

DISMANTLING THE WELFARE STATE

New Labour's new vision of a privatised benefits service

New Labour took another step in dismantling the welfare state with the passing of the controversial Welfare Reform Bill into law in what campaign groups are calling an all-out assault on the poor, vulnerable and most needy. The Bill, which sets out changes to the benefits system, overcame its final hurdle on Wednesday 11th November when the House of Lords backed down in opposing the legislation, specifically over the government's plans to fine jobless single parents with pre-school age children if they do not prepare for work while receiving benefits.

Jim Knight, the welfare reform minister, defended the plans in the Lords as "reasonable" to expect parents to take up compulsory training while their three- and four-year-olds were in government provided childcare – and right to hit them with financial penalties for not doing so.

The Welfare Reform Bill is part of New Labour's attempt to reduce the government's financial burden by forcing claimants off incapacity benefit through the new means tested Employment Support Allowance (ESA). More controversially it will also transfer more of the service to private companies who will

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LENS CAP ULYANOVSK



An explosion at a Russian naval arms depot on 13th November shows the inherent dangers of weaponry under all circumstances, particularly if not well cared for. A lucky escape for the people of Ulyanovsk who already have the misfortune of having their city named after Lenin.

ANARCHIST ARRESTED BY UAF

The Anarchist Federation (AF) has issued a statement condemning Unite Against Fascism (UAF) and the actions of their stewards during a demonstration against the English Defence League (EDL) in Leeds city centre on 31st October.

According to reports during the rally, attended by over a thousand militant anti-fascists, trade unionists, students and left-wing groups, several UAF stewards, including the head of UAF Leeds, physically prevented the AF comrade from rejoining the cordon then collaborated with the police to have him arrested.

The AF statement goes on to say: "We will not tolerate collaboration with the state to halt the activity of genuine anti-fascists" and are asking for other progressive organisations to do the same.

The rally, under the heading 'Celebrate and Defend Multicultural Leeds', was called by UAF to counter a demonstration organised by the EDL against Islamic extremism. The EDL are a collection of ex-army types, football hooligans, Christian extremists and patriots, along with a mix of far-right and Nazi hangers on. The UAF, a front group for the Socialist Workers party but supported by mainstream politicians like David Cameron and police associations, have a notoriously close relationship with the state and are mistrusted by militant anti-fascists, with groups like Antifa refusing to work with them. As the AF states "UAF has never been an effective means to combat the rise of fascism in Britain nor does it offer anything to working class communities". The AF member was later released without charge.

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NEWS

ENVIRONMENT ROUND UP

As the Copenhagen summit approaches we have a round up of some stories we've been following in previous issues.

ARCTIC SEA ICE: The extent grew throughout October, as the temperature dropped and darkness returned to the Arctic. However, a period of relatively slow ice growth early in the month kept the average ice extent low.

October 2009 had the second-lowest ice extent for the month over the 1979 to 2009 period. In mid-December the ice extent had fallen below even 2009 levels to its lowest ever recorded for the time of year.

This slow growth means there is likely to be less ice at the start of the melt season in 2010. Less ice means less sunlight reflected and warmer water melting more ice – you get the picture.

The disaster waiting to happen is methane release from the melting permafrost and undersea deposits. After several years of stable levels in the atmosphere methane levels are again rising and this may be why.

TUNA: The body responsible for managing Atlantic bluefin tuna has decided not to suspend the fishery in response to concerns over dwindling stocks. The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) instead decided to lower the annual catch quota by about one third.

HURRICANES: We chose to concentrate on North Atlantic tropical storms and, guess what, it was a quiet year (but for a bad reason, see below). Small consolation for the 124 people drowned by Hurricane Ida in an unusual November hurricane, but proof again that it's the poor who suffer most from climate change.

EL NIÑO: According to NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), El Niño conditions have been in place in the equatorial Pacific Ocean since June 2009. Therefore the 2009/2010 season is expected to be an El Niño year.

The good side of this is that it caused high shearing winds in the Atlantic preventing many hurricanes. The bad news is that dry conditions in the Western Pacific may cause massive fires, itself boosting CO2 emissions.

PEAK OIL: The only hope you might think to stop rising greenhouse gases is the oil running out. However although there is strong evidence that oil reserves are being exaggerated to prevent market panics (see George Monbiot in the *Guardian* on 17th November 2009) peak oil will be around 2020 and the worst effect will be on world food supplies.

TIPPING POINTS: All this brings us to the big question. Have we reached the point where runaway climate change is inevitable? It's not looking good.

LENS CAP SEALS SUFFER STORM STRESS



Strong tides and stormy seas are being blamed by wildlife experts for a difficult breeding season for Cornwall's grey seals. Eight seal pups were found dead within a six-day period at the beginning of the month. We can't directly blame capitalism or the State for this, but we're sure that seals would be better off without government too.

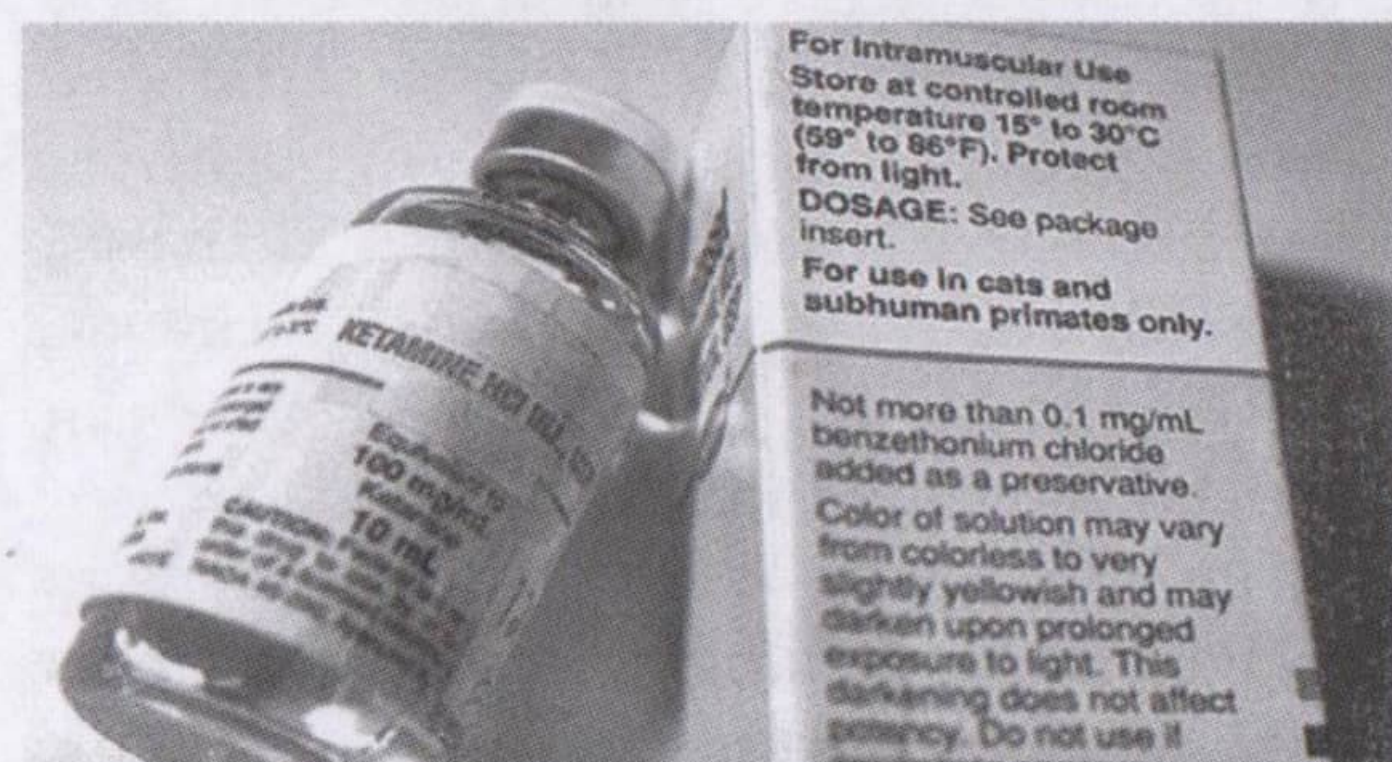
Ketamine: counter-revolutionary drug

Freedom's long standing campaign against the use of ketamine has been backed up by researchers from University College London (UCL). Showing once and for all that 'pony smack' is not only bad for you, it's bad for the working class and it's bad for the revolution.

Frequent use of ketamine is linked with memory problems, the researchers say. The UCL team carried out a range of memory and psychological tests on 120 people. They found frequent users performed poorly on skills such as recalling names, conversations and patterns.

Previous studies said the drug might cause kidney and bladder damage. The London team and charity Drugscope said users should be aware of the risks.

Ketamine – or Special K as it has been dubbed – acts as a stimulant and induces hallucinations. It has been increasing in popularity, particularly as an alternative to ecstasy among clubbers, as the price has fallen over recent years. A gram now costs about £20 – half the price of cocaine.



In response, the drug was made illegal three years ago – it is currently graded class C – although it still remains legal for use as an anaesthetic and a horse tranquiliser.

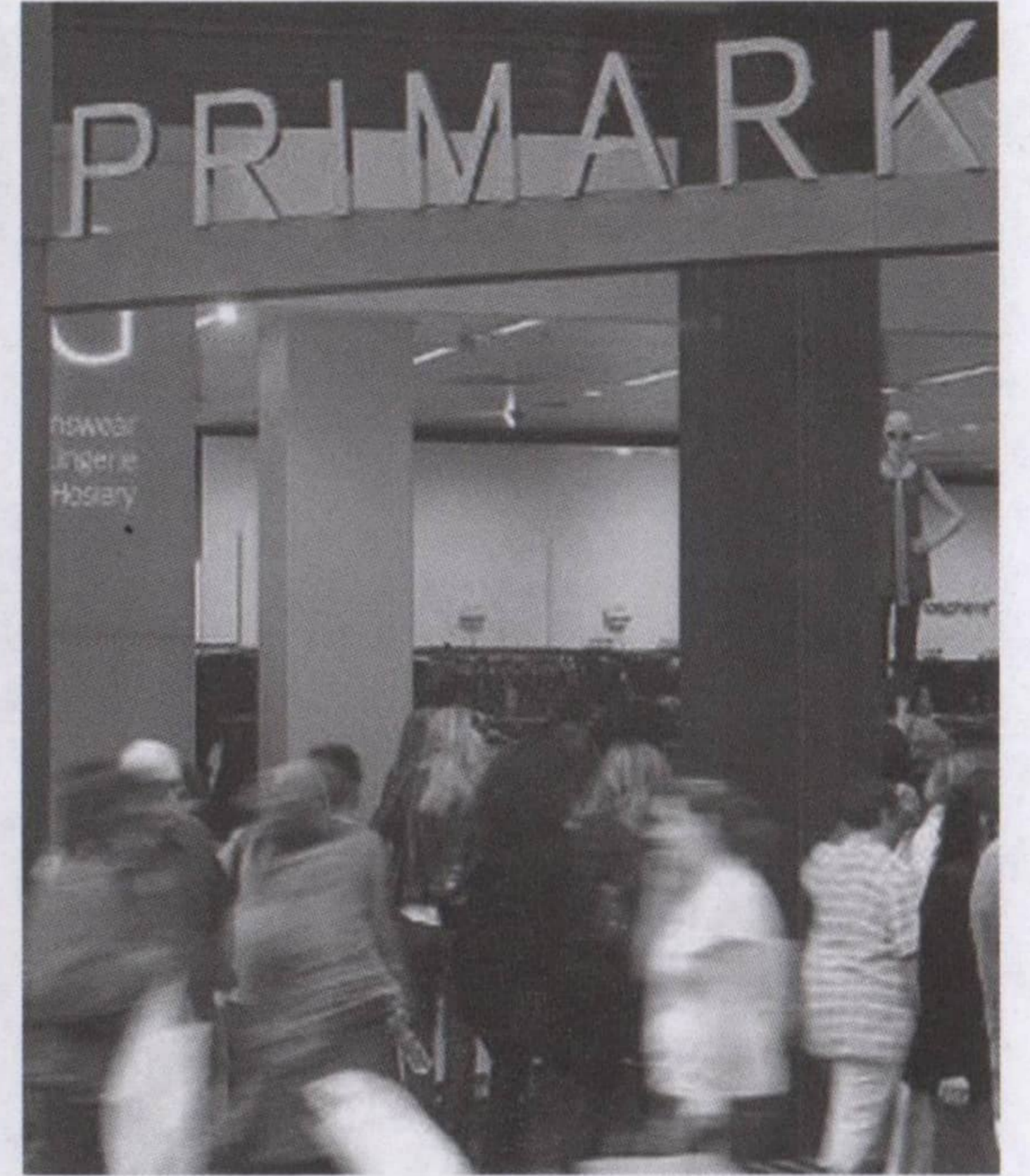
We need to ensure that users are informed of the potentially negative consequences of heavy ketamine use said Dr Celia Morgan of UCL.

