood from the trade.

## IRAN

A mass rally organised by a coalition independent labour organisations in Tehran was attacked by security forces and police and broken up. People began accumulating at Laleh Park at midday to celebrate Mayday where they were batoned and tear gassed, many beaten brutally, with over 150 arrests. According to reports government forces laid in wait trapping over 2,000 peaceful people in the park then systematically set about beating as many people as possible.

## SWITZERLAND

Around 12,000 people who gathered in the streets of Zurich to celebrate Mayday were set upon by police with water cannons and rubber bullets. Police blamed a small number of troublemakers for starting the violence.



Taksim Square in Turkey



# An interview with Chris Carlsson

Chris Carlsson is known as a co-founder and editor of *Processed World* – an early look at the experiences of workers in California's new information industries – in the 1980s, and as a founder member of San Francisco's critical mass bike rides in the 1990s. His new book, *Nowtopia*, is a rare thing – an elegant exposition of theory and practical projects for a 'vastly better world' which is hopeful without avoiding complexity or underestimating the capitalist bemoth. SEH took the opportunity to interview Chris for *Freedom* during his recent visit to Bristol.

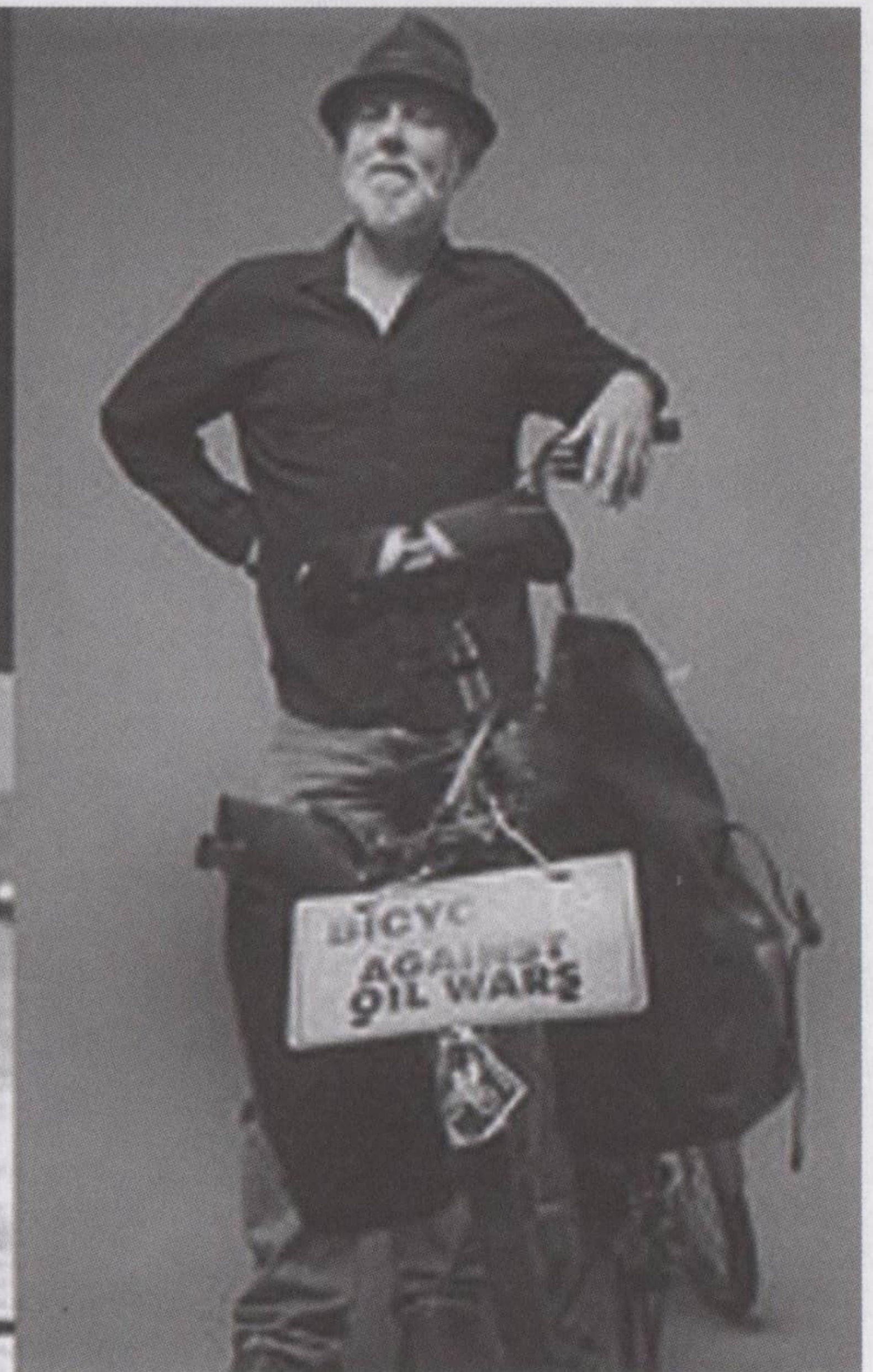
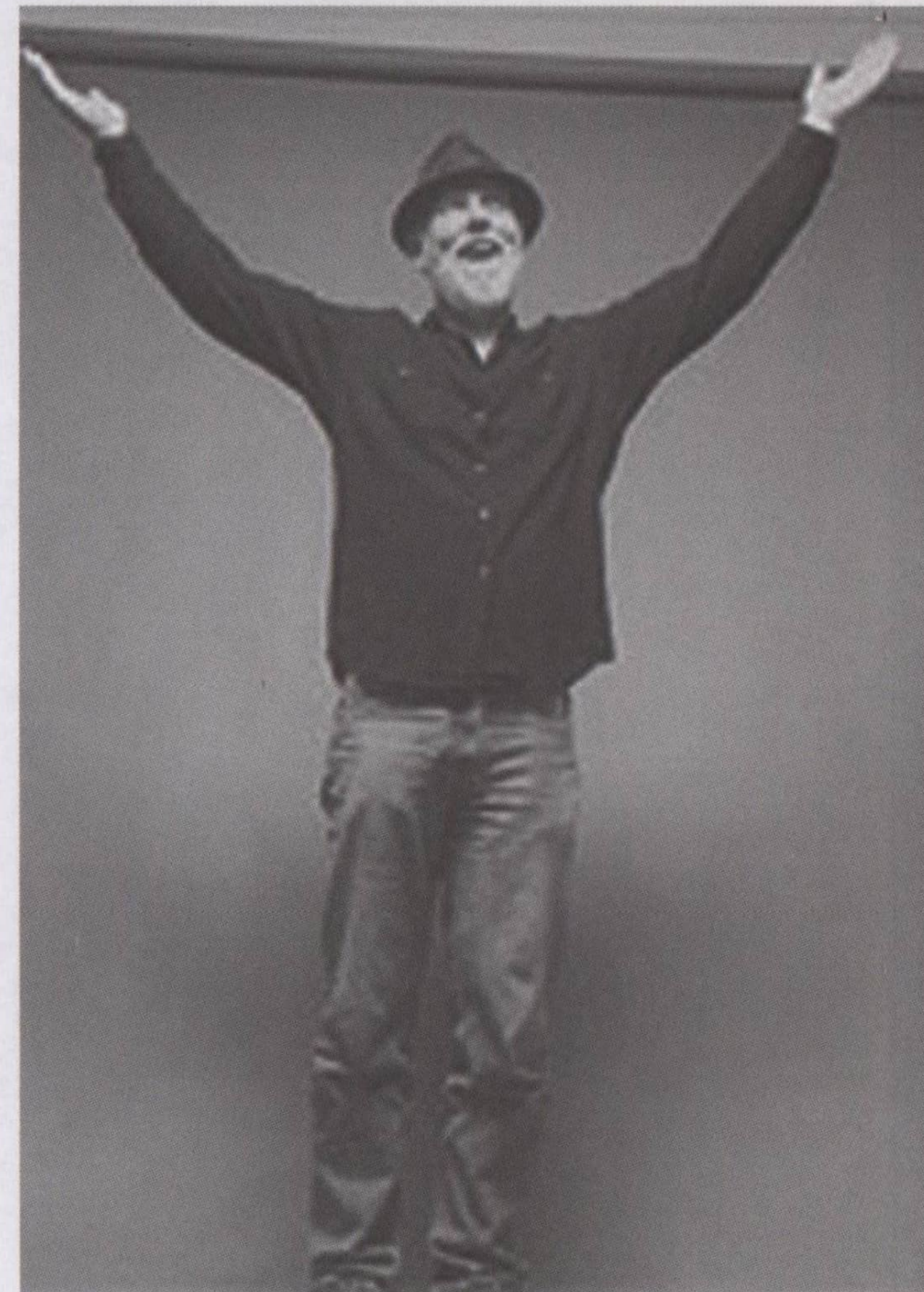
**SEH:** I'm always interested in what factors make some people politically active when countless others do not take that particular path. Some, it seems, are born radicals, some become radicalised by experience and others have radicalism thrust upon them. Could you briefly fill in some of the details and trajectory of your own radical journey.

