

FREEDOM

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END OF THE GRAVY TRAIN?

MPs charged with cheating the public purse.

The controversy surrounding MP's expenses claims that have dogged the Houses of Parliament for the past several months came to a head last week when the Crown Prosecution Service announced criminal charges are to be brought against three sitting Labour MPs and one Tory peer.

The Director of Public Prosecutions, Keir Starmer, revealed that Elliot Morley, a former New Labour environment minister, David Chaytor, the MP for Bury North, Jim Devine, the MP for Livingston, and Lord Hanningfield, a former Conservative business spokesman, will be charged under the Theft Act relating to several claims of false accounting.

The charges come in the wake of an official audit report published on 4th February that examined all past payments to MPs of the Additional Costs Allowance, the 'second home allowance', concluding that 389 politicians, more than half the current and past MPs reviewed, should repay a total of £1.3m.

The report also reveals a damning catalogue of misuse by politicians in submitting claims for their expenses, stating that the system itself was "deeply flawed", the rules "vague" and it had been up to MPs to "self certify" the

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LENS CAP FUEL DUMP



Ever thought the military weren't doing enough for global warming? Think again. Here an Australian F111 gives a display at Singapore Airshow with a 'dump and burn' – deliberately spilling fuel into the hot exhaust of its engines to set it alight. Perhaps another high level summit is called for.

HOWARD ZINN DIES

The influential author, scholar and political activist, Howard Zinn died in Santa Monica on 27th January, apparently from a heart attack while swimming. He was 87 years of age.

The respected academic was best known for his monumental *A People's History of the United States* which chronicles the history of America from a working class perspective and has sold almost two million copies worldwide. As he explained in 2004, he wanted "histories that showed working people and black people and Native Americans and women. And I was aware that no such book existed, that no such history existed. So I decided that I would try to fill that gap."

Born in 1922 in Brooklyn to working class Jewish immigrant parents he grew up in the slums of New York working on the docks as

a teenager where he became radicalised after being beaten unconscious by police during a political rally in Times Square. He later went on to fly combat missions over Europe for the US Air Force during WW2 before starting a family with his wife Roslyn, earning a living loading trucks while studying for a degree in history and political science.

He became a prominent civil rights, workers rights, and anti-war activist, speaking at hundreds of meetings and rallies, being arrested on several occasions, while continuing to write and teach history from below. Through his numerous books he remains one of the giants of radical politics.

He is survived by two children, Myla Kabat-Zinn and Jeff Zinn, and five grandchildren.

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NEWS

IN BRIEF

WAR: British military deaths in Afghanistan reached 255 on the 8th February. This equals the deaths in the Malvinas ... er, sorry, Falklands war ... er, sorry, conflict of 1982.

With a new 'offensive' underway it's clear the Government plans to press on and hit its next target in post Second World War conflict deaths, the 340 killed in Malaya. January saw coalition deaths total 45, compared to 25 in January 2009 and 14 in January 2008.

CARBON DIOXIDE: Amid the high profile disputes on climate change science global warming ticks slowly on. This issue we highlight the record of CO2 in the atmosphere recorded by the Mauna Loa observatory in Hawaii, which has been maintaining figures since 1959. The current seasonally adjusted level is 388 parts per million with a growth of 1.72 ppm in 2009.

JAIL: Kaylx-run HMP Addiewell, Scotland's only private prison, saw yet another disturbance on 25th January. This incident occurred on the same on the same Lomond B Hall as last October's incident (see *Freedom* 7020, 24th October 2009), involved either 10 "actively involved prisoners" or "more than 100 inmates", depending on whether one believes the official Lothian and Borders police statement or the local press, but saw nowhere near the level of damage as last October's riot.

The prison, like all privately run nicks, is subject to profit-maintaining low staffing levels and the disturbance kicked off when one prisoner took exception to having his methadone script reduced without prior notice. So he took a pool cue to a screw's head and staff withdrew from the Hall for their own safety, resulting in "minor damage caused, mainly as a result of burst pipes" according to Kaylx, or a scene of "total carnage" with trashed furniture and daubed the walls with graffiti according to the screws.

VALENTINE? As anarchists everywhere struggle over the issue of whether to celebrate Valentine's Day or condemn it as capitalist recuperation, we find the indoctrination arm of the state in similar quandary.

A primary school in Weston-super-Mare has banned Valentine cards to save pupils the "emotional trauma" of being rejected. Children at Ashcombe Primary School were stopped from exchanging cards because the head teacher said they were not emotionally mature enough to cope.

Peter Turner told parents of the 430 pupils that cards would be confiscated.

One pupil's mother said: "I think it's outrageous. They're just children. Why spoil their fun?" The woman, whose son attends the school, said: "It's comical really. I couldn't believe it when I saw the newsletter.

Here at *Freedom* we love all our readers, so please consider this paper a 'big hug' to you from all of us.

LENS CAP SEALS ON THE MOVE



A Galapagos Islands sea lion colony has moved to Peru due to rising sea temperatures. The Organisation for Research and Conservation of Aquatic Animals say the water temperature in Piura, off the coast of northern Peru, has risen from 17°C to 23°C over the last 10 years. Reports that the pinnepids plan to attend the next round of climate change talks to bite the people responsible are unfounded.

Banking: the fiddle continues

A big shake-up of UK banks with taxpayer support will be have been unveiled by the time you read this. An announcements on the future of Lloyds and Royal Bank of Scotland is expected to be made jointly by the banks and the Treasury. Predictions are for Lloyds to say it will raise more than £20bn from investors in return for staying out of the state-run insurance scheme to cover toxic loans. Both will also have to set up new banks out of their existing branch networks and sell them within four years.

The creation of the new banks is on the instruction of the European Competition Commissioner, Neelie Kroes, and is supposed to boost competition. RBS is also expected to confirm that it will participate in the government's toxic loan scheme, but on different terms. The bank, which is 70% state-owned, would buy an insurance policy from the government to cover future losses from some of its more toxic investments. The announcements are set to include approval from the European Commission of plans to cut back the size of the banks with disposals of branches and other assets. The Commission had demanded that banks bailed out by taxpayers should be scaled down. The result is that a big asset sale will be announced. RBS has already warned that it may have to sell more of its businesses than originally planned to

gain European approval for state support it has received since coming close to collapse last year. While RBS is set to announce the sale of its insurance businesses Direct Line, Churchill and Green Flag as well as more than 300 bank branches, for its part, Lloyds will announce the sale of Cheltenham & Gloucester and Intelligent Finance.

So what is to be made of all this financial mumbo-jumbo? Obviously it can't be to protect the interests of taxpayers, workers or poor people or the government and capitalists wouldn't be doing it. The question is whether it will make the financial system more secure from the kind of banking crisis we've seen recently. The more economics minded amongst our readership may be better placed to look at the short-term advantages and disadvantages of the latest reshuffling of the transaction elements of capital but from a more simple, more fundamental point of view the whole motive concept of banking that lays claim to goods and services without producing anything intrinsically useful is bound to the a house built on sand. The bankers are undoubtedly smart folk or they would not have been able to come up with such an intricate scheme for robbing people, they just need some motivation to work *for* the common good, not against it. An angry organised working class for starters.



Photograph: Brighton SolFed

Occupied: Students at Bramber House in Brighton

Sussex occupation 'just the start'

Students at Sussex University have left their mass occupation of a conference centre after 29 hours saying the fight for their tutors' jobs is just beginning.

Their action was launched as Brighton educators ballot for possible strike action over 115 job losses proposed in the new university budget, focusing on the School of Life Sciences and the closure of its Human and Environmental Sciences BScs.