The study split the participants into five groups – those using the drug each day, recreational users who took the drug once or twice a month, former users, those who used other drugs and people who did not take any drugs.

All of the people took part in a series of memory tests as well as completing questionnaires and were then followed up a year later, the *Addiction* journal reported.

Researchers found the frequent users group performed significantly worse on the memory tests – in some they made twice as many errors. The study also showed performance worsened over the course of the year. There was no significant difference between the other groups.

The most important result though, and one many readers could have guessed without help, was that, all groups of ketamine users, according to the psychological questionnaires used, showed evidence of unusual beliefs or mild delusions such as conspiracy theories. So for anyone out there who's still tempted ... just say no!



Police outside the mill complex; the interior of Majid House, where some workers hid in the roof; goods were produced for Primark

Immigrant workers mass raid

Factory workers arrested in immigration crackdown

Police, along with UK Border Agency officers, raided a factory warehouse in Manchester and arrested 23 of the 65 occupants on suspicion of working illegally in the country.

The workers – 21 men and two women, aged in their mid 20s and early 40s – from Pakistan and Afghanistan, are being held as part of a nationwide crackdown by immigration officials.

Frightened workers were found hiding in the building, some on the roof, as police raided the premises early on 11th November along with the Department of Work and Pensions, trading standards and the Health and Safety Executive.

The arrests followed months of surveillance of Majid House, an old mill complex housing

over 20 separate businesses situated in the Ardwick district of Manchester. Most of the businesses produce knitwear and textiles for the wholesale industry and was the centre of another immigration scandal earlier this year with an investigation of TNS Knitwear who ran a sweatshop in the building employing migrant workers as almost slave labour, on less than half minimum wage in appalling conditions, to produce best selling top fashion range for Primark.

Due to their precarious legal status many immigrant workers are still unable to demand better conditions for fear of being handed over to the authorities with the risk of detention and deportation.

The raid came just days before the government published a new set of proposals concerning its future immigration policy. Under measures in the draft Immigration bill, the current five application categories available to migrants will be replaced by one clear

concept – ‘permission’ to be in the UK. With this new approach, migrant workers in the UK must be granted permission or face immediate removal for breaking the law.

These proposals are the next step in New Labour’s policy of tightening Britain’s border controls, along with a tough new set of conditions proposed for those on immigration bail, including restrictions on residence, work or study; access to public funds; and reporting and electronic monitoring.

The government has also published proposals for a new streamlined asylum support system. The suggested shake-up includes proposals to reward those who play by the rules and getting tough with those who do not; streamline the current complex system of support; and do more to ensure the system works towards the return of those who have been found to have no protection needs and who have no right to be in the UK.

Dismantling the welfare state

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be paid more the less benefits they award, along with increasing punishments for claimants who refuse to work for their benefits, cuts on carers’ allowance and compulsory two parent registration on birth certificates, including survivors of violence. The Department of Work and Pensions aims to reduce those eligible for ESA, through an inability to work due to sickness or injury, by one million by imposing more stringent criteria for claiming, and bullying potential claimants back into degrading and useless work.

Radical campaigns groups from across the country met in Manchester on 14th November for a planning meeting to co-ordinate a nationwide strategy against the implementation of the new act and discuss a campaign of

action. A coalition of grassroots organisations including The London Coalition Against Poverty (LCAP), Disabled People’s Direct Action Network and Feminist Fightback have already staged a week of actions to highlight the draconian measures forced through Parliament, essentially turning the unemployed into second class citizens.

With the latest attack on benefits has seen the re-emergence of claimants groups. Both LCAP and its Edinburgh equivalent, ECAP, along with Nottingham Claimants Action, have been at the forefront of raising awareness amongst unemployed workers about their rights and entitlements, as well as participating in direct action against benefit agencies. In London there is the newly formed Hackney Unemployed Workers and Newham Claimants

Union, and the formation of Unemployed Workers Movement in Merseyside, where unemployment is 6.15%, almost 2% above the national average. An Unemployed Workers Union has also been established by the Unemployed Workers Centre in Salford with an appeal for the formation of a national campaign.

According to government statistics, unemployment reached 2.46 million in September, with the number of people claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance in October 2009 increasing by 12,900 to reach 1.64 million, the highest number of claimants since April 1997.

As part of the national campaign there will be public meeting in London on 21st November on ‘How will the Welfare Abolition Bill affect us?’

ANALYSIS

Banged to rights

How Britain's political policing makes itself known

It's not everyday you make the front page of the *Guardian* newspaper, see a picture of yourself reflected back from the news stands, looking frankly the worse for wear, under the heading of domestic extremism.

I was one of the 24 people pictured on the confidential spotter card used by police on demonstrations to identify 'known trouble-makers' that was published, without people's knowledge or consent, by the paper on 26th October attached to the headline article on how the police target, respond to and counter political activists.

To be fair I was already aware of the small laminated card in question, having seen it at the time, acquired as it was during the DSEi arms fair protests back in 2005. What the card does hint at, and what the *Guardian* was clumsily attempting to reveal, is the level and depth of surveillance of Britain's secret policing and the various organisations behind it.

- FIT (Forward Intelligence Teams), the foot-soldiers and most visible representation of police intelligence gathering. Mostly made up of ordinary constables and recognisable by protestors as having bright blue shoulder markings across their shoulders protecting an intrusion photographer.

- ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers) is an independent, professionally led strategic body that coordinates the direction and development of the police service in the UK. The top of the (acknowledged) secret policing pile.



- NPOIU (National Public Order Intelligence Unit) based in central London and answerable to ACPO, it employs between 60 and 70 police officers and staff seconded from local police forces. Has an intelligence database that is used in relation to politically motivated disorder co-ordinating the collection, analysis, exploitation and dissemination of intelligence on the extremist threat to public order, covering animal rights, environmental, left and right wing threats. Its annual budget is £5 million.
- NETCU (National Extremism Tactical Co-ordination Unit) funded by, and reporting to ACPO, it helps police forces, companies, universities and other bodies that are on the receiving end of protest campaigns, giving "security advice, risk assessments and information that can minimise disruption and keep their employees safe". A 16-strong unit with detailed files on protest groups, rather than individuals, and liaises with thousands of companies in aviation, energy, research, farming and retail.

- NDET (National Domestic Extremism Team) sister organisation to NETCU set up in 2005 and consists of detectives who help police forces around the UK co-ordinate operations and investigations into criminal activities associated with 'domestic extremism'. Initially focusing on animal rights activists, expanded to cover single issue-type causes and campaigns. Draws on intelligence from the NPOIU database.

Much of the legality of intelligence gathering techniques of these organisations have yet to be tested in court given that ACPO is essentially a private company operating within the police network, unaccountable and certainly not bound by the rules governing police duties and operations meaning they exempt from freedom of information laws and public accountability, even though they are funded by the Home Office and deploy police officers from regional forces.

Just a letter

Flats seized from council neglect

A group of 50 people made up of activists, sympathisers and homeless, struck on Saturday 8th November.

The entire first floor of a derelict council block in Finsbury Park, North London, was taken under their control at midday.

The space, now known simply as the Community Squatting Project, is being heavily renovated to provide housing – at least one homeless family have already moved in.

Police arrive at the site at around 4pm, but left after a brief exchange; this essentially rubber-stamps the legality of the occupation for now.

The conditions of the flats vary, but crucially the window panes are still intact in most, and heating and electric have not been sabotaged to prevent habitation. In all, nine three-bedroom flats are now under collective occupation after the action coordinated by North East London Squatters Network

(NELSN). The network has existed so far to provide effective support to squatters by co-ordinating defence from police or bailiffs, but has also been meeting regularly to discuss the collective issues and potential impact of squatting in the area: this action is a promising indicator of a more outward and socially motivated trajectory.

The action had been in the works for roughly two months, aiming from the start to help homeless people discover squatting as a potential solution.

One of the flats will become an information centre connected to the Advisory Service for Squatters (squatter.org.uk) to explain the project, and promote further occupations.

A letter explaining the reasons behind the project was delivered to the council residents in the connected blocks immediately after moving in.

Danny Pritchard

G20 arrests update

Without much publicity, the prosecutions of over 20 people for the demonstrations in London on 1st and 2nd April continue, despite the outcry over police behaviour on the day.

These cases won't come to trial until next year so there is still time to help see that justice is really done.

As always, many cases are simply lies and distortion by the cops, but some resolve around people acting in defence of other people who they didn't know or are not in contact.

It's not possible to list all the times and locations involved, but anyone who saw police violence may be key to preventing a miscarriage of justice.

If you are a potential witness, especially if you have film footage, then you should contact Liam Pollard at Bindman's solicitors, 275 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8QB, tel 020 7833 4433, fax 020 7837 9792, email info@bindmans.com.

IN BRIEF

AFGHANISTAN: A little known milestone was reached on the 15th November with the 233rd British military fatal casualty of the campaign.

This was to equal the number of deaths which were incurred in Palestine in the 1940s.

Of post-World War Two conflicts, only The Falklands (255), Malaya (340), Ireland (763) and Korea (765) rank higher.

Now wars are not determined by the losses but the willingness to endure them, or else the Soviet Union would have surrendered about 30 minutes into World War Two (you have to be a very brave man if you don't want to be a hero in the Red Army, as Stalin put it).

Stopping the ludicrous war needs more than hand wringing. It must be made to have an unacceptable price to politicians not the families of soldiers.

SAVE OUR AIRCRAFT CARRIER:

Doubtless in response to the *Freedom* piece in our last issue, the Ministry of Defence has floated (punny, eh!) the idea of selling one of the new boats to India.