**CC:** I grew up in Oakland, across the Bay from San Francisco, from age 10 to 17, years 1967 to 1974. I had a bunch of teachers who were just out of UC Berkeley and other universities, determined to enter the 'inner city' and help radicalise a new generation. Some of their teaching tricks were quite effective: values clarification, critical thinking, inquiries into oxymorons like 'military justice', etc. I also lived and went to school in a mostly black area, during the heyday of the Black Panthers in the same area, so that too had an influence. In 1975, I went to college at Sonoma State University further

north where I got involved in the nascent anti-nuclear movement, helping to found a local chapter of the Abalone Alliance before moving to San Francisco at the beginning of 1978. (In 1977 I travelled for seven months in Europe, including three months in Spain during their first post-Franco democratic elections, discovered the history of anarchism there, and more.) I read Marx at San Francisco State University in 1978–79, and met the woman I spent almost 20 years with, Caitlin Manning. She was part of a group called the Union of Concerned Commies, a strange outgrowth of the 'milieu' in the Bay Area (consisting of pro-situs, anarchists, council communists libertarian Marxists and others) that went from an energy-related study and action group, to a street theatre group, before collapsing in acrimony in mid-1980. In fall [autumn] 1980, we started working on the first issue of *Processed World* with some of the folks who emerged from the wreckage of the UCC, and the first issue came out in April 1981.

*Part of your approach in Nowtopia is to keep the theoretical parts alive and relevant by talking to lots of people and accompanying your commentary with many other voices. For example class is a core theme. There is a sense that 'class' is an unfamiliar, and even uncomfortable concept for many interviewees. What succinct conclusions did you draw from this?*

I think most people understand, once scratched for a moment, that we live in a class society. But it's also true that most



people are very uncomfortable trying to situate themselves within that class society. This is partly due to decades of balkanising sociological approaches to class (as in social strata) and a widespread rejection of Marxism, one of the theoretical bastions of class analysis. So there's a need to rehabilitate some of the critical tools in Marxism without trying to use it as a prescriptive body of thought for imagining revolution ... a tricky proposition!

*I have often thought that, in addition to the unemployment statistics, it might equally be possible to collate statistics on the misemployed (armaments, factory farming, etc.) and the underemployed – those whose potential is stifled in futile, unstimulating employment. The kind of wage slavery that, using William Morris's term, you call 'useless toil' For those who haven't read Nowtopia what is your vision for creative 'liberated' work – what you term 'repurposing'?*

I think we need each individual to re-engage with their own subjective sense of purpose. I would base my notion of 'liberated work' on a basic trust that each person is capable of making a good decision about how best to use their time. For myself, I don't want to be stuck doing any one thing forever. I like the idea of doing various things during the course of a day, a week, a year, and a life time. I suspect most people would share something like that. But the social process of determining what is worth doing, how best to do it, how to situate it within a

necessary ecological sensibility, these are tasks that we haven't yet begun to take seriously. So a big part of reconfiguring work on a liberated basis is to begin to make conscious our social decisions about what to do, how, when, why, etc. From there, we can all make various contributions to our own and everyone's well-being, in myriad ways...

*The dilemmas involved in the development and application of technology is a central theme in Nowtopia. At one point you state "Technological mediation is unsustainable – not just in ecological terms ... but crucially, in social terms". Could you explain this idea some more?*

It's a pretty straightforward idea. We need more social life! We need, as humans, to spend much more time with each other, engaging our creative and critical faculties in social processes. The tendency to substitute technological tools for social interaction is not just pointing towards further ecological problems, it's also a dead-end for a vibrant society. (This is not to say that we should frame our discussion in terms of 'anti-technology' or 'anti-civilisation' any such simplistic notions that quickly imply mass death.)