Over 100 students occupied the top floor of Bramber House in Brighton against proposed course cuts and job losses at their university after weeks of campaigning failed to move administrators.

In a statement, the occupiers said: "We recognise that an attack on education workers is an attack on us.

"The flash occupation has demonstrated to management that this campaign is capable of taking militant action in support of staff fighting against cuts and job losses, and that

we are capable of mobilising huge numbers at incredibly short notice to support actions."

The occupiers stressed repeatedly that the choice of a conference centre was deliberate as it minimised disruption to students while maximising damage to a profit-making part of the institution.

A decision by Registrar John Duffy to cancel a class in the occupied room was condemned as "explicitly against the wishes of everyone involved with the occupation".

Sussex, along with many other universities, is feeling the pinch, citing a drop-off in central funding and a £1.5m shortfall in research funding adding up to a projected £3m deficit for 2010.

The picture is bleak nationwide. According to the UCU lecturers' union, up to 15,000 jobs could be at risk across the industry. Among the potential cuts already announced have been 700 posts at Leeds University, 340 at Sheffield Hallam and 200 at King's College

in London. Campuses could be closed at Cumbria and Wolverhampton.

Staff at Leeds University have voted in favour of strike action against these large-scale job cuts on a 66% turnout with 78% of staff willing to take action – the highest turnout that UCU has ever seen.

At Westminster meanwhile, where 285 staff are due to be given notice by the end of April, union figures have warned a strike could be on the cards over the 'arbitrary' process.

Activity is also rising at Essex and Portsmouth universities, where student groups and lecturers have been consulting on what steps to take in opposition to cuts.

- Sussex College went on strike on 5th February, joining 10 others across Britain attempting to force their employers to honour an agreement under which pay parity would be offered to lecturers and teachers potentially worth up to £4,500 a year each.

End of the MPs gravy train?

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propriety of their claims. It also acknowledged there was "no audit of any kind" of second homes expenses between 2004 and 2008, the period the report covered.

Sir Thomas Legg, who headed the audit, went on to say: "Neither internal nor external auditors could 'go behind the member's signature'," adding "Taken with the prevailing lack of transparency and the 'culture of deference', this meant that the Fees Office's decisions lacked legitimacy." It is unclear why only four people are being prosecuted for wrongdoing.

What the report does expose however, beside a cavalier attitude with which elected representatives disabuse taxpayers money, is

the inherent greed of the political class who are becoming even more remote and divorced from the people they are charged with representing. It also reveals the extent to which these public servants view expenses as an extension of their wages rather than a privilege conferred upon them as sitting representatives.

To add further insult, the four accused are seeking to invoke 'parliamentary privilege' in order to prevent the electorate gaining access to information concerning their crimes. Given that we remain in the grip of the worst recession since the 1930s, where unemployment and house repossessions have become the norm, it remains an oddity that the whole of the political class, most of

whom are career politicians, should be allowed to pay off their mortgages using public money in order to work as an elected representative.

Politicians have long been regarded as self-serving, using their elected power to either promote their parties own agenda or line their own pockets, with growing recognition amongst the voters that they do little of value in the constituencies that they serve. A recent Populus poll showed an overwhelming 73% of the people surveyed thought "politics were broken". There are currently 646 Members of Parliament sitting in the House of Commons, each with an annual salary of £64,766.

NEWS

Shock as Unison Four lose appeals

Supporters of union activists disciplined for a 'racist' leaflet depicting Unison leaders as the three wise monkeys have expressed their shock after the four lost their appeals and tribunals.

Glenn Kelly, Onay Kasab, Suzanne Muna and Brian Debus, all members of the Socialist Party, were stripped of their branch roles for publishing a leaflet accusing the union's Standing Orders Committee of a policy of 'hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil' after a series of motions to its annual conference were ruled out of order.

Objections were raised two days after their intervention on the grounds the chair of the committee, Clytus Williams, is black.

The four have now been banned from holding office in Unison for five years.

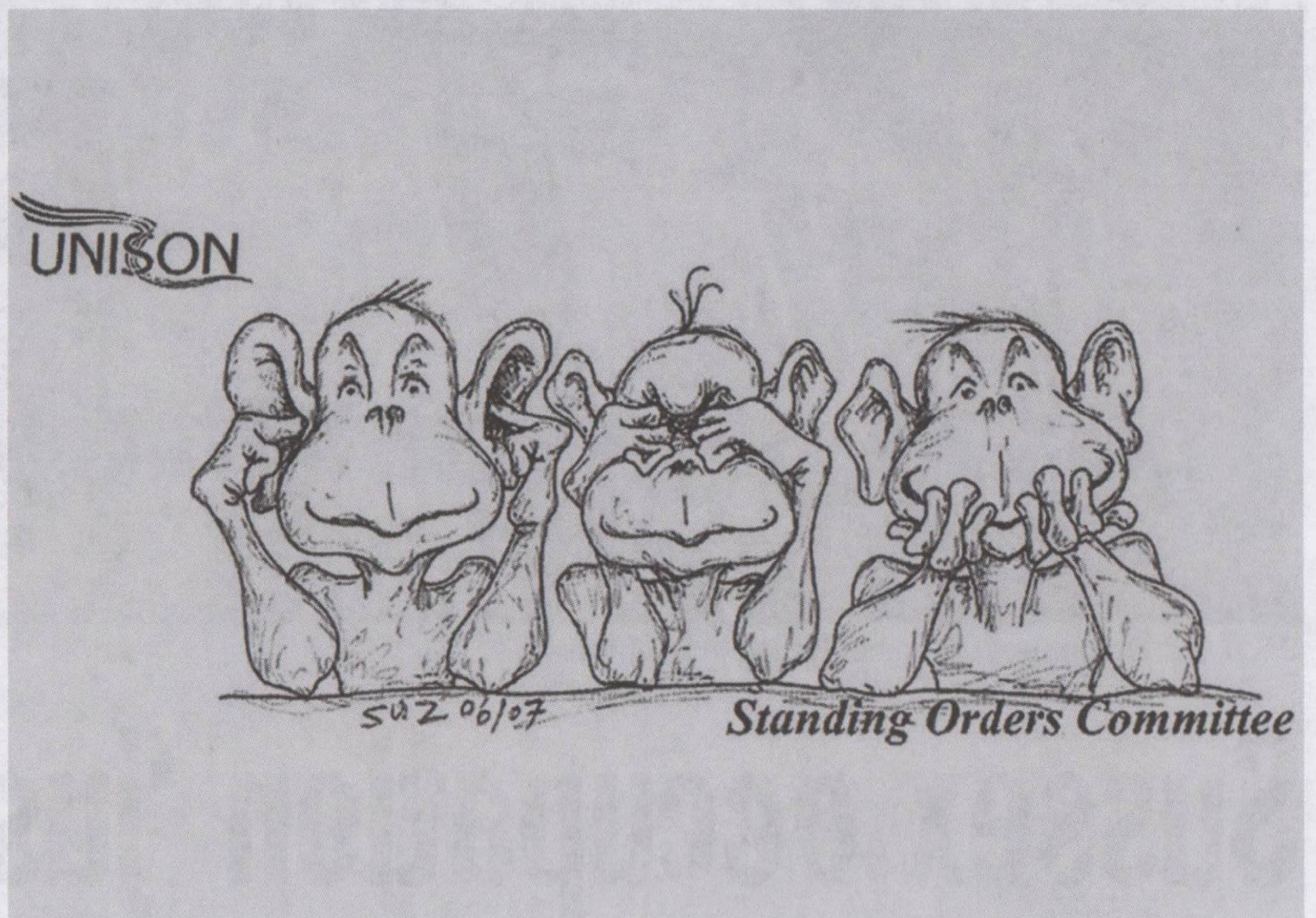
Susanne Beishon of Hackney Socialist Party has been active in the campaign to support Brian Debus, who was Unison branch chair in the borough.