Unfortunately we're no keener on the Indian State being able to bomb folk round the world than the British, so we urge all readers to campaign to 'save the Prince of Wales' as long, of course, that it's not allowed to have planes on it.

ID NONSENSE: Young people should take up identity cards as a 'convenient' way of proving their age in nightclubs and bars, a Home Office minister has said.

Meg Hillier said the cards would also make it easier to prove identity at the post office when picking up parcels. There you go, personal liberty or parcels. Freedom has its price.

SEX: Okay, that was just to get you interested, it's more gender roles really. Chemicals in plastics alter the brains of baby boys, making them 'more feminine', say US researchers.

Males exposed to high doses in the womb went on to be less likely to play with boys' toys like cars or to join in rough and tumble games, the researchers found.

The University of Rochester team's latest work adds to concerns about the safety of phthalates, found in vinyl flooring and PVC shower curtains. The findings are reported in the *International Journal of Andrology*.

NAZIS: German prosecutors have charged a 90-year-old alleged former Nazi SS member with the deaths of 58 Jewish forced labourers.

On the better late than never plan we suppose, but aren't there enough active Nazis who we should worry about first?

RMT Conference

Ian Bone reports from the RMT Conference on working class representation

Bob Crow (pictured below) had a couple of good lines. "The choice between voting Labour and Tory is like choosing between being stabbed or hanged" – he then welcomed Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn onto the platform and said what a top geezer Labour MP John McDonnell is!

Bob wants a variety of socialist candidates, under a name yet to be chosen, to stand at the next election. Dave Nellist is still trying to flog life into the campaign for a new workers party. Other RMT members supported candidates standing under The People's Charter banner. Others still wanted local electoral coalitions as are apparently developing in Lanarkshire and Portsmouth. The SWP and Respect were not mentioned – this was an RMT/Socialist Party show only. The RMT has split with Labour but will not stand against socialist Labour candidates!

Everyone wants electoral unity – but only under their own pet schemes. Dave wants a Campaign for a New Workers Party whereas Bob wants a workers party – you wait for one for ages then two come along at once!

There were about 400 people present and I don't doubt their sincerity – it's just that, like the anarchists, no one can agree with

the others' unity schemes because they all have one they made earlier. An all-white audience mainly made up of well-seasoned working class blokes in their 40s and 50s – a surprising lack of youngsters and none of the 15–17 year olds you see in the anarchist scenes.

Most speakers, apart from Crow, were sincere but boring – no sense of excitement or dynamism or momentum. The usual banal programmes based around nationalisation and anti-Euro bashing – hardly likely to attract our class away from the BNP. Without the charismatic Crow this would be dead in the water. With the charismatic Crow it'll still be dead in the water. It'll be an annual event – Auld Lang Syne, comrades?

As anarchists we can take no glee in this. We haven't got any answers either – at least here were 400 members of our class looking for some. If they were to look further and really question why the Left is getting nowhere that might help ... but there were too many comrades peddling the old failed programmes and no one with any spirit to challenge the orthodoxies. Salvation will not come from this quarter.

The whole day was chaired by Alex Gordon, former anarcho-syndicalist and DAM member, who is reportedly intending to stand for the leadership of the RMT post Bob Crow. Possibly the first syndicalist to head up a union since Tom Mann and A.J. Cook. Can a general strike be far off?



INTERNATIONAL

IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH: Members of the Bangladeshi Rifles brigade who mutinied over poor working conditions and shot officers before being broken by the army, are facing torture and unfair trials, according to Amnesty International. The NGO alleges that scores, possibly hundreds of BDR personnel have suffered torture for possible involvement in the mutiny. Nearly all were denied the opportunity to seek the assistance of a lawyer for weeks or months.

FRANCE: The CNT-F syndicalist union has launched a solidarity campaign for 850 miners working for OCP (a state-owned phosphate extraction company) in Morocco. The miners have been on strike since the beginning of September in the Khouribga region. Their action comes after they were fired en masse for refusing to accept new working conditions in the company including the generalisation of temporary work, fixed term contracts and the cutting of salaries in half.

IRAN: More than 1,000 cane cutters at the Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Company have ended their three day strike after the management agreed to meet workers' demands.

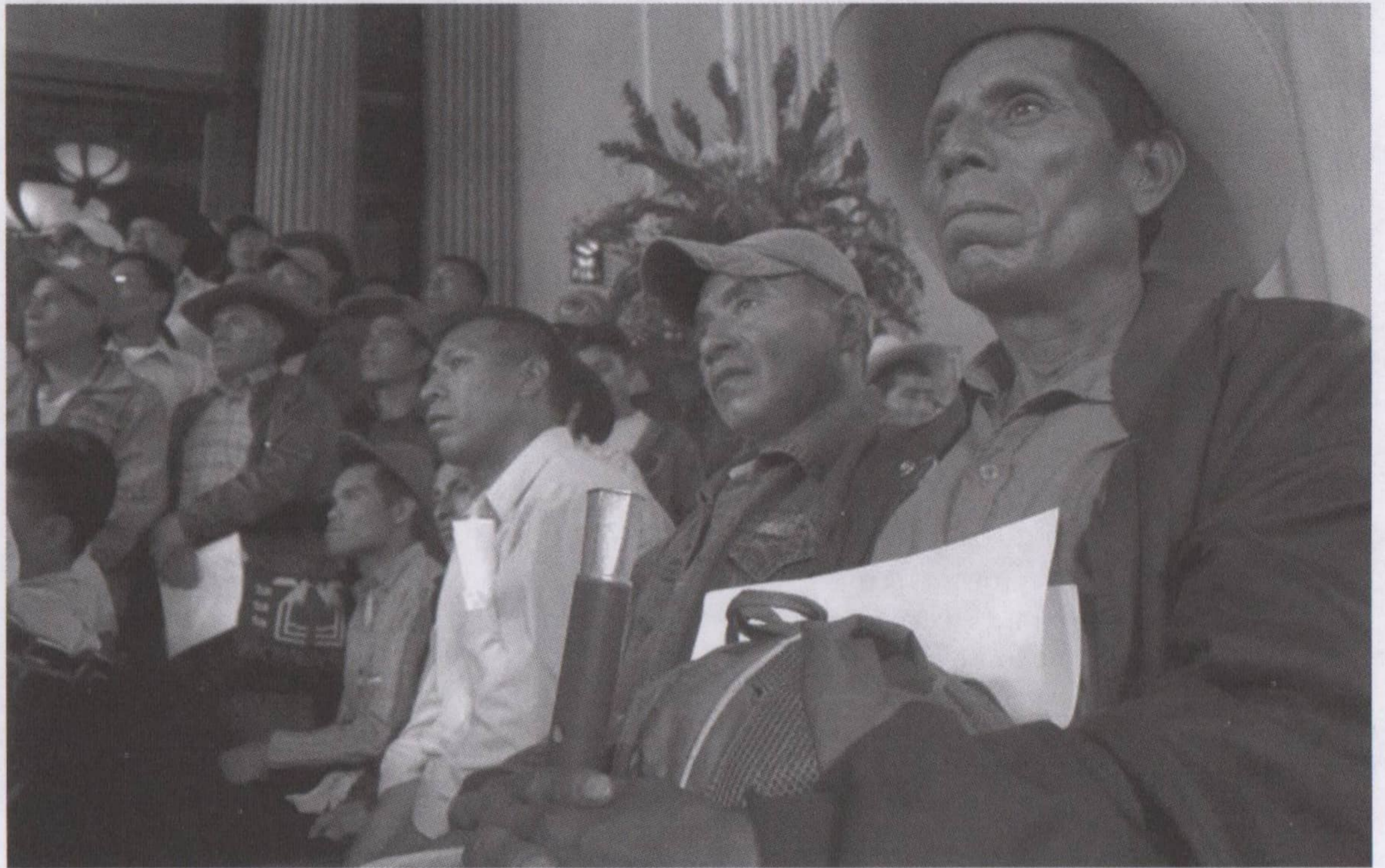
The cane cutters went on strike on 9th November and continued their strike the next day by gathering at the cane cutting camp of the company. The workers demanded the immediate payment of the annual productivity bonus. Most of the cane cutters are seasonal workers from the nearby Lorestan province, working for the company for five or six months a year.

IRELAND: Dublin was brought to a standstill on 10th November as up to 70,000 people took to the streets as part of a national day of protest. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions organised eight rallies across Ireland to protest against the expected \$4bn in public cuts in the Irish budget on 9th December. The rallies took place in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, Waterford, Sligo, Tullamore and Dundalk with Dublin by far the largest.

POLAND: A major antifascist demonstration was held on November 10th to counter a march by far-right elements. The police escorted the fascists down a different street to avoid confrontation with the antifascists waiting for them. Police attacked the demonstrators and used tear gas. Later 14 people were arrested. Only a few people managed to get to the new route of the fascist march and some tried to block it. There were several fights with fascists.

ZIMBABWE: David Whitehead Textiles Ltd, once a giant of the country's textile industry, has collapsed, leaving 800 workers without jobs. Workers say they had seen the collapse coming, as management had failed to keep promises of making the firm viable again and had been paid just \$40 a month since February.

LENS CAP CHIAPAS



A number of attacks in the north of the Chiapas autonomous region in Mexico is condemned by the 'good government' of the Zapatistas at a recent meeting. The group says government-trained thugs have been attempting to intimidate and divide residents of local villages, offering some their backing in re-privatising lands which have been collectivised.

Cities shut down in Mexico

Around 200,000 workers, teachers, students, unionists, farmers and social campaigners shut Mexican cities down on 12th November in a national strike against the military-backed privatisation of a national power company.

On 10th October, 6,000 federal police and soldiers occupied various sites of power company Luz y Fuerza around the country and summarily sacked the 44,000 strong workforce. Martín Esparza, leader of the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME) said, "They came by night, like bandits, like cowards, and barked an order. They thought that they were going to wipe us out, but here there is the conscience of more than 100 years of the SME movement."

In Mexico City the day's 12 hours of action began with a rally outside Luz y

Fuerza. With thousands of other protesters assembling around at points around the city, most of the main roads were shut down and blockaded. Students occupied buildings at several universities, provoking an aborted attempt to flush them out by police.

As the protesters began their march on the convergence point of the Zocalo – Mexico City's main square – there were several confrontations with police. Three police were injured in the clashes and 12 protesters were arrested.

The strike followed weeks of actions against the closure. A march of over a hundred thousand in Mexico City was followed by pickets in Tula, Tulancingo, and Juandho and an attempt to seize a substation in Pachuca.

Adapted from Schnews.org.uk

Notes from the United States

Figures released in mid October by the Iraqi Human Rights Ministry suggest that 85,000 people have been killed in violent attacks and more than 147,000 wounded since 2004.

These numbers do not include some 10,000 missing Iraqis. They're also significantly lower than those published by credible human rights and independent groups; but still represent two deaths an hour.

The recent winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Barack Obama, seems set to add to that number, in Afghanistan, by sending up to 40,000 more US troops there over coming months.

To find all the soldiers necessary for American expansion the Pentagon has begun to target middle schools, which children aged typically between 12 and 15 years old attend: a school district in Kansas has implemented a middle school programme based on the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps curriculum. It's a pilot at this stage, but is being studied to see if it can be expanded nationwide.