*Two features of capitalism's undoubtedly powerful productive forces are its failure to distribute the fruits of production rationally and equitably and its probable unsustainability. Once or twice you allude to the need to reject 'Malthusianism' – a term with a whole*

*cluster of associations and debates behind it from Malthus and Godwin to Foreman and Bookchin. What is your take on the debate about limits to growth, a longstanding green critique of capitalism?*

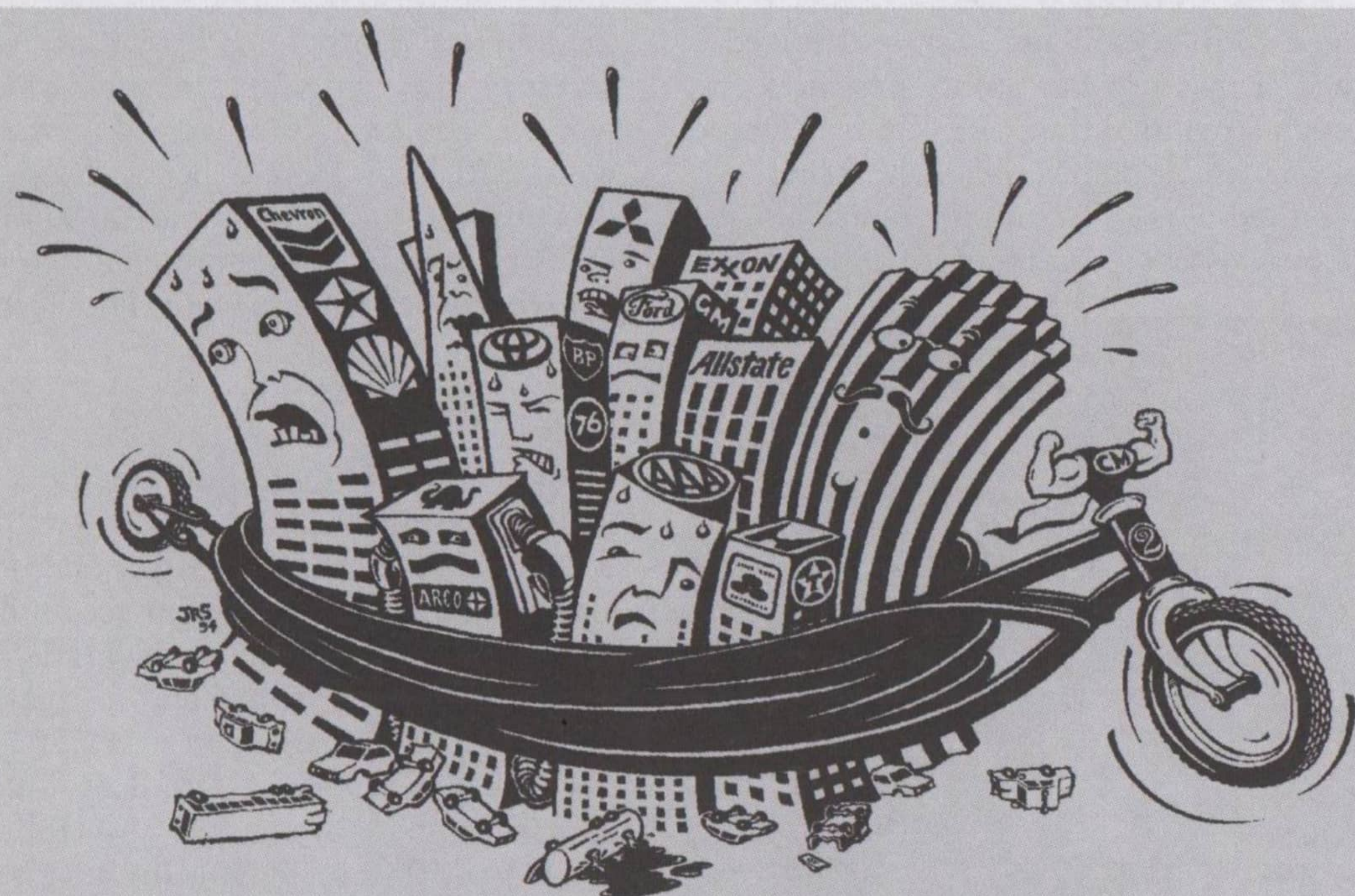
I have a lot of trouble with 'carrying capacity' and various categorical assumptions about limits. Clearly we need to make radically different decisions about resources, human activities, the structure of our lives and its relationship to ecological sanity. But to start from the premise that we have too much, or that there are inherent limits, is to discourage the most creative approaches to the crises we face. It's a political non-starter too, to use a neo-Christian anti-materialist moralism to admonish people to start sacrificing, to give things up ... I think we have to start with the notion that everyone can have everything they want! Then, once we all agree, we have to discuss how the hell we can do such a thing! First question: who wants to work so hard to create so much stuff? Taking that into account will logically start to reshape the definition of everything ... then there's the important ecological constraints that must be factored in, further reshaping what the everything is that we can all have ... but that has to be a shared, social process, rather than some folks wagging their fingers at others, tsk tsk'ing over their apparent 'excess consumption'. If consumption is out of whack (and it is) it can only be solved by a shared, democratic, social process that is rooted in an egalitarian sensibility for everyone on the planet...

*Do you have any observations on the first few months of the Obama era?*

Obama is a very conservative and unimaginative politician. He definitely looks and sounds a lot better than what came before, but don't hold your breath for any significant change in direction. He's the Goldman-Sachs president, and is facilitating the looting of the public treasury beyond even the crazy extremes of Bushism. He's expanding the Af-Pak War, he's trying to restart a debt-based Growth Economy, and he's installed an entire team of re-treads in every part of his administration ... The only grain of hope is that he's smart enough to go in a whole new direction in a year or two when everything he's doing is failing...

*Do you have any future projects in the pipeline that you would like to share?*

I'm starting on a new local history book called 'Ten Years That Shook the City: San Francisco 1968–1978' which will come out in late 2010 or early 2011 ... It is a companion effort to my ongoing work on Foundsf.org, the wiki version of Shaping San Francisco. After that I have two novels in my head. One is the prequel to *After the Deluge*, and the working title is 'When Shells Crumble'. It will tell the story of the revolution, sort of what happens when you extend the activities in *Nowtopia* into the future and a dual power situation with heavy repression emerges ... the other novel is a parallel story set in 1870s and 1990s San Francisco...



**CRITICAL  
MASS  
SAN FRANCISCO**



## COMMENT

## ABOUT FREEDOM

## ANGEL ALLEY

Once again we've been neglecting the Alley and flouncing off like social butterflies to Visteon Pickets, Mayday Marches and the like. Apologies if you get this copy of *Freedom* late, but the delay at least enables us to cram in all the Mayday news which would be old hat by next issue. Alas and alack, the troubles of having a fortnightly paper – if you've any solutions, send us a postcard.

We've had drama in the Alley with a small fire in the yard behind the shop, but it may help in stopping rubbish getting dumped there. We will let you know if there were any casualties amongst the relatives of Bakuno, the late lamented Freedom rat, but certainly not his niece Louise de Goldclerk who has kindly assented to don his mantle as 'vermin in residence'.

Plans for pointing are forging ahead with the good news that the volunteer who has agreed to coordinate the operation has been acquitted of obstructing the police and can lend his full time to this project rather than the mailbag-sewing job the cops had lined up for him.

## 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 9, so if your sub runs out with this issue you'll have 7009 above your name. If the number is 7009 or less, then your subscription is due for renewal. See page 16 for the subscription rates and a renewal form. If you don't want to worry about remembering to renew your subscription to *Freedom*, email [subs@freedompress.org.uk](mailto:subs@freedompress.org.uk) or write to at 'Subscriptions', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX and we will send you a standing order form.