She said: "We were surprised by quite how brutal the wording of the tribunal was, saying that the leaflet was 'repugnant and not worthy or a democratic society', it just shows how much they wanted the four out.

"There is another tribunal pending over whether challenging the Standing Orders Committee was out of order, but the legal angle is out of the picture now.

"All the branches affected are planning to protest outside their workplaces shortly after the mitigation phase, where they try and reduce the sentence, finishes at the end of February.

"There's a lot of anger about this, I was at the Hackney Unison AGM recently and everyone was up in arms against the national leadership."



The timing of the condemnation at conference, after the four had been suspended pending a further investigation, meant that they were unable to respond or apologise for any unintentional offence caused.

This, combined with the dropping of related charges against Matthew Waterfall – who is not a Socialist Party member – has led to accusations that Unison's leadership is trying to neuter left wing opposition.

Supporters of the four have pointed to examples in which the union itself has used the three wise monkeys formula and failed to punish more serious offences.

In its own article on the issue, the Socialist Party noted: "Tellingly Chris Remington (Unison head of health for London) was quoted as saying that the 'trots' had to be 'castigated'. This is evidence of Unison not only giving a clear line to full-time officials to witch-hunt union activists but it also calls them onto courses designed for this purpose."

Union members have also criticised the cost of the hearings, which is rumoured to have reached a quarter of a million pounds over the last two years.

Rob Ray

Immigration detention shame

Tinderbox conditions at the Yarl's Wood detention centre in Bedfordshire made a major action, such as the hunger strike which began as *Freedom* went to press, inevitable, according to campaigning groups.

Eighty-four women took part in a hunger strike over the amount of time they have spent in prison, their treatment while there and, for several, the right to see their children.

According to reports from Women Behind the Wire and Black Women's Rape Action project, the authorities' response was brutal with the women being sequestered in a corridor with no toilet facilities or access to water.

Allegations also surfaced that some women were beaten and racially abused as 'monkeys' during the incident. Four strikers were removed from the bloc entirely and taken to Greyfriars Police

Station in Bedford – they were due to be brought back to Yarl's Wood later on.

The hunger strike came as new figures were released under the Freedom of Information Act showing a 25% rise in self-harming in 2009 compared to 2008 in immigration detention centres nationwide, up to 215 incidents for the year, with 1,588 inmates being classed as 'at risk of self-harm'.

The figures underline worsening problems at the privately-run facilities, which have repeatedly come in for heavy criticism from governmental oversight groups.

Yarl's Wood itself, which holds over 400 immigrants, has already seen a number of hunger strikes over the last few years by inmates fighting for better living conditions, decent treatment of vulnerable people, proper medical treatment and improved support services.

Amnesty crackdown on dissenter

Amnesty International has been accused of hypocrisy after the organisation suspended the head of its own Gender Unit over her public criticism of Salafi Islamist Moazzam Begg.

Gita Saghal argued in a newspaper article that her organisation should not be supporting Begg or his Cage Prisoners group, as they support sexist and fundamentalist positions which are fundamentally at odds with Amnesty's mandate.

She said in a statement: "I have been a human rights campaigner for over three decades, defending the rights of women and ethnic minorities, defending religious freedom and the rights of victims of torture, and campaigning against illegal detention and state repression. I have raised the issue of the association of Amnesty International with groups such as Begg's consistently within the organisation. I have now been suspended for trying to do my job and staying faithful to Amnesty's mission to protect and defend human rights universally and impartially."

IN BRIEF

ASSAULT: A teenager who was left brain damaged in a hammer attack at his school has lost his High Court battle for compensation. Henry Webster, 18, had taken legal action against Ridgeway School in Wroughton, Wiltshire, where he was assaulted by a gang in 2007.

The school denied being negligent as the attack happened after school hours. Thirteen teenagers and a man were convicted for their part in the assault and jailed last year.

At London's High Court in October, Mr Webster claimed there was a negligent failure by the school, which denied liability, to maintain proper discipline and deal with racial tension.

His mother Elizabeth, 14-year-old brother Joseph, and stepfather Roger Durnford, of Beranburh Field, Wroughton, were also seeking compensation for the trauma of witnessing his injuries but their claims will now also fail.

In his ruling, Mr Justice Nicol said that the school did not breach its duty to take reasonable care to keep Mr Webster reasonably safe while on its premises.

HEALTHCARE: An overseas doctor employed to provide out-of-hours care unlawfully killed a patient, a coroner has ruled. German GP Daniel Ubani, on his first NHS shift, gave patient David Gray, 70, an overdose of diamorphine. He was working for Take Care Now, a company that provided care in Cambridgeshire.

Coroner William Morris said the doctor had been "incompetent" and called for a shake-up of the out-of-hours care system to ensure patient safety. He said Dr Ubani had made "a gross error" and was "not of an acceptable standard" in carrying out his duties in Cambridgeshire in February 2008. But he also criticised the "insufficient induction" he was given by Take Care Now, as well as the NHS system, which meant his skills were not properly assessed. The company's contract has now been terminated.

Mr Morris called for a review of European regulations which allow the free movement of doctors, a national database of overseas doctors applying to work in out-of-hours services in the NHS and more consistent standards in monitoring by local health chiefs working for primary care trusts.

Dr Ubani had had an application to work in the UK rejected by the NHS in Leeds because of inadequate English. But he later got approval in Cornwall after they did not test his language skills.

Mr Morris also said there should be better assessment by the NHS of overseas doctors' ability to work in the UK.

These two tragic cases show the inadequacy of the capitalist social system to deal with these issues, but also illustrates the response that it wants: victims going to law and calling for more regulation to bolster the parasitical bureaucracy of the state rather than solving the problems that it causes.

Smash EDO protest

One year on from the end of the Israeli onslaught on Gaza, Smash EDO held a protest in Brighton. Not as well attended as those in October 2008 or Mayday last year, it nonetheless contained a number of areas of interest.

About 300 people – mostly anarchists in black – gathered in Brighton's Wild Park for the short stroll to Home Farm Road, leading to the EDO factory, to find four police horses, some evidence gatherers and a small police command team, in day-glo orange jackets, awaiting them.

At the end of the five minute stroll most of the demonstrators surged up the hill into the woods to go round the police on Home Farm Road, leaving a rump behind keeping two serials of police – about 42 officers – occupied. However, the cunning plan did not result in success, as another three serials – about 63 police – were elsewhere in the area. Push came to shove on the top of the hill, mostly push and shove from the police.

While plans had been laid and some demonstrators had agreed objectives, it seems that many people joined in the surge in a moment of collective madness. Numerous minor injuries were reported by people who'd ascended the hill, while those left below waited for something to happen.

The second half of the demonstration began when people retreated from the hillside back to the road. Watched by the London FIT's double act of Discombe and Cowlin

(CO2558 and CO5456 respectively), single figures came down the hill shortly followed by larger groups. At this point the re-converged demonstration headed up the Lewes Road back into Brighton. The police took some time to take charge of the situation as protestors used their mobility and surprise to good effect, advantages which were sadly to ebb away in the return towards the city centre.