This is at a time when polls show a majority (58%, for example, according to

'Let them stay'

East Rome community defies Mayor's Gypsy pogrom

The mayor of Rome has declared his attempted eviction of Romani Gypsies from their camp on Centocelle Street a failure, blaming the city's radical social centre network.

In Italy's latest and largest eviction of Romani this year, city authorities illegally attacked a community of 400 people at the camp, which was in the east of the city, without warning on 11th November.

Around 20 men were arrested and some 120 children, most of whom had places at local schools, were among those displaced.

However almost all of the families were rehomed by the surrounding community within hours, effectively ruining plans to drive the refugees into temporary homeless shelters where they could be detained.

Communist newspaper *Il Manifesto* said: "A social bomb exploded in the hands of Mayor Gianni Alemanno".

The paper reported that a combination of solidarity from parents, teachers and local residents who knew the families, alongside direct action from the city's social centres, meant that the Roma were quickly found new digs, mostly at the Metropolix building in Main Street.

Metripolix, an old factory which was occupied a few months ago and houses Moroccans, Peruvians and Italians, provided a roof for the families of Romani children, allowing them to start school the next day.

However, as *Freedom* goes to press, the Rome administration is already making



noises about attacking the rebellious factory collective next, according to human rights NGO Amnesty International.

The first eviction has already drawn significant criticism from human rights groups. Local NGOs say that the community was not notified or consulted about the eviction. Under domestic law, the authorities should notify each individual, or publish an order or notice.

As the order was not formalised in this way, the community could not challenge it through the courts and stop or postpone the eviction.

The organisation also reminded the authorities that forced evictions, carried out without legal and other protections, are prohibited under international law as a gross

violation of a range of human rights; in particular, the right to adequate housing.

For at least the last 10 years, numerous forced evictions of Roma communities have been carried out in Italy, as part of a wider offensive by the Italian state against precarious and migrant groups.

Racism has been on the rise in many parts of the country, stoked by far right media loyal to President Silvio Berlusconi, with vigilante attacks becoming more common.

New state laws have recently made illegal entry and stays in the country a criminal offence, punishable with a fine of between 5,000 and 10,000 Euros along with immediate repatriation. Marriages to 'illegal' migrants are also banned.

Notes from the Unites States

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CNN/Opinion Research Corporation) of people in the USA oppose the war. And as new revelations emerge that the Pentagon is actually funding the Taliban: its civilian contractors in Afghanistan now pay 'insurgent' groups to protect American supply routes from attack – 10% of the Pentagon's logistics contracts consists of payments to the Taliban.

That's millions of dollars as the military recently expanded its trucking contracts in the country by 600% – to a total of over US\$2bn (£1.2bn).

But there's a justification for all of this, apparently. In a Congressional testimony at the end of October, oil tycoon T. Boone Pickens told lawmakers that the US is 'entitled' to Iraqi oil because of the human and financial toll of occupying Iraq. "We're entitled to it... We even lost 5,000 of our people, 65,000 injured and a trillion, five hundred billion dollars."

But destruction in the American colonies is obviously not enough. Obama's administration is increasing the production of nuclear weapons. The 'Complex Modernization' initiative is now set to expand two existing nuclear sites to produce new parts for bomb.

Additionally, the administration has proposed new plutonium pits at the Los Alamos lab in New Mexico and expand enriched uranium processing at the Y-12 facility in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

If there's money to be made though, radioactivity is neither here nor there: massive drilling for petroleum-based resources in New York's underground Marcellus Shale deposit is due to start soon.

State officials themselves admit that the waste water which is a by-product of the blasting used in the extraction process is radioactive and have so far refused to say how they propose to deal with that.

Louis Further

Thousands of Greek prisoners on hunger strike

More than 3,300 prisoners in nine Greek prisons, nearly 30% of the total prison population, have begun refusing food.

They are demanding the reversal of the last government's law that makes prison leave more difficult to be granted, an immediate pardon for all prisoners with five or less years of penalty, abolition of life-sentence for drug-use related crimes, with a maximum penalty of 10 years instead, and an immediate release of all prisoners who have served three-fifths of their time.

The Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, fearing a domino effect and an escalation of the crisis like last year's mass hunger strike, has promised to find ways to cut prison overcrowding and to introduce of alternative social penalties, a measure the Judges are reluctant to accept.

Most of the concessions won by the prisoners during the previous hunger strike were never implemented by the last government.

The forthcoming climate conference in Copenhagen

This December activists from across the globe will be descending on Copenhagen to protest the COP15 round of discussion – ten years since the alter-globalisation movements took to the streets of Seattle to oppose the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Has the UK Direct Action movement changed in the interceding years between these cycles of struggle? And what lessons, if any, can it learn from its recent past?

What is COP15?

The fifteenth 'Conference Of Parties' (COP) is scheduled for 7th to 18th December 2009. Established by the UN, with the first meeting in Berlin in 1995, these conferences aimed to determine the method by which the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) treaty could be pushed forward. This treaty was legally non-binding, but provided protocols with the objective of stabilising greenhouse gas emissions at a level which would prevent 'man-made' climate change.

The COP talks aim to establish legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their emissions whilst not inhibiting the industrialisation of developing nations. Throughout its brief history, the COP process has been hampered by indecision. The most famous example being the Kyoto Protocol. This was proposed at COP3 in 1997 to set emission restrictions for the period 2008–12.

The next nine years and eight meetings were dominated by attempts to ratify the Kyoto Protocol in the face of severe challenges and finally a firm rejection by the USA.

By the time an agreement was met, the time frames set were unworkable and COP shifted their focus towards establishing a successor.

The purpose of COP15 is to establish a decisive global agreement which can pick up the pieces from the Kyoto Protocol when it expires in 2012. This they hope to achieve through various market methods, including



the implementation of carbon trading, a means by which developed nations can buy their way out of emissions targets through exchange with less-developed nations which emit far less than the designated targets. In effect, through the supply of funding and 'technology', richer countries can accumulate 'spare' carbon credits and not address their own emissions. The meeting will be attended by Governmental ministers and officials from 192 countries as well as business leaders and civic society groups.

Why should you care about COP15?

In the wake of the financial crisis it seems apparent to us that states and the international markets will use the threat of runaway climate change as a means to restructure capital and to shore up state power.

What do we mean by this?

That the very industries and national bodies that have created this crisis will make the working and poor population of the world pay for carbon reduction through increased attacks on our collective standards of living and our limited freedom.

It seems likely that these attacks will take the form of green taxes levelled against

populations, the control or regulation of people's movements between borders (flight allocation/personal carbon rations), rising fuel prices, energy rationing or through the establishment of renewable industries (which will involve lay-offs/retraining).

The 'radical' green movement, as we see it

From the outside it appears that these concerns for COP15's outcome seem to be drowned out by the louder voices of the 'mainstream' green movement who seek solely to cut carbon emissions by *any* means necessary.

This desire to halt emissions is fuelled by the apocalyptic rallying cry of '100 months'. This 'peer reviewed' timeframe states that the world has less than 100 months to reduce carbon emissions before runaway climate change leads to catastrophe. This tempo has set the agenda for what is believed possible, with many campaigners claiming that only state-led solutions can be offered in the timeframe posed. The failure of anti-authoritarian movements to organise themselves materially and to challenge state power, has only helped maintain people's faith in a process that has systematically failed to deliver any agreements over the last 14 years.

Another narrative shared by the both the state and the broad green movement is the belief that climate change is a 'man-made' problem and not one of our economy. This confusion only lends the state more power when offering up its solutions.

While human industry has undoubtedly contributed to climate change to pin this on a 'neutral humanity' is to miss the point entirely. Climate change has not been brought about by mankind's progressive march towards a petroleum-driven technological future, but by capitalism, the means by which our lives are ordered.

Summit hopping again?

The activist movements seem awash with an excitement not felt since the heyday of the alter-globalisation movement. In the UK, Climate Camp have called for a national mobilisation, similar to Earth First's

mobilisation to Prague for the IMF/WB meeting in 2001.

Many have projected that climate change will kick start a new cycle of summit struggles, if this is to be the case there seems to be little comparisons or inter-movement dialogue regarding the failures and limited successes of the last cycle.

Uneasy victory?

Anarchist and ultra left groups have often recognised what is at stake at these summits, and as such played an important role in summit mobilisations during the last cycle, especially against economic forums such as the WTO and IMF. These manifestations were able to galvanise activists from diverse backgrounds (environmentalists, faith groups, indigenous peoples through to steel workers) due to the obvious nature of the unelected and unaccountable illegitimacy of the institutions these protests opposed. It can be also argued that the inclusion of just eight of the worlds leading economies was justification enough for many to mobilise against the predecessor of the G20. Anti-state voices were often in the minority at these mobilisations.

While the legitimacy of such institutions matters little to anarchist groups, COP15 presents itself as a united effort on behalf of 'world democracy' (the UN) to reorder itself, and as such, antagonisms to the process are not as clearly defined by those attending as in previous summit event. Or, to be more precise there is no shared understanding of what is at stake and who or what is to blame. Already there have been calls to both 'shut them down and keep them in' from activist networks mobilising for COP.

This confused position has been seen as a positive representation of the 'diversity of opinion' of the groups attending. Regardless of political difference, for all attending – be they radical or reformist – carbon reduction remains the priority of the movement. A priority that could lead to strange and uncomfortable 'victories' if the governments and business leaders attending COP15 have their way.

From the outside the debate seems solely focused on carbon emission reduction with the occasional nod towards 'worker's issues' in the shape of a 'just transition to a carbon free future'. Without addressing by whose agency a just transition will be achieved, protests will do little to counter the attempts to restructure labour from above. It could be argued that those attending the COP15 protests could also be seen to be supporting any planned 'new green deal', austerity is the only outcome likely in our mind.

We have yet to hear of radical voices inside the green movements that articulate our concerns or address the inadequacy of narrow single issue demands effectively. We hope that those attending the protests take our concerns with them, and articulate them, in order to broaden the debate inside the 'carbon justice' movement.

Give up activism...