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## NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 23rd May 2009 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 14th May. 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

Over the last few years I've covered various local campaigns that I've supported and observed in this column. What strikes me most is how inter-related they all are – and it's not just because the people running the campaigns are often the same.

On 23rd April, a group of parents at Lewisham Bridge Primary School occupied the roof of an outbuilding there. They were protesting about the closure of the school and the ludicrous decision taken by Lewisham Council to bus their children one and a half miles each way to a temporary site. The council want to replace the primary school with a foundation school for ages 3 through to 16. It will be run by a private livery company, the Leather Sellers, an unaccountable relic from the feudal age. (Lewisham Council have a fondness for livery companies – as well as Leather Sellers, the Haberdashers run four Lewisham schools and two are about to be handed over to Goldsmiths).

There are several ongoing trends in Lewisham's approach to education – the ever increasing involvement of the private sector being one; and a failure to adequately plan for future pupil numbers being another. But let's go back to the root of why the council want to close Lewisham Bridge. It starts back in the late '90s, when a secondary school in nearby Telegraph Hill, the posher end of New Cross, was failing. Telegraph Hill School was closed and re-opened with a super-head. When even this alleged magic bullet failed, the school was closed. The other secondary schools in the Telegraph Hill area are the semi-selective Askes, run by Haberdashers, which are very difficult for parents to get their children into as they are academically successful. The site in Telegraph Hill was used for a sixth form academy. After a little while it became obvious that there was a shortage of secondary places in the north of the borough. Labour even lost a seat to a local education campaign. So the search began for a new school.

Government rules and the natural inclination of the local Labour Party was that it should

be out of local authority control. During the last seven years, several other schools have been handed over to the management of successful schools, which always are those that have a history of selection, whether overt or covert.

The initial site identified, was Ladywell Leisure Centre, which at the time was the borough's only open full size swimming pool. A vigorous local campaign by pool users, combined with crucial losses for Labour in wards local to it, meant that Lewisham Mayor Sir Steve Bullock relented on using the pool site.

Lewisham Bridge was identified as the final alternative because it was next to another development site and has a high proportion of parents whose first language isn't English. It also had a high proportion of travellers' children – there was a local site and anti-traveller racism is still quite common. Despite these problems, it is rated as having amongst the best pastoral care in the UK.

Lewisham claimed it was the only site available in the timescale. It didn't count the neighbouring Sundermead Estate, which it knocked down in the interim, because that was earmarked for a new swimming pool, shops and private homes, including a 24-storey tower block. Presumably no one who lives there will have children, and need them to attend a local school.

Lewisham don't have planning permission for their plans, which have been drawn up by architects who told one school governor that they didn't know there was an access road to the rear. The plans currently don't meet the government's own standards for a school. And have been further thrown into disarray by the decision by English Heritage to give the school building grade 2 listing.

Lewisham needs more secondary places. It also needs more primary places. The site is disputed, but what's really the problem is the poor decision making. It reminds me of the rhyme about the old woman, who swallowed a spider, to catch the fly that wriggled inside her.





## Congratulations

I think the edition of 11th April is one of the best in recent years. My copies continue to go to Hebden Bridge library where they are prominently displayed and read by many – including several of the librarians. Thank you.

Gwen

The paper is very relevant these days but needs more articles about local struggles people are actively involved in. I would write some up but am too busy with the local activity in Haringey.

Dave Morris

*Eds: Keep up the good work! Come on everyone write in with some inspiring actions.*

## Some mutual aid

Well meaning as Anton Pawluk is in reviewing yet another edition of *Mutual Aid* (*Freedom*, 11th April) he appears equivocal about whether the book upholds anarchist ideals. This is strange since *Freedom* has always exploited Kropotkin mercilessly as an anarchist. A bit of backtracking here? Perhaps he is being lined up to be dumped? From what Anton says, Donald Rooum, in his preface, appears to have strayed into foreign territory. Contrary to what Donald says Kropotkin has not suffered in academic circles. Academics have been rather easy on him. This is largely because they have in the past been uncertain about the concept of group selection as put forward by Wynne-Edwards. He believed in the happy bunny society, all for one and one for all. Kropotkin had used this belief to justify for an anarchist society. Currently kin selectionists think Kropotkin was wrong.

Judging from what Anton says, Donald appears to have lost the plot when he says that reciprocal altruism and cooperation give a selective advantage to animals. It sounds authoritative, I will give him that. Donald appears to believe in a socially motivated species: behaviour is an intellectual process leading to cooperation. (Actually, cooperation and reciprocal altruism are the same.) This is the stronghold of social scientists: the ancestral home of the daft anthropologist Margaret Mead. It is nonsense. If Donald were to argue that cooperation depends on genes then that would make better sense. Kropotkin wrote before Mendel and was unaware of genes, which might excuse his mistake. With advances in biology we can now interpret Kropotkin's thesis in terms of genes. Most anarchists, including Donald, fail to see his error.

To give Donald the benefit of any doubt, I will suppose he accepts the importance of genes. (He certainly believes in genetic engineering and was severely censured for this in the pages of *Freedom*.) But even then he wobbles. I assume he is referring to species and specifically humans. An argument based on species is seriously misguided. For starters,

the term species is almost meaningless: it is a taxonomic category with little biological significance. It is for the convenience of classification. We are concerned with a biological mechanism. Unless one is a group selectionist, which Donald may be, species are an iteration of individuals such as in shoals, herds and flocks. Only individuals exist as biological unites, and they are purveyors of their own genes. To have a selective advantage, which implies competition, one individual is not going to promote the genes of another. One could argue, as many anarchists do, we have evolved to a superior esoteric level: one dependent on intellect which has given rise to society. The problem is, as Kropotkin was in effect saying, the rules that apply to other animals apply equally to us. To be selected individuals must have an advantage over other individuals that are similar to themselves: they, we, need to be selfish. A mistake that is often made is to think we are being selected by a physical, non-biological, environment. In reality other individuals are the environment.

The Peppered Moth is used as a text book example of the process of evolutionary selection. Due to industrial pollution a genetic mutation for a black pigment appeared, and those moths carrying it came to dominate the population. The 'normal' variety of moth, which does not carry the gene, was eaten to near extinction by birds. When pollution decreased the pigmented moths were in their turn targeted. This so called survival of the fittest (a tautology) can be applied to the behavioural character of cooperation (altruism). Imagine an anarchist heaven populated by cooperating Kropotkins. Unless anarchists can stop mutations appearing the worst happens. Exploitative capitalist mutants take advantage of these

nice guys. However, fortunately for anarchists, the opposite is true: in a capitalist hell Kropotkins have an advantage. The net evolutionary result is a balance between co-operators and exploiters. The two strategies come to co-exist and are found in every one. We are opportunistic and implement whichever strategy will succeed. A banker's genes act in the interest of the banker. That they also help other bankers is due to iteration, a common gene pool. Social scientists and most anarchists imagine that these two characters are controlled by intellect and are the product of society. They are wrong.