Despite there having been a number of demonstrations near the EDO factory which have then returned by way of the Lewes Road, many demonstrators have not yet learned the parallel side streets down which to run to avoid kettling. Equally, the charge into the woods seemed in many ways to be a triumph of hope over common sense – having been tried before, it was only to be expected the police would have come up with a counter-plan.

Back in the centre of town the police tried, and once again failed, to kettle people on the Level. They succeeded in North Lane. In total five people were arrested over the course of the day.

The campaign against EDO is by no means over. Future events should see more imaginative tactics used. In the meantime, getting to know the area, from the Universities to the centre of town, should be a priority for people intending to attend future events.

Harry White



INTERNATIONAL

IN BRIEF

COLOMBIA: Riot police in Bogotá have been found guilty of causing the death of a 15 year old during Mayday protests in 2005.

The Attorney General's Office dismissed two officers for their participation by 'omission' in the death of the teenage libertarian student Nicolas David Neira Alvarez, murdered by riot police who surrounded him and beat him unconscious. Friends rushed him to hospital where he died five days later.

FINLAND: More than half of Finland's freight traffic was brought to a standstill on 2nd February following a wildcat strike by stevedores throughout country's key ports.

Over 1,000 workers stopped work in an unofficial strike, due to a breakdown in contract negotiations, closing down seven of the countries ports and stopping all container traffic. Stevedores in all of Finland's 25 ports have threatened to stop work if no agreement is reached.

NICARAGUA: A human rights review by Amnesty International has condemned the country's medical practices that continue to put women's lives at risk.

Nicaragua's revised Penal Code, which came into effect in July 2008, stipulates prison sentences for girls and women who seek an abortion, and for health professionals who provide health services associated with abortion.

FRANCE: Under government pressure, Public Assistance Hospitals of Paris (AP-HP), plans to dismantle the hospital network to save money. The AP-HP recorded a deficit of 1.9 billion euros in 2009. After releasing the information in November, members of the Executive Council of AP-HP announced cost-cutting measures including axing up to 4,000 jobs across the health care profession. The CGT union denounced it as a "cancer that destroys the supply of community care".

INDONESIA: Thousands of demonstrators took to the streets of Jakarta in an anti-government protest at the continuing corruption of state officials. There were also demonstrations in several other cities to mark the first hundred days of President Yudhoyono second term in office. Allegations of misconduct have been levelled at the new government who after bailing out the bank many of its wealthy clients went on to donate money to the president's election campaign.

JAMAICA: A riot at a maximum-security prison in Jamaica over water shortages has sent 23 inmates to the hospital. Seven are said to be in serious condition. Nine guards also were slightly injured during the unrest at the Horizon Remand Center in west Kingston. The authorities are investigating how more than 100 inmates were able to unlock their cells. The facility holds about 600 prisoners and an ongoing drought is affecting the prison's water supply.

LENS CAP OLYMPICS PROTEST



The anarchist-organised Heart Attack bloc blocking road access to the first day of 2010 Olympic games in Vancouver, Canada. As expected there were many and varied protests against the games.

Solidarity with Turkish anarchist

Demonstrations were held in both Ankara and Istanbul, Turkey, on Saturday 13th February in support of Turkish anarchist Volkan Sevinc who was beaten and arrested during an anti-militarist demonstration a month earlier.

On 6th January 2010 the police attacked and broke up a press conference and demonstration in support of the immediate release of the imprisoned military objector Enver Aydemir. Over 100 police surrounded the activists, who were mostly anarchists, arresting 23, some of whom were threatened and insulted and forced to strip while in detention.

Sevinc is the only person among the arrested demonstrators who continues to be detained by order of the court. He is on charges of 'organising illegal demonstration', 'shouting illegal slogans', and 'resisting officers'. He is

also accused of being in possession of a knife. Anarchists in Turkey demonstrated against his imprisonment in the two cities as well as other countries across Europe. Volkan remains in custody, although in good spirits demanding the status of a political prisoner.

The number of conscientious objectors is increasing steadily, which is causing alarm to the Turkish state. Enver Aydemir remains detained in the Eskisehir Military Prison on the grounds of refusing military service because of his religious and philosophical beliefs. He has not seen anybody but his lawyer for the time he's been in prison. The coming hearing was postponed to 22nd April to hear statements of witnesses.

To contact Volkan's comrades for updates and information, and to send messages of support, email ahaligazetesi@gmail.com

Notes from the United States

- At the end of 2009 the US unemployment rose to at least 10%; 85,000 jobs were lost that month alone. And that figure of 10% would be higher if the 661,000 people who had not registered as 'looking' for a job were counted as unemployed. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that no more than 80% of males aged between 25 and 54 were employed in December; that is the lowest figure ever recorded. Since the recession began just over two years ago 7.2 million jobs have been lost.

- At the other end of the economic spectrum, companies on Wall Street are preparing to give out billions of dollars in annual bonuses.

For instance, the average employee at Goldman Sachs is expected to receive a bonus worth nearly US\$600,000 (£370,000).

Many executives will earn far more. At JP Morgan the average bonus is likely to be over US\$450,000 (£280,000). But the recipients

Unrest against austerity measures

Workers across Greece take to the streets as the economy crisis deepens.

The last three weeks has seen Greece once again gripped by massive social unrest this time aimed at the government's introduction of severe spending cuts. Workers across the public sector staged mass strikes and walk outs on Wednesday 10th February as a protest over the government's plan to curtail public spending. The socialist government announced a raft of 'austerity measures' at the beginning of the year in an attempt to manage Greece's spiralling budget deficit, including a freeze on public sector pay, cuts in salary allowances and tax increases, which led to mass demonstrations by workers on the streets of Athens and other major cities. There were angry confrontations when riot police fired tear gas at protesting strikers after refuse collectors tried to drive their trucks through a police cordon to join the march.

The main government workers' union, with 600,000 members, brought the country to a virtual standstill with all the airports being shut down as air traffic controllers stopped work, along with civil servants, including tax offices, social security and local government workers. Other public sector workers to support the strike were teachers and doctors and nurses, with hospitals only accepting 'emergency cases'. The freeze on public sector salaries, and reduction of government agencies, the cuts on public spending as well as raise the retirement age have been interpreted by



Greek trade unions as a 'declaration of war'. The confrontation between the Greek government and unions is expected to intensify if the two-million-strong federation of unions supports another general strike planned for 24th February.

Meanwhile, Greek farmers have been in revolt demanding greater economic support from the government and have staged blockades along the Bulgarian – Greek border for the four weeks running, while numerous blockades were organised at major road arteries and junctions in the north of the country. With the government apparently unable or unwilling to meet demands of the farmers, the end of the blockades were no where in sight.

The crisis in Greece is a credibility test for the Eurozone, the 16-nation bloc where a one-size-fits-all monetary policy has underlined the

challenges of managing disparate economies during an economic downturn. The EU is applying increasing pressure to Greece, one of the latest countries to join the European union, to comply with their stringent economic policies. Greece's deficit is, at 12.7%, more than four times higher than Eurozone rules allow. Its debt is about 300bn euros (\$419bn or £259bn).

The government has announced \$2.75 billion in public spending cuts. It also aims to raise \$6.87 billion more from new taxes and measures aimed at fighting tax evasion, which analysts said deprived the federal budget of \$44.2 billion last year. It has frozen salaries, said it would increase the average retirement age among men and women by two years to 63 by 2015 and introduced a higher gasoline tax.

Notes from the Unites States

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are grumbling: many of this year's bonus will be in stock instead of cash.