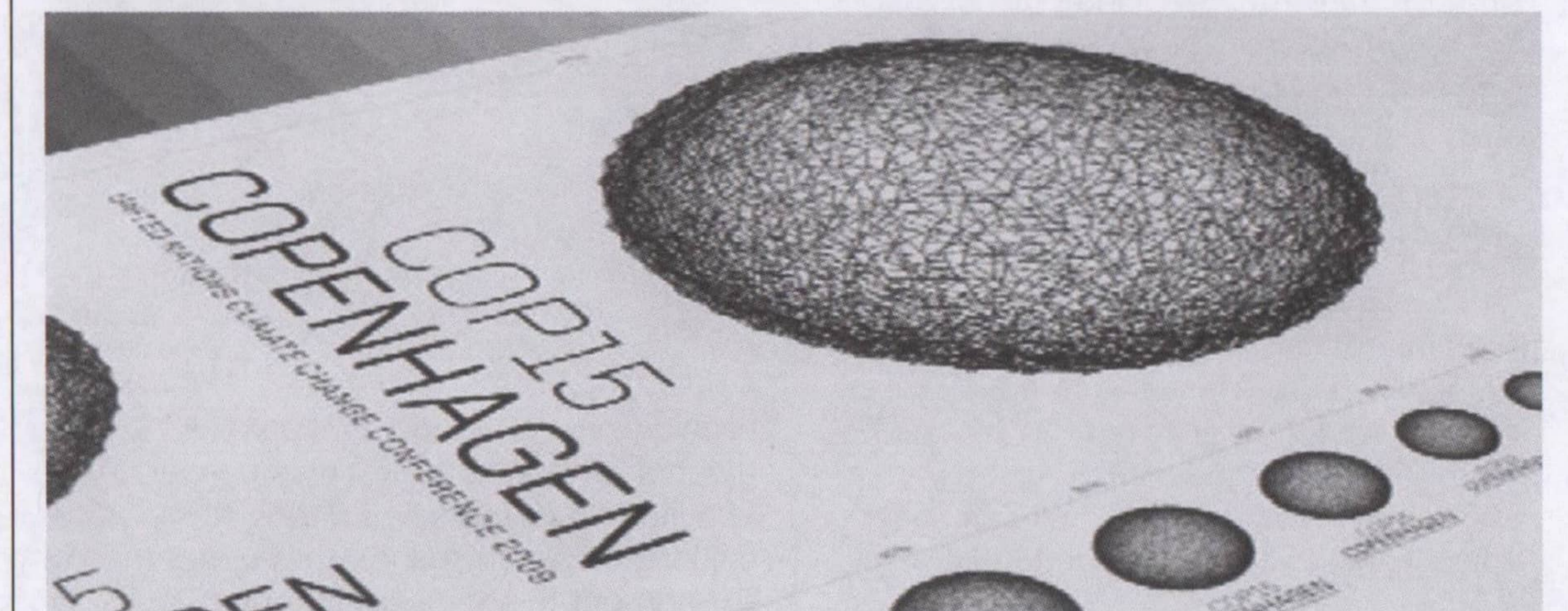
It can now be stated with some certainty that summit hopping of the past failed to generalise itself outside of the activists who attended them. Protests became the increasing expertise of a small class of international activist 'experts'. We see little to convince us that this trend has changed in the interceding years. In the end the only people who understood the politics of summit mobilisations were not the millions of passive observers the protesters imagined being radicalised by their actions, but the dwindling numbers of participants and the

police. If the radical green movement, of which climate camp is a main player, is serious about 'confronting and reversing the route causes of climate change' it must broaden itself out to include the concerns of the international working class.

Whilst it is to late to halt the process set in motion by a 'summit call out', we hope that all those attending COP15 return to their homes safely and without the necessity to reinvent the wheel – i.e. condemning their generation to another decade of spectacular riots with little or no real material gains.

Instead, we hope they return refreshed and willing to expand the movement at home, wherever that may be, that deal with the route causes of climate change. Climate change is one of the most pressing issues facing our species continued survival on this planet. Whilst we must strive to halt emissions, this must be contained within the framework of a totalised understanding of the problems we face, e.g. capitalism and the State as the motor of climate change. Failure to articulate our demands or to meet other people in contestation with capitalism will condemn the movement to one of radical posturing and isolation, like its 'anti-globalisation' predecessor. A posture that will not be noticed from the outside, regardless of how many column inches the *Guardian* devotes to its unofficial leadership.

Notes From Below collective
<http://notesfrombelow.wordpress.com/>



COMMENT

ABOUT FREEDOM

ANGEL ALLEY

This week's episode concentrates on the upcoming programme of events for the festive season.

Starting with Saturday 5th December, we will be hosting an evening of celebration of the Living Legends. As well as an informative talk about the band by *Freedom* columnist Ian Bone, they may be persuaded to reprise some of their best loved tunes – 'God Bless You, Queen Mum' for instance.

Moving on to the 19th December, we have the annual *Freedom* Crimbo booze up. This starts at 6pm after you have all had a chance to buy loads of books for you family, friends and political rivals. There will be nibbles, refreshments and, atheism willing, refined debate on the future progress of *Freedom* and reflections on the year's achievements in the class struggle to liberate humanity.

Meantime in the building, we see the rapid construction of post-boxes for all the groups that use *Freedom* as a mailing address, the replacement of the faulty light and – shock, horror – the repair of the faulty phone line. Shop-wise, there is now a bargain £6 t-shirt display.

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 22, so if your subscription runs out with this issue you'll have 7022 above your name. If the number is 7022 or less, then your subscription is now due for renewal. See page 16 for the current rates and a renewal form or, if you don't want to worry in the future about remembering to renew your subscription to *Freedom*, just ask us to send you a standing order form by emailing subs@freedompress.org.uk or you can write to us at 'Subscriptions', *Freedom*, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 5th December 2009 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 26th November. You can send your articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post addressed to 'The Editors', *Freedom*, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

A sideways look

by SVARTFROSK

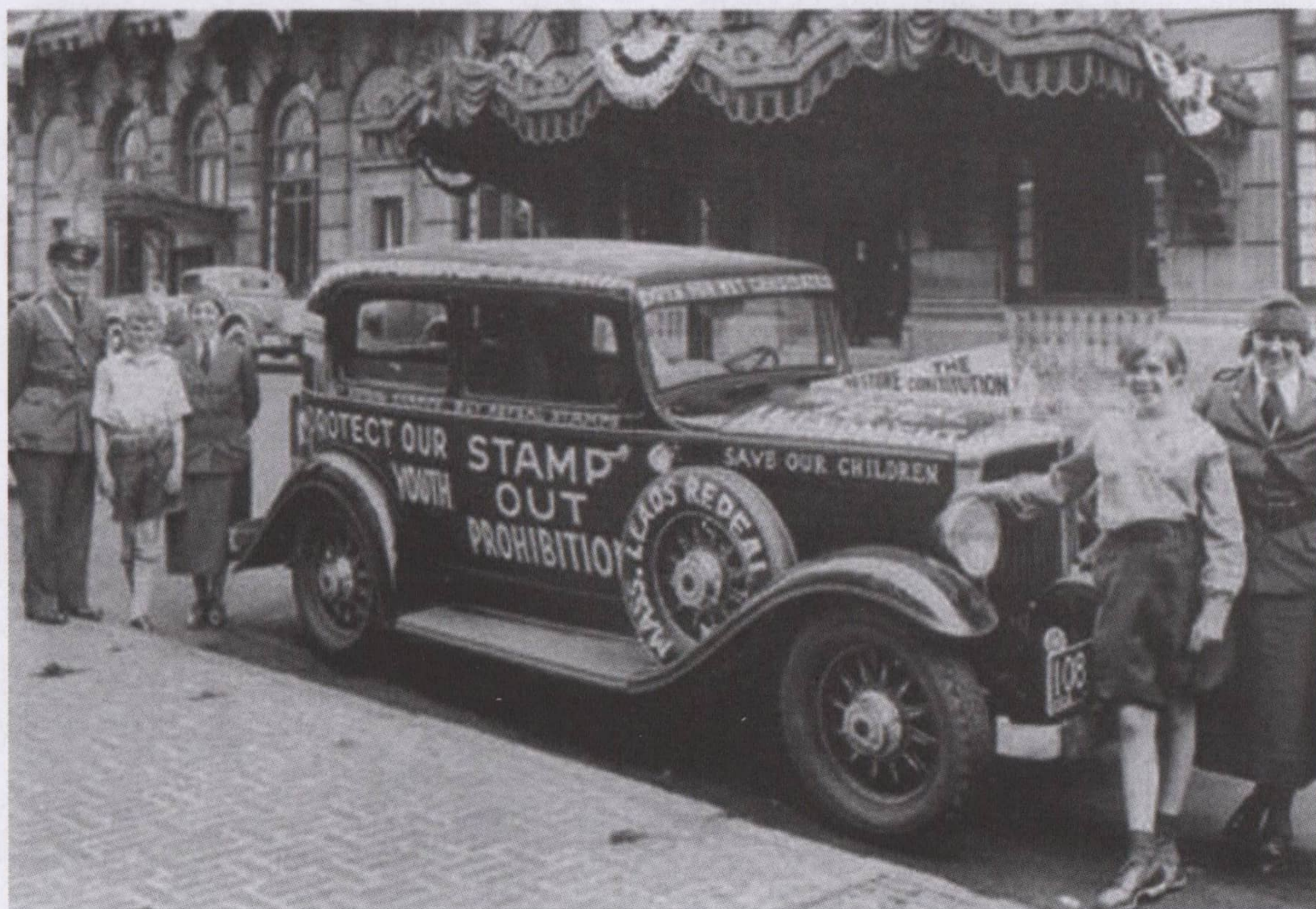
I have a stimulating time arguing with a political Muslim at work. He uses Islam as a total world-view and comments on almost anything through the prism of the Koran and whatever Islamic thinkers he happens to agree with. Usually the ones I find most reactionary – with fairly repulsive views on gays, women, science, and who advocate banning all sorts of things, like music and alcohol.

He's been on surer ground recently, quoting Professor David Nutt with glee. Professor Nutt, as you will know, was the government scientific adviser sacked by Home Secretary Alan Johnson after he said that ecstasy and LSD were less dangerous than alcohol. Of course, my Muslim colleague sees this as evidence that all substances should be banned, rather than a debate about comparative harm. But I know that alcohol does far more harm than almost every other drug in Britain. Nutt said that the evidence made it the fifth most harmful, after heroin, cocaine, barbiturates and methadone, but none of those are as widely available.

Alcohol can certainly wreck lives – aside from the effects on the body, particularly the liver and heart, there are the dangers from impaired judgement when driving or just getting into situations you can't get out of. It can lead to domestic violence and abuse. All these are true, and indeed it was recognised as a vice by the early workers' movement in many countries because of the effects it had. There were temperance leagues in Britain, Australia and the US, many linked to the early unions. In Spain, many CNT members refused to drink alcohol.

Fast forward to modern day Britain and we find there's an awful lot of alcohol around in our movement. We use it to raise money, to relax after meetings, sometimes during meetings if a pub is the only place we can find to meet. This can be problematic – some of the most stupid ideas often come about after one too many. But ultimately we are all adults and are capable of making judgements. It is, however, an issue for society as a whole; for plenty of people the highlight of their week is to go out and drink too much. Here is the key point – why does someone want to do it? Obviously because they enjoy it, but also because it fulfils a need. Every society has its ways of getting 'out of it' – alcohol is a near-universal drug because it is so easy to produce; why do we not regulate our need for escape better? Perhaps it's because alcohol, like other drugs, is a symptom, not the problem itself.

My Islamic colleague would have the government ban alcohol. I don't think it needs banning, nor do I want the government any more involved than it already is. Yes, we have a problem with alcohol. We use it to deal with the pressures and boredom of every day life. Like any drug it needs a bit of respect – unfortunately the spaces in which to do that are closing by the dozen every day to be replaced by great drinking barns selling alcopops. The government will never do it, but what we need is a lower drinking age, not a higher one. Smaller venues where the staff can actually see what's going on and stop serving people who've had too much. And everyone, from the Government to the religious, to stop trying to save us from ourselves.



Prohibition, between 1919 and 1933, when the sale, manufacture and transportation of alcohol for consumption was banned in the United States. The resulting crime, violence and illegal speakeasies during this period were thought to endanger young people, and millions of parents and other concerned citizens organised to abolish this radical experiment in social engineering.