We live in a world where genes shuffle for supremacy. The time has come to dump and to read biology that belongs to this century, and follow the links.

Peter Gibson

## Acoustic gig

On Friday May the 15th I am putting on a small acoustic gig in East London. It will be at the London Action Resource Centre, 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1 1ES. The nearest tube is Whitechapel. If you still have a job its £5 on the door, for benefit cheats its £3. The line up is: David Rovics, Robb Johnson, Sarah Bear and Ed Cox. There will be a bar and veggie grub on offer.

If you are used to leaving gigs organised by me with your ears bleeding and smelling of super lager, then this will be a much more civilized affair. So come to the East End and enjoy the musical at lyrical brilliance of some of our greatest contemporary folk artists. See you there.

Guy Smallman

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## GETTING ACTIVE

### PRISON NEWS

#### Prisoners and the press

Here a short piece from Charles Hanson on his ongoing struggles with the prison authorities and the repercussions in the press.

"I am not sure if you have seen all the papers of late, but I have been targeted over my claim against the Prison Service over them not providing me with a haircut and making me pay it myself, 'Lag sues Jail Chiefs over haircuts' said the *Sunday People*, and 'Killer sues over haircuts' trumpeted *The Sun*.

"This was a very quiet affair that did not even reach the courtroom, but was settled before it even reached there, and it was only the local Small Claims Court anyway. It has to be a screw who leaked it, but on the other hand we have a few wrong 'uns in Blantyre House who might have done it if they had an axe to grind or a grievance with the Governor for an old screw told me ages ago that there are cons in Blantyre House who have been rewarded by being moved there and that can mean anything.

"I have been really and truly tucked up by the press of late – *Sunday Express*, 26th April – that with a Parole Board hearing coming up 2nd June, when I could regain my freedom after 14 years inside, the dirty tricks brigade have been at work and I am now in a situation where the possibility of freedom could be knocked back severely and yet I can count on one hand the number of cons who support me and can see right through all the shit that's been flying around whilst other cons are less than supportive believing what is written about me.

"Almost to a man they are on friendly first name terms with their jailers and the known 'wrong uns', so what does that tell you?"

You can contact and send support to Charles at:

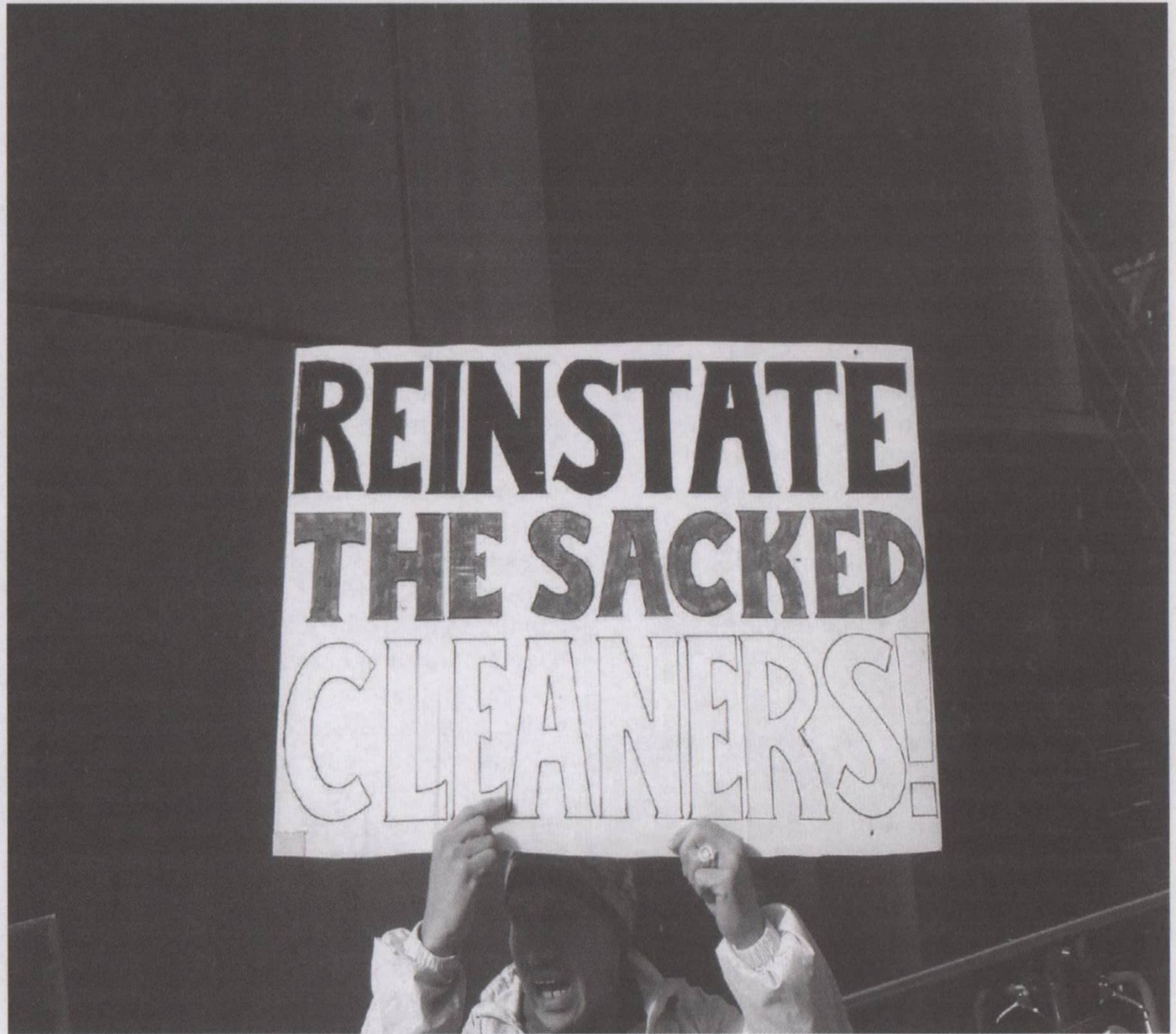
- Charles Hanson, V V 1638, HMP Blantyre House, Horden, Goudhurst, Kent TN17 2NH  
email charleswhanson@hotmail.co.uk

#### United States

Brenda Ann Spencer will be eligible for parole again, having been refused four times, on 13th August 2009.

This is not an overtly anarchist case, but it serves to show the madness of a system that has kept someone in prison for thirty years for something they did when they were sixteen, on top of the madness of a society that leads to children shooting their schoolmates.

While not wishing to prioritise high profile cases above the millions who suffer in jail around the world, this paper thinks that should Ms Spencer be released Sir Bob Geldof owes her more than a few drinks.