- At the end of last month the Senate has approved (by 88 to 10) a US\$636 billion (£395 billion) military spending bill to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Then figures released at the end of the year show that the ratio of Pentagon contractors to military personnel is at an all-time high: contractors now make up 69% of total Pentagon employees.

In Afghanistan alone, for example, the number of private contractors grew by 40% between June and September last year. The number of armed contractors doubled in size to more than 10,000.

A new congressional study suggests that the escalation of the Afghan war will need tens of thousands of new contractors. Perhaps as many contractors as soldiers.

- In Pakistan, it has been reported that the

US is actively considering an expansion of drone attacks beyond tribal areas into the major city of Quetta (population 850,000). Senior US officials have apparently argued in favour of launching or threatening the attacks as a means to pressure the Pakistani government to crack down on Taliban leaders.

- A clutch of peace groups has formed a new coalition to oppose the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and other US military actions; it's called 'End US Wars'.

Democratic Congress member Dennis Kucinich was among those to address the crowd at one of its first rallies in December: "We have money for war, but not for jobs; money for war, but not for healthcare; money for war, but not for education; money for war, but not for housing; money for war, but not for peace – billions for bailouts, bonuses and bombs."

Louis Further

Sudanese riot police quell student unrest

Armed riot police surrounded hundreds of protesters at the funeral of a Darfuri student who colleagues said was tortured and killed by state authorities. Sudanese security services have denied any involvement in the death of Mohamed Musa, 23, who fellow students said was abducted in Khartoum and later found dead.

There was a tense stand-off as riot police moved in to block the funeral group when family members started driving Musa's body to Omdurman's famous Ahmed Sharfi cemetery, where more students gathered.

Khartoum University students who gathered around a morgue where Musa was taken last week said they had seen the body, adding his hands were burned, his head and body beaten, cut and swollen and his clothes soaked in blood.

More than 1,000 Darfuris, students gathered at the funeral in the Khartoum suburb of Omdurman on Monday morning chanting and waving banners.

Unnatural causes

Last month's severe earthquake in Haiti could not have been prevented. But the earthquake's effects, the likelihood of far fewer people dying, and the extent to which corporate greed and power can, even now, make matters much worse for Haitians could all have been mitigated.

Haiti Liberté journalist Kim Ives notes: "This earthquake was preceded by a political and economic earthquake with an epicenter 2,000 miles north [of Port-au-Prince], in Washington, DC ... [The] coups d'état and subsequent ... foreign military occupations, in a country whose constitution forbids that, were fundamentally destructive, not just to the national government and its national programs, but also to the local governments or the parliaments, the mayors' offices and also the local assemblies, which would elect a permanent electoral council."

In fact, the US client's political infrastructure has deliberately prevented these councils from being effective. Cronies of Préval, the president of Haiti since the US overthrew the previous incumbent, effectively dominated this structure and used it to their own ends.

For two centuries the big powers have bullied Haiti and its people, from the harsh reaction to Haiti's independence as a republic of free slaves to the US-backed overthrow of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide (twice) and his replacement with unpopular puppet regimes.

In 1804 the first, and so far the last, slave revolution in history turned Haiti into the world's first black republic. It was also the first independent nation of Latin America. In many ways that revolution became the touchstone for later similar ones. But not until 60 years later (at the time of the US Civil War, when lip service to blacks was fashionable), did the US recognise the country.

In 1915 US Marines invaded Haiti, taking control of the bank and government. They

occupied it until 1934. On leaving, they installed an outfit called the Garde d'Haiti; it acted as a proxy force to maintain US interests there.

In 1957 this evolved into the notoriously vicious dictatorship of François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier. He was 'president for life' and passed that title to his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, when he died in 1971.

The US actively supported the family, its oppression and further degradation of life for Haitians.

By the 1980s it was obvious to Washington that the oppression was so great it was helping to make resistance movements more effective. Their solution was to stage faux elections from 1986 to lift the lid on such pressure. In fact Haiti would be the first country in Latin America to expose and confound these bought elections by choosing a poor parish priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, as president.

Aristide had no illusions about what Haiti needed – real independence from the US. At his inauguration on 7th February 1991, he declared Haiti's independence from US control for a second time. One of his first moves was to increase the minimum wage.

Less than a year later Washington responded with a coup d'état. Aristide was removed for the first time by Clinton (now appointed, along with George W Bush who staged a second coup in 2004) to oversee Haiti's 'recovery'.

Aristide remains in exile. Security Adviser at the time Condoleezza Rice forbade Aristide from setting foot "anywhere within the Western Hemisphere", threatening Jamaica in the process.

Aristide had a nationalist agenda to try and build up self-sufficiency for Haiti. Washington couldn't allow that. The US elite insisted that the nine principal public owned industries should be privatised and sold off to US and foreign investors.



Above, many Haitian homes were flattened; below left, Americans at Fort Riviere, Haiti, in 1915; below right, US soldiers after the earthquake.

So towards the end of the 1990s they forced through the privatisation of the Minoterie d'Haiti (which produced flour for bread) and Ciment d'Haiti (cement). The former was sold to a company of which Henry Kissinger was a board member. The mill was closed and Haiti now has no flour mill. Flour and rice, in a country once self-sufficient, has had to be imported over the last decade at great cost from the US.

Haiti is a country mostly made of limestone (the foundation of cement). When Ciment d'Haiti was closed down, US-backed corporations began using the docks of the cement company to import cement – again at greater costs.

Now, with buildings flattened, Haiti is going to have to pay for the import of millions of tons of cement, a commodity it once had in abundance.

One of the biggest challenges after the earthquake was the management of information between families and loved-ones. The Haitian telecommunications company, Teleco, was highly-regarded amongst the Haitian state industries but just a week before this earthquake, Teleco was sold to a Vietnamese company, Viettel.

All communications today are in the hands of the three private cell companies, Digicel, Voila and Haitel.

Ives notes: "Thirteen years ago, we had a delegation here to talk to the [telecommunications trade] unionists ... A certain Jean Mabou, the union leader, took us to a room where it was filled with new, brand new, modern telecommunications equipment, boards, all sorts of things. He said, 'We've

we want from the international community is technical help – action, not words."

This is all consistent with the way the 'Shock Doctrine' (a political-economic theory advanced by Naomi Klein in her book of the same name) works. In Klein's words shortly after the quake: "Crises are often used as the pretext for pushing through policies that you cannot push through under times of stability."

"Countries in periods of extreme crisis are desperate for any kind of aid, any kind of money, and are not in a position to negotiate fairly the terms of that exchange."

Just one example illustrates the point – the influential right-wing think-tank Heritage Foundation.

Shortly after the quake, the following appeared on the free-market advocate's website: "Amidst the suffering, crisis in Haiti offers opportunities to the US. In addition to providing immediate humanitarian assistance, the US response to the tragic earthquake in Haiti earthquake offers opportunities to re-shape Haiti's long-dysfunctional government and economy as well as to improve the image of the United States in the region."

And "Finally, a vital part of Haiti's recovery will be increased help from the faith-based community in the US and around the world. Religious organisations have long played a critical role in keeping Haiti afloat through generous cash and food donations as well as mission visits to help build and run Haitian schools and clinics."

"Faith-based assistance often has more lasting long-term effects than official development assistance, and no doubt this will prove to be the case in Haiti."

In barely-concealed coded language, the Foundation suggests that "Long-term reforms for Haitian democracy and its economy are also badly overdue". It doesn't take much imagination to understand what they mean by 'reforms'.

Louis Further

got these, and they won't allow us to install them. They are deliberately undermining the state company so they can sell it'."