A sense of occasion

In the anarchist calendar the issue of *Freedom* which is published after the London bookfair is, potentially, one of the most important issues because it affords an opportunity to build upon the momentum which the success of the bookfair generates. In at least one respect, the bookfair this year was much more successful than its predecessors. It had an access working group which, in its website and programme, achieved benchmark standards about enabling access for visitors who have impaired mobility.

Consequently I deeply regret the inclusion in the 24th October 2009 issue of *Freedom* three spoof contributions, the two articles on the cover and 'The Anarchist Bookfair Song' inside. Perhaps a shortage of contributions resulted in the editors having to include them. Regardless, I found the articles tasteless and 'The Anarchist Bookfair Song' psychologically disturbing. Moreover I observed first-hand the shocked reaction of an unaligned but sympathetic reader of *Freedom* who went to the bookfair, who now has grave doubts about anarchism and the prospect of her future involvement in it.

It would be regrettable if the only motivation for submitting a contribution to *Freedom* after next year's bookfair was to afford the then-current editor or editors a choice about whether to include a contribution from another contributor who, at the very least, had no concept of a sense of occasion about it.

Fortunately the 24th October 2009 issue of *Freedom* also included the commendable article 'Where does the anarchist movement go now?' by Tony Wood. In it he asked "should we have a 2010 conference?" I've submitted my name as wanting to be involved in discussing the possibility of organising such a conference. Accordingly, like him I say 'Yes'.

John Desmond

Editors reply: Oh well, you can't please everybody. However it's good to see interest in the conference and, since we were both involved on the last one, we look forward to working with John and others on a bigger and better future event. Just to be clear, all the unattributed articles (aside from Rob Ray for the international pages) are by the Editors, for which we take collective responsibility. Or, in the words of one of our critics on a different issue, "he's 50% responsible".

Dean Talent and Andy Meinke

Prisoner support correction

I have only just noticed that the old Leeds ABC address was included in the prisoner support piece (*Freedom*, 24th October). The new address is: Leeds Anarchist Black Cross, 145-149 Cardigan Road, Leeds, LS6 1LJ.

ABC

Economic commentary

I enjoyed John Griffin's recent three-part look at the financial crisis (12th September, 26th September and 10th October). However, I think I would have to take issue with his emphasis on pragmatic anarchism. If something works, there is no guarantee that it will continue to work in future, as for example if:

1. Natural resources are depleted (like at Tower Colliery, or North Sea fish);
2. It is found not to be scalable (say, participation replaced by representation);
3. Random or unpredictable events make long-term operation unfeasible (you run out of luck after short-term success);
4. Internal forces or instabilities (like inheritance or personality cults) produce chaotic results.

In other words, past experience is no guarantee of future experience. To persuade others that anarchy works, and can be transplanted between unlike environments, some more abstract explanation of how it works may be needed.

One of the major criticisms of the modern banking industry, predominant economic theory and capitalism itself is that it is theoretically unsound (false or contradictory assumptions, say) even if it appears not to collapse for periods of time. I believe this is why a theoretical understanding of an anarchist model is required, even if practical experience is also necessary.

Tavis Reddick

The fourth part of John Griffin's economic commentary appears on page 13 of this issue.

Local community newspaper appeal

The *Burgh Angel* is a local community newspaper which reports on issues which affect the local residents in the North West of Glasgow with sisters papers in the East End and South Side respectively (see our website for back issues and to be kept up to date, <http://burghangel.wordpress.com/>).

So far, we have reported on issues including the Save Our Schools campaigns, the Welfare Reform bill, housing stock transfers and the actions taken by local residents to counter these attacks on our education, livelihoods, job security and health and safety.

The *Burgh Angel* has become a voice for local residents to voice their concerns as well as report on campaigns and actions, whether it is through writing an article, taking photos or simply writing a letter in support of the campaigns and the paper, the *Burgh Angel* has become a feature of the local landscape.

The *Burgh Angel* needs you to help keep it going. Please set up a standing order to donate money to ensure this is one community paper which isn't drowned out through lack of funds and support. No amount is too small and anything you give would be much appreciated.

Please reference 'The Burgh Angel' with Sort Code 20-33-70, Account Number 23046974.

Thank you.

Burgh Angel Collective

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GETTING ACTIVE

PRISON NEWS

In the 26th September issue we wrote about the on-going crisis of overcrowding, routine suicides and other mysterious deaths in Italian prisons. This overcrowding has resulted in a significant increase in the suicide rate. Based on figures from the prisoners association Ristretti Orizzonti, 148 inmates have died in prison so far this year, of which 61 were suicides. Yet on average, 150 people have died in Italian prisons each year since 1992, around a third of which were suicides.

It is very rare for there to be any real investigations into these deaths, suicides or not. However one case that has recently hit the headlines has provoked controversy. Stefano Cucchi was in good health when arrested late on 15th October for possession of a small quantity of drugs and detained in a Rome prison. When he appeared at court the next day he had black eyes and his face was covered with bruises. He was subsequently admitted to the prison hospital where he died six days later from the injuries and severe dehydration. Identifying his body, his parents said their son's face had been "destroyed". The Italian Minister of Justice Angelino Alfano claimed that Cucchi "died following an accidental fall and after refusing to be hospitalised".

Another recent high profile death in an Italian prison has been the suicide of Diana Blefari Melazzi, a member of the 'New' Red Brigades, in Rebibbia women's prison in Rome. The 43-year-old was found hanged in her cell, where she was serving a life sentence for the killing of government adviser Marco Biagi in March 2002. This was despite being returned to the general population from the highly restrictive 41 bis regime and effectively being on suicide watch in an open cell next to the guards' station.

Back in the 12th September column we flagged up that Pentonville and Wandsworth nicks had been caught 'red-handed' moving troublesome prisoners prior to visits from the HM Inspectorate of Prisons. Well, now HMP Brixton has been drawn into this 'ghosting for inspections' controversy. This time, rather than moving vulnerable but disruptive prisoners (i.e. self-harmers and prisoners on suicide watch) to obtain a higher safety audit score, half a dozen high security Category A and Category E (those considered high escape risks) were temporarily moved out of this overcrowded Category B prison prior to an internal security audit rating exercise earlier this year.

Coincidentally it has also just been announced that the Pentonville and Wandsworth prison governors who had been charged with gross misconduct have been cleared of all charges, including gross misconduct, and three managers have been issued with written warnings and other disciplinary penalties for their roles in the transfer of vulnerable prisoners in an attempt to undermine official inspections.

Brighton ABC



Anarchists have always sought to build open social environments – back in 1906 The Workers Friend Club, just down the road from *Freedom*, became the hub for the anarchist movement of Rudolph Rocker's day and would regularly hold mass meetings, cultural events and late night weekend dances. Such autonomous spaces developed into the social centres of today.

Social centres are defined as 'self-managed spaces either owned, occupied or leased whereby people can come together to create, conspire, communicate and offers a visible presence in the community where people can engage in radical ideas and events'. We take a look at some of the most enduring.

- Named after local activist Harry Cowley, **The Cowley Club** in **Brighton** opened its doors in 2003 providing a community base for activists and continues to cover a wide range of activities including vegan cafe, bookshop, bar, venue, English lessons, welfare rights, library, meeting space, office space, fundraising for groups and campaigns.

- Meaning 'community place' in Amharic, an Ethiopian language, **Kebele Social Centre, Bristol**, has been going 14 years. Like almost all social centres it is run by volunteers on a not-for-profit basis providing an alternative social space and was prominent in the very successful recent Co-Mutiny event.

- The aim of **The Common Place** in **Leeds** was to create a place in the city centre in which together people can enjoy a sense of community, affordable entertainment and food; a non-commercial place to relax, talk, be creative, meet people and find information on political campaigns, issues and actions.

- A former Ukrainian social club, the **Sumac Centre, Nottingham**, came into being in 2002 and has remained at the forefront of radical activity in the city ever since. A resource and meeting place for local groups and individuals campaigning for human and animal rights, the environment, and home of the world famous vegan caterers Veggies.

- Founded in 1997, **ACE, Edinburgh**, is at the very heart of radical politics in Scotland maintaining a high level of group activity

including Anarchist Federation, Climate Camp Scotland, Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty & Edinburgh Claimants, Edinburgh IWW and Scottish Radical Library.

- **56a Infoshop** in south **London**, is a volunteer-run, 100% unfunded DIY-run social centre in the traditional sense. It's a resource for local people, campaign groups and projects as well as selling books, zines, music and t-shirts. They have an extensive radical archive of international info with thousands of publications saved over the last 16 years of its existence.

- Along with providing an alternative social space, promoting veganism, and working in an alternative setting (co-op, volunteer-run, organic) the **Pogo Café** in east **London**, also puts on political film showings, benefits, free-school projects and acoustic gigs, while serving delicious food.

- Built and run by activists from Merseyside **Next To Nowhere** social centre, **Liverpool**, is situated in the city centre beneath the bookshop of the same name, with connections in community activism, animal rights, the anti-war movement and anarchist groups it seek to provide resources for people to improve their own lives.

- The daddy of social centres and still going strong after three decades, **The 1 in 12 Club** in **Bradford** stands as a testament to the hard work, ingenuity and sheer bloody-mindedness of committed radicals.

Addresses:

- Cowley Club, 12 London Road, Brighton BN1 4JA
- Kebele Social Centre, 14 Robertson Road, Bristol BS5 6JY
- The Common Place, 23-25 Wharf Street, Leeds LS2 7EQ
- Sumac Centre, 245 Gladstone Street, Nottingham NG7 6HX
- The Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh (ACE), 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh EH7 5HA
- 56a Infoshop, 56 Crampton Street, London SE17 3AE
- Pogo Café, 76 Clarence Road, London E5 8HB
- Next to Nowhere, 96 Bold Street, Liverpool L1 4HY
- 1 in 12 Club, 21-23 Albion Street, Bradford BD1 2LY

Economic commentary

John Griffin examines the role of the banks in this fourth part of his look at the financial crisis

We now know that negotiations with Neelie Kroes, the EU competition commissioner, have been ongoing for the last year, and have much concerned our banks and the Treasury. At the end of October, Kroes ordered the break-up of the Dutch bank ING, signalling something more drastic than drip-feeding our own cash-hungry banks, the latter running counter to EU rules. Unfortunately, our Chancellor is going to part with yet more of our money in the process, and even after the 'break-up', RBS and Lloyds/ Halifax, will still be among the biggest banks in the world. On 3rd November, hiding behind Kroes' skirts, Darling made his announcement:

An undefined chunk of the fully nationalised Northern Rock bank is to be sold off – the 'safe' mortgages that is – we are left with the more risky bits.

Lloyds receives a £5.9bn State contribution to its rights issue of shares, so as to keep 43% nationalised. Lloyds have to sell off 600 of their 2,982 branches.

RBS gets another £25.5bn. from us, increasing the State's shareholding to 84%. RBS has to sell off three-eighths of its 2,279 branches, along with insurance and commodities trading businesses. They keep their US bank, 'Citizens'.

It is a pity the UK needs prodding from Brussels to take on its banks – editorial, Financial Times, 4th November 2009

Whilst Lloyds and RBS are to be slimmed down, Barclays is getting fatter. They swallowed lucrative investments once owned by the collapsed US bank Lehman's, and in October, took over Standard Life. The latter is known for insurance, but it also has a safe mortgage book. Note how Barclays have expanded both the investment and the retail sides of their business, the insurance and the mortgages providing a cheap source of capital for their more speculative ventures.