● In the wake of the killing of Ian Tomlinson by police during this year's G20 protest at the Bank of England, a campaign has been launched against police brutality in support of those killed at the hands of the police. Consisting of a broad coalition of left groups, trade union leaders and anti-capitalists United Campaign Against Police Violence (UCAPV) is seeking to hold accountable police tactics and actions, especially those of the notorious Territorial Support Group, whom many feel are increasingly operating outside the law. UCAPV have already successfully leafleted Millwall football ground (Tomlinson was a Millwall fan), as well as demonstrating outside City Hall at a meeting of the Metropolitan Police Authority, which was interrupted by heckling anarchists who managed to gain entry. There will be a mass demonstration on 23rd May at Scotland Yard in London.

● Sacked **Mitie cleaners** are continuing their weekly pickets outside the building of global insurers Willis Group Holdings in the City of London (pictured above), despite the lack of support from their union, Unite. The five sacked migrant workers are demanding to be reinstated after they were made redundant for resisting the imposition of new working conditions. The dispute began just before Christmas when cleaning contractors Mitie established new contracts with the Willis Group without consulting the workforce. This was on the back of Unite's 'Justice For Cleaners' successful living wage campaign, in return Mitie sought to impose an all night working schedule. The weekly protests which happen every Friday at 1pm are almost entirely self-organised with no visible union recognition, with some suggesting Unite are hostile to the pickets, having already gained their victory.

● The Sparrows Nest an anarchist library and archive is going from strength to strength. Opened at the end of last year in Nottingham its aim is to preserve and promote anarchist literature and ideas. Established by Anarchist Federation (Nottingham) in collaboration with other class struggle anarchists it has already built up an impressive range of books and pamphlets concentrating on anarchist thought and practice (including local, UK and international categories), a back catalogue of anarchist newspapers and magazines, an arts collection as well as a general left and local labour activist collection. It also stocks all the current anarchist periodicals, including *Freedom*.

It's open the first and third Mondays of the month from 11.15am until 2.30pm and every Tuesday and Thursday between 2-6pm. For the moment it is reference only.

On Saturday 9th May they will be holding a talk by Iain McKay on recent *Freedom* Press reprint of Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*.

Anybody who wishes to visit or contribute items to the library or archive please get in touch.

Website: <http://thesparrowsnest.org.uk>, email: [info@thesparrowsnest.org.uk](mailto:info@thesparrowsnest.org.uk) or phone: 07913 720136. Mailing address for books/donations: Box AF, c/o The Sumac Centre, 245 Gladstone Street, Forest Fields, Nottingham, NG7 6HX.

● The latest edition of the long standing anarchist magazine *Black Flag* is in the shops now. As with all *Black Flag* issues, it has an impressive range of articles including reflections on the recent Greece uprising, analysis of the current economic crisis, US activism and New Labour's time in power. Full review in the next edition of *Freedom*.



# Pirates and emperors

The maxim of Thucydides was that “large nations do what they wish, while small nations accept what they must”. This is how international affairs work today. A striking case right now is the piracy off the coast of Somalia.

Throughout the last few weeks, the mainstream media has been informing us that a Somali teenage pirate named Abdiwali Abdiqadir Muse has been put on trial for piracy charges in the United States. But it has almost entirely neglected the causes behind the surge in piracy. This piracy is simply portrayed to be a result of Somalia’s “anarchic political situation spilling out into the sea” (from the *Guardian*). Let’s forget this gross misrepresentation of anarchism and focus on the reasons for the surge in piracy.

Johann Hari of the *Independent* is the only mainstream journalist to present some background to the situation. He describes how “in 1991, the government of Somalia collapsed. Its nine million people have been teetering on starvation ever since – and the ugliest forces in the Western world have seen this as a great opportunity to steal the country’s food supply and dump our nuclear waste in their seas.”

This collapse came as a result of American policy towards Somalia. In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan’s America supplied the dictator Mohamed Siad Barre with arms and about \$100 million a year. As is common with dictators, this money didn’t trickle down to the people of Somalia and the country became increasingly poor. The money was used, however, to repress the population. So it did trickle down in one way. Barre’s brutal policies led to an uprising against him, which quickly turned into a full-scale civil war after he was ousted, and a famine ensued.

America, then under George Bush snr, withheld aid for two months, during which about 100,000 Somalis died of starvation. Now that Somalia was in a huge crisis, Bush took the opportunity to declare, just before the election, that he was dedicated to helping the starving people of Somalia and ordered a ‘humanitarian’ invasion. These policies led to the political collapse of Somalia. European powers saw this as a great opportunity for exploitation.

Somalia has continued to be damaged by American foreign policy. In recent times the Bush II administration destroyed the charity that provided the main support for Somalia on the grounds that it was involved in terrorism. They later conceded that it wasn’t.

After Somalia’s political collapse, mysterious ships started to show up off the coast. These ships are owned by private companies, often the Italian mafia, who have been paid by European governments to dispose of their nuclear waste. They have been dumping this waste off the coast of Somalia. So far more than 300 Somalis have died of radiation poisoning.



Some of the Somali pirates who captured the crew of MV Faina on the deck of the ship

This is not the only way that European ships have raped the coast of Somalia. According to investigative journalist Jeremy Scahill, “over \$300 million worth of tuna, shrimp, and lobster are being stolen every year by illegal trawlers off Somalia’s coast”.

Because of this, many of the local fishermen are starving and Somalia has been pushed further into the abyss of political instability that starvation brings.

It was the combination of fish theft and nuclear dumping that led the ‘pirates’ to take to the seas. Somali fishermen started taking speedboats out to sea to try and stop, or at least tax, boats that were stealing their fish or dumping the toxic waste. They call themselves the volunteer coastguard of Somalia and they have the support of the majority of Somalis – 70% according to WardheerNews (an independent news site in Somalia).

Unfortunately, some of the volunteer coastguards have turned into gangsters and have begun to take hostages, go beyond Somali waters and capture innocent ships like the one carrying world food programme supplies. Trying to justify himself, one of the leaders of the pirates, Sugule Ali, has said that “we don’t consider ourselves sea bandits. We consider sea bandits those who illegally fish in our seas and dump waste in our seas and carry weapons in our seas.”

The governments of the United States and of many of the European countries, including Britain, did not care when Somalis were starving to death in the hundreds of thousands. They took this opportunity to dispose of their nuclear waste and to steal fish to make up for the overfishing that has taken place on their own coasts. But now that Somalis have got desperate and have started disrupting one of the world’s most important oil ways, these governments- the emperors of our world – are suddenly keenly interested in Somalia.

Abdiwali is currently on trial for piracy. But surely the European governments and the companies who have been stealing the Somalis’ fish and dumping nuclear waste in their seas should stand trial with him. As should the American politicians who supported Siad Barre against the wishes of the people of Somalia, withheld aid for two months during a famine and destroyed a charity giving aid to the desperate Somalis. Unless this happens we will continue to live in a corrupt world of pirates and emperors.