Now, in the teeth of one of the worst catastrophes in recent decades, instead of helping, the US in particular is taking advantage of the situation to continue to pursue its own aims.

Although they didn't get into the US media, eye-witness reports such as the from Sebastian Walker of Al Jazeera English are typical on the ground: "Most Haitians here have seen little humanitarian aid so far. What they have seen is guns, and lots of them."

"Armored personnel carriers cruise the streets. UN soldiers aren't here to help pull people out of the rubble; they're here, they say, to enforce the law. This is what much of the UN presence actually looks like on the streets of Port-au-Prince: men in uniform, racing around in vehicles, carrying weapons."

"At the entrance to the city's airport, where most of the aid is coming in, there's anger and frustration. Much needed supplies of water and food are inside. Haitians are locked out ... Beyond the well guarded perimeter, there's something else going on."

"Here, the United States has taken control. It looks more like the Green Zone in Baghdad than a center for aid distribution. Heavily armed US forces patrol the entrances. Even within the airport, these soldiers are never without weapons. There are several thousand on the ground already, and that number is expected to grow. America now decides who lands in Haiti."

Patrice Ali is the former Haitian defence minister. Even he is concerned with the way

the Americans have taken over the relief efforts: "We don't need soldiers, as such, you know? There's no war here. The choice of what lands and what doesn't land, the priorities of the flight should be determined by the Haitians. So, otherwise, it's a take-over."

"And what might happen is that the need of Haitians are not taken into account, but only either the way a foreign country defines the need of Haiti or tries to push its own agenda."

One Haitian man spoke for many: "These weapons they bring, they are instruments of death. We don't want them. We don't need them. We are a traumatised people. What



COMMENT

ABOUT FREEDOM

ANGEL ALLEY

Oh how slow grind the wheels of anarchist endeavour. The t-shirt committee has submitted a set of preliminary designs and the day of our very own Freedom Brand going global is at hand ... well, Whitechapel at least.

There is a special offer on Dannie Burns *Poll Tax Rebellion* of only £3 (it was £4.95 when it came out in 1992) to mark the upcoming 20th anniversary of the Poll Tax Riot (31st March for the benefit of younger comrades). As with all books in the shop you can have it sent post free (cheques made payable to Freedom Press).

We call on any comrades who have not yet had the pleasure to come and wash their hands in the new all-singing all-dancing 'hand basin' that has been installed in the furtherance of hygiene next to the lavatory on the first floor. More bourgeois decadence is to follow, starting with a clean up of the 'Autonomy Club' meeting room. We are also pleased to be hosting the Red & Black Co-ordination meeting of London anarchist groups on the 23rd March.

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 71, no 03, so if your subscription runs out with this issue you'll have 7103 above your name. If the number is 7103 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. You can now renew online as well at freedompress.org.uk.

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 27th February 2010 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 18th February. You can send your articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post addressed to 'The Editors', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

A sideways look

by SVARTFROSK

The words 'A local shop for local people' immediately conjure up the absurd couple in *The League of Gentlemen*. The idea that a shop would only cater for some people and not care about maximising profit brings a wry smile, but at the heart of the image is the mockery of an insular way of seeing the world.

I was reminded of this when given a newsletter at my daughter's school. It boldly proclaimed that a 'New Campaign Group Challenges Council'. As you might imagine, I like the idea of challenging the council, so I read on eagerly. I was quickly disappointed by the 'localist' tone.

The newsletter's biggest problem is that it is totally devoid of politics. The council's decisions are bad not because they are not 'local': it's because they are managerial decisions within the framework of central government regulations and the capitalist system. The campaigners want Lewisham's council tax to stay in the borough, and point out a couple of council contractors based outside the borough, one of which is a multinational, one a national firm and the other based in a town ten miles away. It also misses the point that the councillors and Mayor do live in the borough, as it's a legal requirement that they do.

They then mention some successful campaigns, interspersed with a list of anti-Labour candidates from the last elections, only two of whom were successful. The affiliations of the successful two, both Socialist

Party councillors, go unmentioned. The back is a shopping list of leading questions with a very small space for comments. What is most distressing though is the last paragraph exhorting the reader that by acting together, "we can make Lewisham a better place without cutting services and taxing us all into debt".

If ever there was a case where something other than local politics are required it is in the last bit. Who controls taxes and how government money is spent – the local council or the government? And how is voting for socialism in one ward going to change the government's view?

At the heart of anarchism is a commitment to localism, but this goes hand in hand with federalism. It also has a political stance – one that aims for real power to be devolved locally as far as possible. Having any control over your environment is something that is won by struggle. The campaigners talk about people power, but show no idea of how that can be built.

It is also a crucial question for us, as anarchists can at times fall into an excessively localist approach. We have to remember that the reason local people have so little say over things is a symptom, not a cause. Sometimes local control can be quite reactionary – you only have to look at Switzerland for that. Local democracy is one thing, but without politics it is fairly banal and not a lot different from what we have now.



LETTERS

The last straw

I hope Ian Pirie (letter 30th January) will reconsider his decision to cancel his subscription.

Ian's anarchism is like my anarchism and the anarchism of *Freedom*. We believe, and hope, that the best way towards the free society is to spread knowledge of anarchism, and argue the ethical case for libertarian socialism.

But *Freedom* also sometimes publishes contributions expressing other opinions. Some anarchists believe, and hope, that the best way towards the free society is to incite angry defiance in those who suffer most under authoritarian society: the downtrodden, the 'great unwashed', the 'lumpenproletariat'. It is argued (and this is a rational argument) that such outcasts are not much attracted by philosophical arguments, and therefore that the case against their oppressors is best put to them in violent language and taboo words, such as they themselves use to express anger and defiance.

We may disagree with this view, but if we prohibit its occasional expression in *Freedom*, we may be in danger of yielding to prudery, despising simple unlearned people for being simple and unlearned, and sliding into intellectual snobbery.

Donald Room

Was Dr Kelly Murdered?

Just before the Iraq invasion there occurred the mysterious death of Dr David Kelly, the weapons expert, who, via the BBC journalist

Andrew Gilligan, had discredited the 'intelligence' used to justify the war in Blair's famous dossier. The BBC was harassed by Number 10 for biased reporting, and Gilligan was sacked. This affair has now been re-ignited seven years on, by the revelation that the High Court judge, Lord Hutton, made all of the medical records of Dr Kelly's death secret for 70 years – i.e. until after all of the interested parties are dead. Lord Hutton did this in 2004, immediately after he had completed his enquiry into the affair. All of which explains why there seems to have been no mention of Dr Kelly in the current Chilcot Enquiry.

These manoeuvres have emerged after five doctors recently requested the release of the documents and the re-opening of the inquest. In their opinion the drugs overdose and wrist-slashing, apparently the acts of a suicidal Dr Kelly, were not sufficient to have caused his death. It was also alleged at the time that the body had been moved, and I recall that news of Kelly's death caused Blair and his press secretary, Alistair Campbell, to look distinctly rattled.

John Griffin.

Ray Gilbert meeting

There will be a meeting held in Liverpool on behalf of one of Britain's longest serving prisoners, Merseysider Ray Gilbert. Ray was set up by cops way back in 1981 and has been protesting his innocence ever since. CND Campaigner, Bruce Kent will chair the session, which will also be attended by the murder victim's father, John Sutcliffe. Mr

Sutcliffe is firmly convinced that Ray Gilbert did not take his son's life and will contribute to the meeting to that effect. The meeting takes place on 20th February from 3pm until 5pm, at 'The Casa', Hope Street, Liverpool. All are welcome to attend in attempts to bring an end to Ray Gilbert's nightmare of almost three decades.