The sell-off is likely to result in job losses. A harassed-looking cashier at my local Nat West branch (RBS) told me recently that they were already operating with a staff of only four. The queue says it all.

Out of control

We got into this mess through a spectacular failure of hierarchy: Andy Hornby, once CEO



at HBOS, famously sacked his Risk Manager, Paul Moore, when told unpalatable truths. This is what power does to people. And now thanks to technology, you don't have to be the boss to bring down a bank, it can be done at the click of a mouse.

In 1995, the 'rogue trader' Nick Leeson literally gambled away Barings' assets as if playing some foolish computer game – which, of course, he was! The prospect of having someone like Leeson, running on coffee and chocolate bars sitting glazed-over before the screen, will send shivers through anyone who's saved a few bob. But things have moved on.

According to Radio 4's, *File on Four* on 3rd November, they are lining up to leave it all to the computers. Part of the New York Stock Exchange is already using 'high frequency computerised trading'. And 'somewhere in Essex' work has begun on a facility to serve the London Exchange...

You can't help getting the feeling that life in our financial institutions (and elsewhere) is getting far beyond the ken of solid individuals, like that of the cashier I mentioned, who turns up week after week to keep things moving, but who may now face the sack through no fault of his own.

The seeds of the next crisis are being sown. Right here, right now – Larry Elliott, economics editor, Guardian, 2nd November 2009

Meanwhile, at that more macro, macho and rarefied level, the banks are still reluctant to increase their lending to business, as the Government wants to boost the economy

generally. The banks say the economic climate is too risky, businesses say loan rates and conditions are too onerous to take on. Either way the statistics show bank lending falling through successive months. And so on 5th November, the Bank of England announced the advancement of a further £25bn of Quantative Easing apparently to remedy this situation – or maybe another...

No one in Government has admitted that the Quantative Easing programme is a failure, but its object has become much less clear; so much so that theories abound as to what the Bank of England is now trying to do. We are incidentally talking about a programme which has been subject to parliamentary scrutiny. This is out-of-controlness on the grand scale.

Furthermore, if inflation starts to gather pace, and it becomes necessary to reverse Quantative Easing, the Bank of England is again beholden to the banks to buy back the bonds yet again. If the banks decide they would rather have the money than the bonds, then what, besides finger-wagging, is the Government going to do about it?

The Government, in its obvious desire to avoid a deeper recession (and get re-elected) may have showered so much cash around that an out-of-control property and stock market boom could be triggered – but that's where we came in in '08! Wherever we have now got to, it seems likely that the Quantative Easing programme has run its course: £200bn is a nice round number after all! No one knows what it has achieved, but we all know it's likely to cost us a great deal, one way or another.

All the evidence shows that this Government cannot, or will not, do anything to upset the banks; only Neelie Kroes seems to have the muscle to do that.

It's been quite a week.

REVIEWS

WHAT'S ON

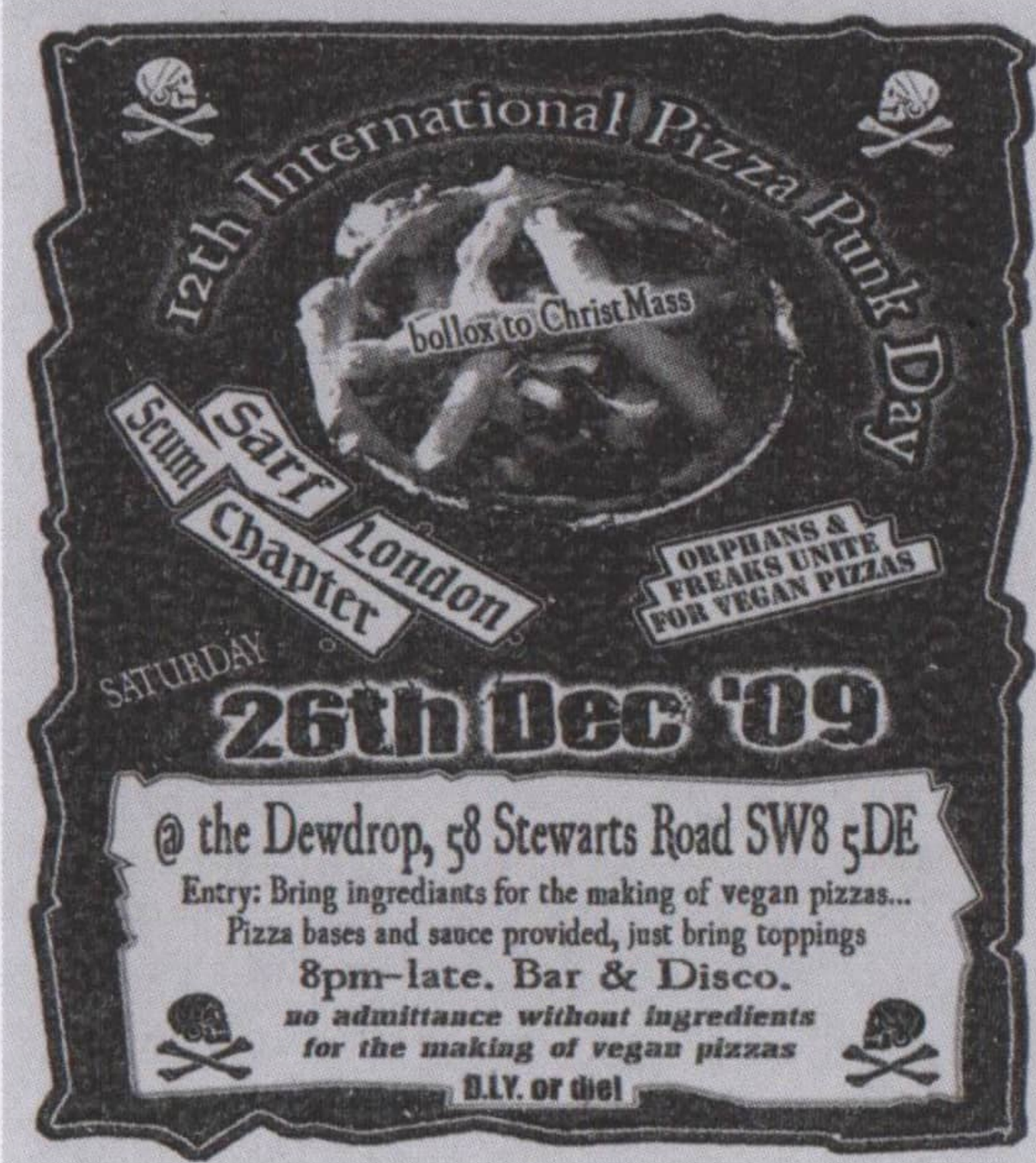
NOVEMBER

26th Amnesty book sale at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL from 11am until 3pm, offering a wide variety of good quality new and second-hand books including English and foreign language books, philosophy and politics and the usual good range of hardback and paperback fiction, all books £1 or £2.

DECEMBER

5th National Climate March 2009, join hundreds of cyclists on the streets of London for the Climate Emergency Bike Ride to urge the government to make major cuts at the UN climate talks in Copenhagen, bring sirens, horns, bells and whistles, and decorate your bike, starts at 10am in Lincoln's Inn Fields and finishes at 12 noon at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park to join the Climate Emergency Rally which will then lead to the Stop Climate Chaos 'The Wave' event starting from Grosvenor Square at 1pm to surround Parliament at 3pm, for more information see campaigncc.org, call 020 7833 9311 or email info@campaigncc.org.

16th As part of a series of public meetings convened by the Anarchist Federation, 'War in Iraq and Afghanistan, War Against the Working Class' – the wars being waged around the world are costing millions and killing thousands. We look at their effects and how these wars are closely related to the economic crisis. Meeting starts at 7pm, the Calthorpe Arms (upstairs room), Grays Inn Road, London WC1, see afed.org.uk.
26th International Pizza Punk Day, the global holiday that *will* replace Christmas, so celebrate the madness of imagining the impossible (an action based around cooking vegan pizzas for the revolution) by forming your own autonomous IPPD action cell! "On International Pizza Punk Day, the division between struggle and pleasure, between total insurrection and festival, will be dismantled as we bake the pizza of our desires into reality", at the Dewdrop, 58 Stewarts Road, London, SW8 5DE, from 8pm until late, bring raw ingredients for the making of vegan pizzas ... pizza bases and sauce provided, just bring toppings, see eroding.org.uk/pizzapunx.htm



FILM

The Yes Men Fix the World,
directed by Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonnano

The second showcase for these intrepid anti-capitalist stuntmen chronicles frontmen Bichlbaum and Bonnano's surprisingly successful infiltrations of global media and business circles – starting with a mortal threat to corporate bottom lines in 2004. Fooling the BBC with a lookalike website, a shiny-suited Yes Man broadcasts to the world Dow Chemical's decision to pay billions in compensation for the 1984 poison-gas catastrophe in Bhopal, India (caused by subsidiary Union Carbide's negligence, never previously admitted). The hoax is soon nailed, but not before share prices fleetingly plummet – suggesting that more than moralising mileage might transpire from brand-naming and shaming monopoly power. Subsequent Swiftian spoofs parody conglomerates' callous glee exploiting miseries they create and exacerbate – Halliburton's SurvivaBall suit to 'Protect and Survive' against 'natural' disaster and Exxon-Mobil quantitatively easing fossil fuel shortages by flogging body fat rendered from those killed by industrial pollution.

April Merl's accomplished editing bowls the tragicomic action along with ultra-low budget visual aesthetics – despite more secure funding (including from Channel 4). Such miniscule mendacity may mirror the titular ambiguity (to 'fix' as rig and/or mend), but also hints at deeper problems with their paradigm of performance art activism than the group seem prepared to countenance – beyond, that is, the diminishing returns accruing when outsider dissidence births celebrity (as with diverse jokers like Michael Moore, Mark Thomas and Sacha Baron Cohen). Nevertheless the inventive wit and critical spirit of the Yes Men satisfyingly demonstrates the patent absurdity of expecting anything of 'ethical capitalism' – except in mediated, bandwagon-jumping, virtual PR domains. And there's the rub – their opposition is also mired in spectacular imagery, their actions and end-products equidistant from real-life pragmatic struggle incubating the praxis to transcend static resistance.

Fix Up, Look Blunt

The debut documentary (*The Yes Men*; see *Freedom* review, 9th April 2005) mentioned

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Jeremy Clarkson! He said it while advocating that Isambard Kingdom Brunel be voted 'Greatest Briton' – Churchill was the favourite and eventual winner.
2. Noam Chomsky, in an interview about the propaganda model of the media, where Marr missed the point time after time.
3. Lê Đức Thọ, a Vietnamese diplomat who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize jointly with United States Secretary of



no possible repercussions of the duo's jolly japes for those directly affected by the corporate excesses lambasted and lampooned. The new film shows them appropriately agonising, debriefing Bhopal and Hurricane Katrina survivors before conveniently concluding that re-engaging public attention is broadly welcomed. However, the latter disgrace – with institutional floods of do-gooders and -badders belatedly parachuting into New Orleans, adding insult to meteorological injury – underscores that radical strategy should start from such perspectives rather than being improvised later. Yet the gentrification feeding-frenzy of Louisiana real-estate clearances is righteously denounced via Bichlbaum's fake Housing and Urban Development official blithely announcing that poor former residents can reclaim their houses after all. Furthermore, final confirmation that their tactics merely ape 'alternative' top-down benevolence arrives in the exhilarating results of the Yes Men's most ambitious collaboration, mobilising vast resources among swathes of soft-left liberals across the US. A meticulously designed simulacrum of the *New York Times* coinciding with Obama's election causes momentary consternation among millions – raising prospects of an end to poverty and war while apparently reproducing illusions of good leaders (electoral or editorial) making the difference.