Robert Miller

*Freedom*, ‘the paper that backs the pirates’, will continue to report on the ongoing oppression and exploitation in East Africa in future issues.



## REVIEWS

## WHAT'S ON

## MAY

**9th** Out of Step, anarchic punk-rock poetry and music from 6pm at Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX.

**9th** Anarchist Movement Conference 09 benefit at Cross Kings, 126 York Way, London N1 0AX, see [conference09.org.uk](http://conference09.org.uk).

**10th** 'Do people have the right to have children?', open discussion facilitated by Ed McArthur from 3pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 4RL.

**11th** Showing of *Bomb It*, an explosive new documentary investigating graffiti, starts at 7.30pm, Pogo Café, 76 Clarence Road, Hackney, London E5 8HB, see [pogocafe.co.uk](http://pogocafe.co.uk) for more.

**13th** Book launch for *The Wheel's Still in Spin*, the second volume in the 'Stardust and Coaldust' trilogy by Dave Douglass, at 7pm, Housmans Bookshop, 6 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX, for more on Dave see [minersadvice.co.uk/dave.htm](http://minersadvice.co.uk/dave.htm) or see [housmans.com](http://housmans.com) for details about event.

**16th** Demonstration at Nestlé UK HQ from 11am until 12 noon at St George's House, Park Lane, Croydon CR9 1NR, see [babymilkaction.org/action/demo09.html](http://babymilkaction.org/action/demo09.html)

**16th** Benefit for Anarchist Movement Conference 09 at Boston Arms, 178 Junction Road, London N19 5QQ, see [conference09.org.uk](http://conference09.org.uk) for details.

**16th** 'Atheism and Feminism' talk with Sue Mayer at 5pm, Housmans Bookshop, 6 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX, [housmans.com/events](http://housmans.com/events) for details.

**18th** Zines and things, a multi DIY media event at Pogo Café, 76 Clarence Road, Hackney, London E5 8HB, for more see [pogocafe.co.uk](http://pogocafe.co.uk)

**23rd** Cardiff Anarchist Bookfair at Cathays Community Centre, 36 Cathays Terrace, Cardiff CF24 4HX from 10am until 6pm, see <http://southwalesanarchists.org> or email [cosmoinnit@talk21.com](mailto:cosmoinnit@talk21.com) for more.

**30th** Haringey Independence Day, grassroots gathering for social change at West Green Learning Centre, Park View Academy, West Green Road, London N15 3RB, from 12 noon until 6pm, for more information see [haringay.org/independenceday](http://haringay.org/independenceday).

## JUNE

**1st** Screening of *Occupation 101*, a powerful documentary on the current and historical causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, at 7.30pm, Pogo Café, 76 Clarence Road, Hackney, London E5 8HB, for more see [pogocafe.co.uk](http://pogocafe.co.uk)

**6th and 7th** Anarchist Movement Conference, two days of debate, discussions and ideas for the future of the anarchist movement at Queen Mary & Westfield College, London E1 4NS, see [conference09.org.uk](http://conference09.org.uk)

**23rd to 29th** Calais No Border Camp, a joint venture between UK and French activists aiming to highlight the realities of the situation in Calais, for more info see <http://london.noborders.org.uk/calais2009> or <http://calaisborder.eu.org>

## FILM

**Five Minutes of Heaven**

written by Guy Hibbert.

Shown on BBC 2 on 5th April, *Five Minutes of Heaven* won international cinema awards for screenwriting and direction (by Oliver Hirschbiegel) for its complex portrayal of personal legacies in the North of Ireland Troubles. Flashing back to 1975, aspiring teenage UVFer Alastair Little shoots local Catholic Jim Griffin. His 11-year-old brother Joe witnesses the murder – which leaves the family imploding – and thirty-odd years later (as James Nesbit) is still consumed with anguish threatening to ruin relationships with wife and daughters. Meanwhile the sad and lonely killer (Liam Neeson), reformed after a 12-stretch, travels the world professionally preaching truth and reconciliation. They are nearly brought together by a production company exploiting fashionable 'closure' by stage-managing a Reality TV showdown but – packing a knife to exact revenge – Griffin can't hack their cynically fake solicitousness. Little subsequently makes contact privately and their meeting results in a mutual battering, after which they are both able to contemplate moving on.

## Troubles shared

Though based on real individuals, the protagonists have never actually met and the screenplay developed interview material to speculate on what might happen if they did. This gives the film interesting forward-looking potential compared to recent fact-based fictions about the Troubles. Presumably newly-freed from the need to pander to government propaganda, two worthy 2002 television drama-documentaries commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of Bloody Sunday (written by Paul Greengrass and Jimmy McGovern) preceded Ken Loach's *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (2006), which carefully

sketched different ideological, organisational and class-based divergences among 1920s Irish independence campaigners as well as judiciously depicting Brit brutality. This incipient political forthrightness then allowed Steve McQueen's expressionistic *Hunger* (2008) to transpose such overwhelming historical agony onto the flesh of Bobby Sands during his 1981 hunger strike. Unfortunately *Five Minutes of Heaven* has neither the courage nor conviction of these films in insisting on the institutional and cultural underpinning and support of violence and oppression.

Strenuously narrowing the damage down to isolated psyches leaves the optimistic payoff tritely unconvincing – wasting powerful performances relying on star-personas (Neeson's effortless gravitas stereotypically balancing Nesbit's likeable neurotic) to overdetermine the effective recuperation of any genuinely conflictual edge within safe mainstream comfort zones. Though less crass than *Fifty Dead Men Walking's* (Kari Skogland, 2009) mystification of IRA mole Martin McGartland's biography into vacuous commercial entertainment, Hibbert's narrative yields equally soporific 'liberal-issue' therapeutics, doing no justice to any meaningful sense of collective redemption because questions of belief, commitment, community – ultimately sociality of any kind – simply evaporate. Similarly, officialdom pretends that, with the 'politics' supposedly sorted, monetary value attributed to suffering settles the matter (see the government's Eames-Bradley Report on compensation for victims' families). Thus the title, referencing the fleeting pleasure of vengeance, instead evokes Warhol's 'fifteen minutes of fame' – the failed spin-doctoring of *Five Minutes of Heaven's* predatory media perhaps unconsciously signalling the fundamental dishonesty of the present queasy consensus concerning the Six Counties.

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



## QUIZ ANSWERS

1. It was bought in 2003 by Securitas, and is ironically now covered by a union contract through the SEIU.
2. It was the Feast of Saint Joseph the Worker, deliberately set on 1st May, to counteract May Day, and its radical history.
3. Saint Joseph is the patron saint of "people fighting communism".
4. Bankers, doctors, lawyers, gamblers, stockholders, and liquor manufacturers were excluded because they were considered unproductive members of society. Asians were also excluded, because the Knights were racist, though they did let in blacks.