Frankie Dee

John Rety

We are saddened to report the death of John Rety, anarchist, poet and chess player, who was editor of *Freedom* in the 1960s. John died on 3rd February of a heart attack at home.

John co-founded the Torriano Meeting House and published the Hearing Eye series of poetry books while his column, 'Through the Anarchist Press', in *Freedom* has been published as a book by Freedom Press.

He remained active in recent years as compere for meetings of the Torriano Poets for Peace, a vivid insight into his passion and commitment that no one who has ever seen could forget, and he was a regular visitor to Angel Alley.

He is survived by his partner Susan, son Jacob and daughter Emily Johns, who is active in the peace movement and co-editor of *Peace News*.

We will be doing a full obituary for John in the next issue of *Freedom* but for a flavour of the man some of his chess games can be found online at chessgames.com/player/john_rety.html and some of his poetry at hphoward.demon.co.uk/torriano/practice.htm.

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GETTING ACTIVE

PRISON NEWS

Two wheels on my wagon

Yet another wheel seems to have come off the Tories prison policy in the run up to the election.

They have already had to drop their plans to gazump Labour's prison building plans by 5,000 new places because of financial constraints, a combination of their miscalculating the amount of money they could realistically raise from their idea to sell off 30 inner city Victorian prisons (most of which are listed buildings) to finance the plans and the global financial crisis or, as Cameron would like to have it, Labour had already "adopted our policy" (see *Freedom* issue 7024, 19th December 2009)

Hot on the heels of that climb down comes an internal row about the possible use of prison ships to fill the gap between available prison beds and the extra spaces needed for Tory plans to keep people locked up even for longer periods by introducing minimum-maximum sentences and the scrapping of the early release scheme.

In keeping with the oxymoronic level of such debate, the Conservative spokesperson claimed that there was a "need for extra capacity in view of tougher and more 'honest' sentencing plans the Conservatives intend to introduce".

According to senior shadow cabinet members, the plan is the idea of Cameron's communications chief, Andy Coulson, and the senior policy team that have spent the last four years cobbling together a prisons policy only to see it torpedoed by an ex-tabloid editor à la Alastair Campbell is particularly galling.

One of those apparently less than pleased with the plan is Alan Duncan, the shadow prisons minister who, in an Oxford University speech, is also alleged to have claimed that the slogan 'prison works' was repulsively simplistic and that "Lock 'em up is Key Stage 1 politics".

HMP Liverpool report

The latest HM Inspectorate of Prisons report into HMP Liverpool, where screws went on strike last November, shows that "progress has stalled" there.

Whilst claiming that Walton "was a better prison than four years ago", the report, which listed 162 recommendations, found that more than a half of the prisoners felt unsafe at some time and that there was a "glaring gap" in the absence of effective drug or alcohol treatment. There was also an underlying problem of violence and bullying.

Up to 46% of prisoners were banged up during the work day and the most popular workshops were over allocated, good for hitting government targets but left many prisoners without any actual work. There was still insufficient activity for the whole population and that only two-thirds of education places were taken up.



● On 29th January the last occupants of the **Mainshill Solidarity Camp** (pictured above) were forcibly removed after a five-day long eviction which ended over seven months of protests and actions disrupting Scottish Coal's plans. The occupation part of the campaign against the Mainshill open-cast has now ended, but the campaigners vowed to continue their struggle against continuing coal extraction in the area. A total of 45 arrests were made during the eviction, with close to 70 people taking part and supporting the camp.

All five days saw extreme violence inflicted on the occupiers by the state, and the collusion between the courts, police and corporations. But there were also heroic acts of defiance, with people fighting off bailiffs until their hands and feet were cable-tied together and supporters maintaining a 24-hour vigil throughout the eviction.

This eviction marks another step in the campaign of community-based radical direct action sweeping Scotland's central belt. From actions to stop work on open-cast sites and the shutting down of a major coal rail terminal for a day (which happened for a third time on 3rd February), to fostering community engagement and solidarity which resulted in the seven-month occupation and a positive change in direction for radical environmentalism in Scotland.

● Once again another successful annual winter gathering was held by the ecological

direct action movement. The **Earth First! Winter Moot** is organised each year to bring together likeminded people who "believe in non-hierarchical organisation and directly confronting the forces responsible for the destruction of the Earth and its inhabitants".

This year the three day event, from 5th to 7th February, was held the village of Dipton, County Durham, just twelve miles outside Newcastle and close to several ancient woods in an area with a large number of open-cast coal mines, both active and at the application stage. The weekend included much discussion and meetings with activists involved locally in campaigns against these.

There were also updates on ecological campaigns from around the country, with a themed event, 'The Crisis: evaluation, analysis and possible responses', which explored the interactions between the various ecological, financial and resource crises, with a view to find a way forward using non-hierarchical approaches.

As was acknowledged: "The current and impending crises of economics, ecology, energy and society fundamentally alter the terrain of struggle; this in turn impacts both the practice and possibilities for a radical ecological movement."

Politically there was meeting on anarchism versus liberalism in recognition of the actions, impact and visibility of the current crop of climate change groups and initiatives.

An evening with Moazzam Begg

On 20th October last year I saw former Guantanamo Bay inmate and Director of Cage Prisoners Moazzam Begg address the Norwich branch of Amnesty International, as part of Amnesty's 'Protect the Human Week'.

However well intentioned Amnesty International are, and I think they are correct in their call for due process and in their opposition to Guantanamo and similar institutions within Afghanistan, there is a real risk here in terms of their credibility.

Begg outlined the process that led him to be taken in what he referred to as extraordinary rendition – from Islamabad, to Bagram in Afghanistan, then to Camp Echo in Guantanamo Bay. He argued that too much attention has gone on to the Cuban facility, when the bigger issues are around Bagram, secret detention and proxy detention using sites in countries such as Libya and Syria.