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4. State Henry Kissinger in 1973. The prize was for the peace accords Vietnam signed with the US in Paris in 1973, Lê declined it because Vietnam wasn't at peace.
4. Cape Town in 1989 – a protest just before racially-segregated elections was sprayed with water cannon using purple dye. Hundreds of people and a number of buildings were dyed purple in what became known as the Purple Rain protest.

A slippery fish

This powerful take on troubled teenage subverts social realist conventions as well as underclass clichés, according to Tom Jennings

Fish Tank's 15 year-old Mia (Katie Jarvis) is angry at everyone and everything in her life on an Essex council estate. Her vicious invective constantly threatens to boil over: at home in a cramped high-rise with party-girl single mother Joanne (Kierston Wareing) and precocious little sister Tyler (Rebecca Griffiths); in the neighbourhood fighting running battles with peers; and facing social services intervention following school exclusion. For respite she dances alone in an empty flat fuelled by cheap cider and hip-hop – honing b-girl routines being the only discipline she accepts. Then, restlessly roaming the area, she becomes fascinated by a horse tethered on waste ground and repeatedly fails to free it, nonetheless forming a tentative friendship with Billy (Harry Treadaway), one of its traveller family owners.

Meanwhile Joanne's latest conquest Conor (Michael Fassbender) charms her daughters too (Tyler's initial conclusion: "I like you: I'll kill you last"), taking them on excursions and encouraging Mia's vague dreams of a dancing career. His avuncular friendliness and interest touches her but also arouses sexual attraction – which one night, with mum dead-drunk upstairs, they consummate. He promptly bails out but Mia tracks him to a private estate in a nearby town, discovering he's a married father. In a vengeful rage she entices the six-year old daughter away, narrowly avoiding a fatal accident in the estuary. Then, at a local nightclub's dance audition she's been practising for, she walks out in disgust without performing. Finally, learning Billy's horse has died, she accepts his offer of a trip to stay with relatives in Wales.

Both this and the director's previous feature (*Red Road**) won the coveted Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival – and her 2003 short film, *Wasp* (rehearsing some of *Fish Tank*'s themes), an Oscar. With meticulous casting and deft preparation of script and acting – including, here, from superb first-timers Jarvis and Griffiths supported by the equally excellent Wareing and Fassbender – Andrea Arnold distinctively integrates expressionistic and symbolist cinematography and visual design into narrative development, confounding expectations based on familiar generic formulae. Keeping the camera close to the protagonist's point-of-view, her careful attention to conflicts and complexities of character and situation strenuously withholds backstories and resists sentimentality



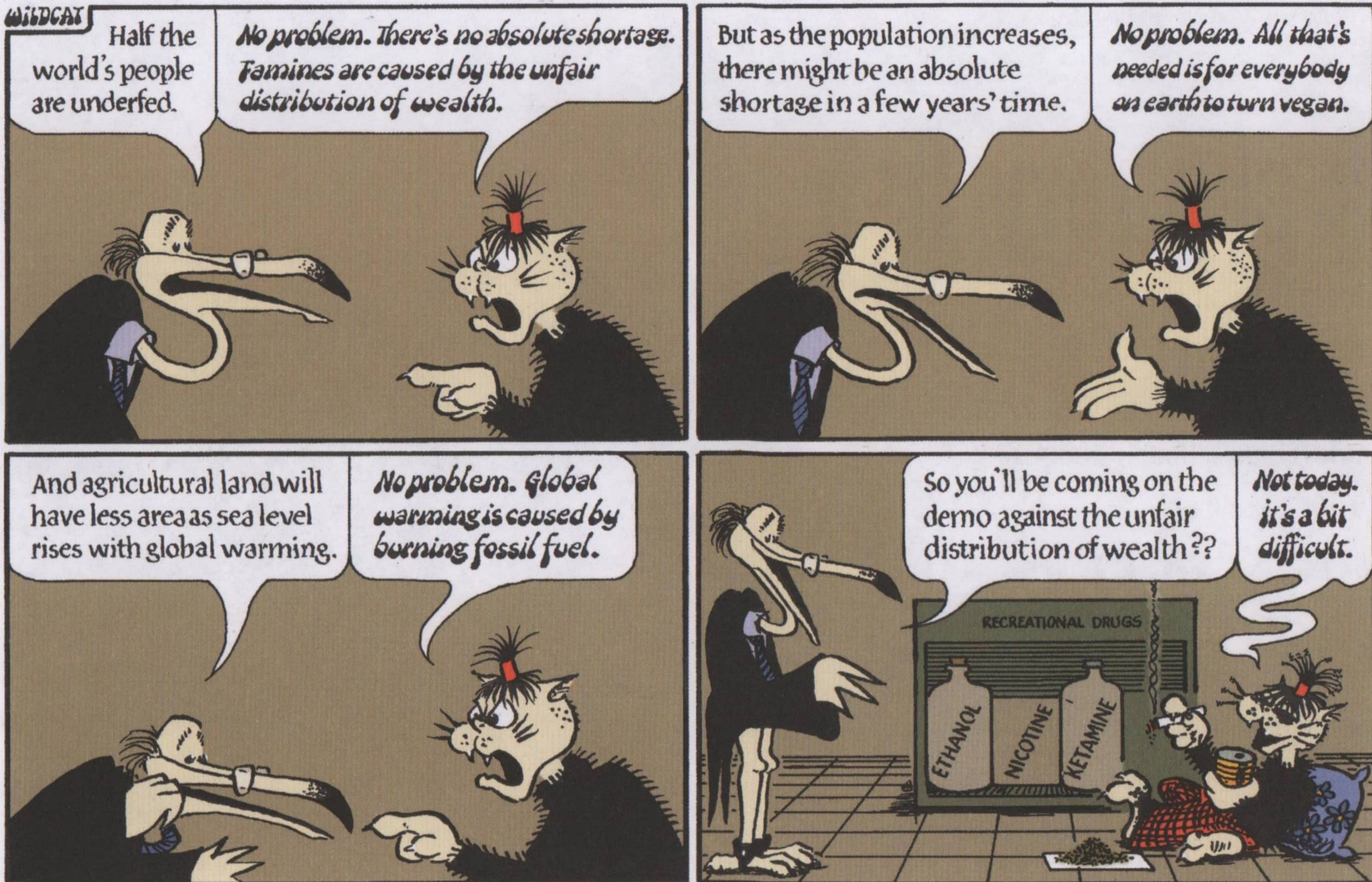
or easy resolutions. Insisting on the rich emotional and social texture of working-class life – even in the most unfavourable circumstances – the films invite but resist the prejudicial stereotyping typically traded by mainstream representations.

In this case the portrayal of dysfunctional family dynamics is thoroughly affecting and convincing (Joanne: "What the hell's wrong with you?"; Mia: "You're what's wrong with me!"), with combined economic, social and cultural impoverishment apparently inexorably yielding hopeless disaster. But despite a habitually repellent interpersonality, the girl's restless, questioning gaze consistently finds mystery, strangeness and beauty around the estate and out into the semi-rural Thames estuary sprawl's marginal spaces and dilapidated vegetation. Biographically conditioned to default responses of frustrated resentment, she can't yet interpret or usefully deploy this sensitivity and imaginative openness to passionate experience. But, for example, Billy's incipient mobility counterpointing the imprisonment of the horse (which turns out to be a sick old mare), or the adrenaline rush when Conor, with her help, tickles a fish from the lake (later dumped on the floor for the dog's dinner) tantalise Mia's dawning determination to escape the prosaic constraints hitherto hemming her in – evoking more the glass walls of a fish tank rather than the glass ceilings which preoccupy more upwardly-mobile types.

Anti Social Behaviour Opera

This sophisticated rite of passage transcends time-honoured conservative caricatures of out-of-control delinquent chavs drowning noble aspirations to hardworking betterment – while never shying away from the potentially dire consequences of youth disaffection. And though Arnold's titular metaphor invites superior perspectives on poverty traps and sink estates (most critics predictably following suit), the film itself prefers their inhabitants' fractiously vibrant intimacy, wit, incipient intelligence and spirit – further showing how such vital human impulses can twist into malevolent or self-destructive acts when desperation narrows the limits of the foreseeable. Even a family this fragile nurtures as well as neglects – the home and kids are physically well cared-for, and emotional bonds run as deep as its extremes of profanity. But the refusal to relinquish desirous intensity – however inadequately articulated, developed and negotiated – or subsume it in respectable female role prescriptions, inevitably precipitates conflict among difficult daughters and immature mothers fixed in arrested adolescence.

These currents in the *Fish Tank* contextualise its masterstroke. Lower-class exuberance and earthy sexuality not only patchily trump tragic victimhood, but also echo through its socio-historical soundtrack. Urban music from classic soul and lovers rock through to rap and grime animate its public culture over



Review

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four decades of shifting working-class fortunes from the heydays of Ford Dagenham and Tilbury Docks to present prospects of service-industry McJobs. For Mia, the genuine resonance of Black music now offers only sleazy self-commodification, whereas she loses her virginity not to some cynical exploiter but a weak, well-meaning acquaintance – after Conor previews her routine like Simon Cowell appraising a hopeful. Pop Tart fame is anyway out of reach, since her dancing's actually not very good, and her scepticism at the club mirrors an earlier dismissal of local lasses gyrating in sub-par streetcorner R&B video style and fashion – nailing its objectifying reduction while secretly ruefully envying its

sensual call-and-responsiveness. Finally, Nas's pivotal hip-hop album *Illmatic* (1995) is Mia's leaving present for her mum as they dance together, showing and sharing love explicitly for the first time here. But the film's gist transforms the signature refrain into "Life's a bitch, and then you *live*". Because these fish certainly aren't kitchen-sinking, let alone tanking, and – whether applied to her films or to Arnold herself – you just know that this bitch will not be going quietly.

* See my review in 'Closed Circuit Tunnel Vision', *Variant*, 29 (2007).

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Fish Tank, directed by Andrea Arnold, is released on DVD on 25th January.

THE QUIZ

1. Which TV presenter described Churchill as "the drunken Kurd killer"?
2. Who told Andrew Marr "If you believed something different you wouldn't be sitting where you're sitting"?
3. Who is the only person to have declined a Nobel peace prize? And who were they nominated with, who did accept?
4. Where and when was the slogan "Forward to Purple People's Power!" used?

Answers on page 14

The Anarchist Quiz Book compiled by Martin Howard with illustrations by Paul Petard is available from Freedom Press at £5 (post free) – see our website at freedompress.org.uk for details.

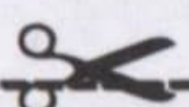
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