# The Wire

Tom Jennings endorses the accolades accorded to this ground-breaking American television drama – but with reservations.

Widely acclaimed as the best television ever, US crime saga *The Wire* finally arrives on freeview here, continuing on BBC2 into the summer. “A political tract masquerading as a cop show”,<sup>1</sup> the first season introduces central characters and situations in the inner-city narcotics trade and its policing in Baltimore, Maryland – or in local street argot ‘Body-More, Murdaland’ – intended to represent any decaying second-tier rust-belt metropolis. The self-defeatingly stupid but electorally compelling ‘War on Drugs’ focuses the five seasons<sup>2</sup> test-case of the dysfunctional amorality of postmodern government – subsequent narratives expanding these narrowly-delineated parallel micro-worlds into the contemporary social complexity of a tragically ailing urban America and the terminally failing institutions nominally charged with its welfare. The net effect is a forensic fictionalisation of economic bankruptcy in the docks and trade unions, corruption and bureaucratic degeneracy in municipal politics, chaotically incompetent and helpless leadership in the police department and school system, and comparably cynical sociopathic management in local media and drug-dealing franchises.

Early-90s West Baltimore sees another teenage gangbanger murdered and, as we encounter his peers and police investigators, the suspected ‘corner-boss’ culprit wriggles free after witness intimidation. A frustrated detective persuades the judge to pressure the brass into tackling the gang who, despite running things for years, are unknown to official ‘intelligence’ because City Hall prefers paramilitary tactics to pack crime-stats. Loaded with dead-weight from sundry divisions, the new squad nevertheless makes headway via telephone intercepts, and glimpses into the targets’ social and professional networks thereafter intercut with those of the taskforce. The range of idiosyncratic personalities involved grows, manifesting varying degrees of strength and weakness, wit, intelligence and compassion, malice, violence and selfishness – with the significance of conduct for personal gratification, misery and effectivity depending on position and impact upon wider interests. Conversely, ongoing activities are regularly disrupted by banal, brutal and/or arbitrary twists of fate, mistakes, external forces, and decisions and conflicts higher up both food-chains. Final outcomes are provisional compromises, minor defeats and victories, in



the drug trade and its law enforcement mirror – the overriding message being ‘the game remains the same’.

## Wired for sound and fury

The plotlines and arcs crowding sixty-odd *Wire* episodes originally emerged from meticulous journalistic research by David Simon (former police reporter with the *Baltimore Sun*) and Ed Burns (ex-detective and schoolteacher). Filmic forays first followed documentary books *Homicide: Life on the Killing Streets* (embedded in murder investigations; Barry Levinson’s television adaptations running from 1993–99) and *The Corner* (drug-dealers and their milieu portrayed in a 2000 mini-series<sup>3</sup>). The guiding vision was spun by a top-notch script team, including crime novelists George Pelecanos, Richard Price and Dennis Lehane, cementing a seamless literary sprawl and verisimilitude of dialogue and relationships among an impressive, massive ensemble of relatively unknown actors and local amateurs. Repudiating good/bad guy simplification and capturing the everyday humour and pathos of protagonists at all levels constrained by circumstances allowing limited ethical and practical options, the resulting Dickensian specificity attracted fierce loyalty among viewers in the ghettos and officialdoms depicted, seeing aspects of their lives detailed realistically for once. Meanwhile the non-naturalistic economy and meticulous artfulness of narrative execution, condensing full-spectra societal conflict into unflashy visualisations a few hours long, fascinated media pundits amenable to the show’s ideological and artistic ambitions.

In its multilayered refusal of individual or collective resolution, the creators conceived series one as “a training exercise ... to watch television differently” so as to appreciate their relentless “deconstruction of the American Dream” – namely, the postwar consensus

whereby supposedly “everyone gets to make a living”.<sup>4</sup> The show then proceeds as a modern equivalent of Greek tragedy – except that capricious late-capitalist institutions rather than omnipotent gods orchestrate hierarchies and systems according to their interests, agendas, whims and fancies, “hurling lightning bolts, hitting people in the ass for no reason”.<sup>5</sup> However, rather than mythical fairytales, actual city events are woven together with their shape and logic intact, including the most apparently outlandish developments. But then reality is more bizarre, as Simon sketches in a recent *Guardian* essay<sup>6</sup> concerning a major criminal justice scandal which propelled Baltimore’s mayor to Maryland governorship but was never publicly analysed. Thus, being “separate, unequal, and no longer even acknowledging each other”, the “two Americas” connect in *The Wire*’s TV ‘entertainment’ but not in “the stunted political discourse ... eviscerated, self-absorbed press ... [or] any construct to which the empowered ... comfortable and comforted America, gives its limited attention”.

Flouting media and current affairs conventions to question fundamental tenets of mainstream US discourse, this is a refreshing, magnificently sustained artwork. Yet it is restricted by operating assumptions consistently privileging objectifying observers. Even the most vividly well-rounded characters are perceived through the policing prism, in terms of salience to identifying and solving ‘problems’ defined and acted upon by others. So, however tangential to the drugs scene, neighbourhood residents only appear in that context – and myriad additional social and cultural interactions and dimensions are neglected, ruling out their own understandings, levels of autonomy and collective potential. Whereas the filmmakers’ mission – like the authorities – is to render the world intelligible





## Review

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in terms amenable to their agendas, and thus the questionable binary 'two Americas' firmly reinstates passive victims in traditional positions. Simon's righteous anger about the complacent indifference of power to the suffering and wasted human energy of millions is palpable. But so is nostalgia for a time before current trends in political economy when life was (or might have been) better – union leader 'Frank Sobotka' in series two encapsulating the fantasy best: "You know what the trouble is? We used to make shit in this country; build shit. Now we just put our hand in the next guy's pocket". Whereas such dreams of national unity through social-democratic prosperity were yesterday's

illusions incubating today's fiascos – *The Wire* equally, in the end, being "a cop show masquerading as a political tract".

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

### Notes

1. David Simon, interview with Lauren Laverne, *Culture Show*, BBC2, 15th July 2008.
2. Each available in an HBO DVD box-set.
3. And new Simon & Burns' Blown Deadline Productions exploiting similar reportage-based strategies for fine-grained television serial fictions are *Generation Kill* (2008) about US marines in Iraq, and *Treme* (due next year) about local musicians in post-Katrina New Orleans.
4. David Simon, interviewed by Oliver Burkeman, *The Observer*, 28th March 2009.
5. *Culture Show*, note 1.
6. 'The Escalating Breakdown of Urban Society Across the US', 6th September 2008.

## THE QUIZ

1. What was the eventual fate of the union-busting Pinkerton Detective Agency?
2. What was the additional feast day given by Pope Pius XII to Saint Joseph and why did he do it?
3. What other related thing was Saint Joseph made patron saint of?
4. Who were barred from the nineteenth century US union the Knights of Labor? And why?

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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