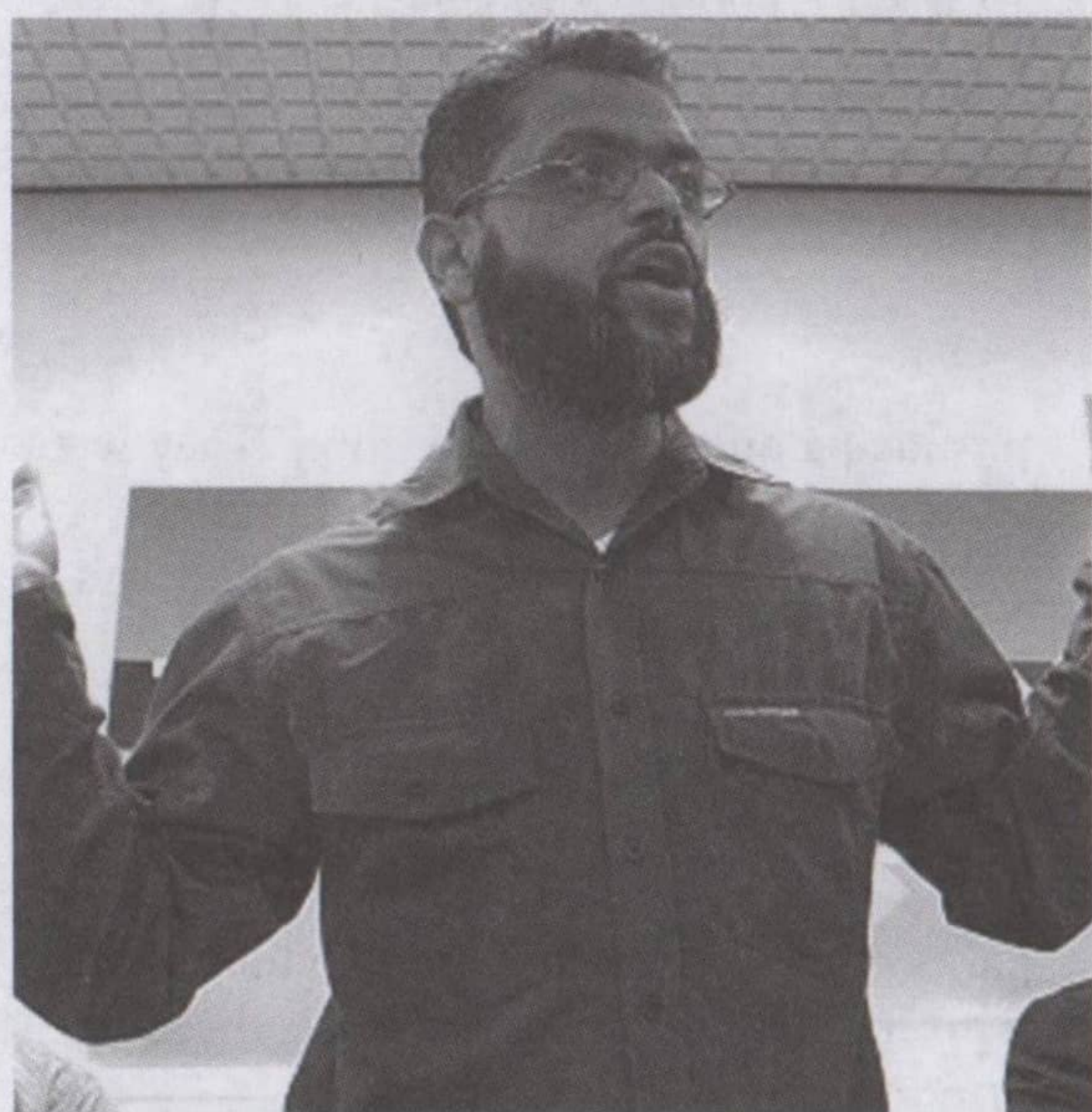
This message was appreciatively received by Norwich Amnesty, who had earlier campaigned hard for Binyamin Mohamed, also held by the Americans until February 2009. It is fair to say this was a well meaning, rather middle class audience but I fear one that is also slightly gullible.

Putting aside the case of Mohamed (who we are supposed to believe had travelled to the centre of the world's heroin trade in order to receive treatment for drug addiction), Begg and Cage Prisoners were not entirely straight with Norwich Amnesty.

Firstly, take the Cage Prisoners promotional material at their stall that evening. It centred on their film and glossy leaflets promoting their work. Yet when I attended Islam Expo in June 2008, literature with official Cage Prisoners leaflets (upstairs at the Olympia event) included prison details for that well known 'prisoner of conscience' Abu Hamza, convicted of eleven charges in February 2006, including soliciting murder.

This cannot be explained away as contrary to Cage Prisoners policy, as a glance at the prisoners list on their website demonstrates

Are would-be shoe bomber Sajid Badat, arms importer Andrew Rowe or Abu Qatada prisoners of conscience? Not from where I am



Above, inmates at Guantanamo Bay; below left, Moazzam Begg.

sitting. This aspect of Cage Prisoners work was entirely absent from the Norwich event. Put simply, Moazzam Begg and his group present one set of issues to a white middle class crowd from Norwich's 'Golden Triangle', and another one to their fellow Islamists.

Secondly there is the issue of Begg himself. In Norwich he stated that his rendition was due to a UK intelligence services dossier re his visits to Bosnia in the early 1990s. This told the Americans he was a threat. Nothing more was said that evening, yet anyone with even a cursory glance of Begg's book *Enemy Combatant* can see this is far from being the whole truth.

In 1993 Begg visited a Jamaat-e-Islami training camp in Afghanistan, a camp still operating some four years after the Soviets had left the country. He then visited an adjoining Arab camp (pages 50–57).

He explains to his future wife that something may happen to him if he goes to Bosnia (page 59) before going to a Mujahideen camp in the country (pages 66–67). He subsequently plans a trip to Chechnya – not exactly the sort of place you go to for a Club 18-30 – but is stopped on his way out of the UK by the security services. He attempts to travel there anyway, but is refused entry to Georgia (page 87) and so cannot reach his desired destination.

You do not have to be Sherlock Homes to take the view that, following 9/11, Begg's presence – in either Afghanistan or Pakistan – is likely to be of considerable interest to the security services.

Like Amnesty I disagree with how those same security services treated him – in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Guantanamo. But it is easy to feel just as uncomfortable with

the sight of 'progressive' political activists queuing up to support someone who is by his own words a follower of the Salafi (early) way of Islam (page 331 of his book). What price 'due process' in a society run by Moazzam Begg?

In Norwich Begg made it clear that Cage Prisoners will continue, even if Guantanamo Bay closes. That in a way is no surprise – it has a wider objective. Some of those objectives are very far from the types of beliefs progressives claim to uphold.

The last word however, should go to Moazzam Begg himself, and this unintentionally hilarious exchange with two CIA interrogators from his memoirs (page 214):

"I wanted to live in an Islamic state – one that was free from the corruption and despotism of the rest of the Muslim world.

"So you chose the Taliban?"

"I chose Afghanistan. I admit I have made mistakes but, had it not been for 9/11, I think I would still be living happily in Afghanistan.

"Probably as a member of Al Qaeda or the Taliban."

"I knew you wouldn't understand. The Taliban were better than anything Afghanistan has had in the past twenty-five years. You weren't in Afghanistan – not before nor during the Taliban. Child sex, rape, looting, robbery, murder and opium production only ended when they took control.

"And in came amputations, floggings and executions..."

Paul Stott

Paul Stott is part of the Anarchist Studies Network, who will be holding a gathering at Freedom Press on 2nd March at 7pm, an opportunity for anarchist students, researchers and academics to meet, talk and socialise.

REVIEWS

WHAT'S ON

FEBRUARY

14th Screening of *10 Tactics for Turning Information into Action* 1in12 Club, Albion Street, Bradford BD1 2LY, 5.30pm, see 1in12.com/monthly/day.listevents/2010/02/14/ and informationactivism.org

15th Aldermaston Big Blockade: Bikes not Bombs – cyclists and environmentalists will be blockading one of the gates from 7am at Aldermaston, near Reading, at a crucial time for the future of Trident, for details email info@bikesnotbombs.org.uk, see bikesnotbombs.org.uk or, for more general info, see tridentploughshares.org

21st Screening of *Cruel and Unusual* at The Common Place, Wharf Street, Leeds LS2 7EQ, at 7pm, see thecommonplace.org.uk/events-calendar/day.listevents/2010/02/21/ and cruelandunusualfilm.com

22nd Stop the traffic and change the world – create the biggest traffic jam ever, just step outside into your street during the rush hour, for details call 07758668637, email info@stopthetraffic.info or see http://stopthetraffic.info

28th Screening of *Cruel and Unusual* at the 1in12 Club, Albion Street, Bradford BD1 2LY, at 5.30pm, see cruelandunusualfilm.com and 1in12.com/monthly/day.listevents/2010/02/28/ and cruelandunusualfilm.com

MARCH

2nd The first London Anarchist Studies Network social, from 7pm at Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX – an opportunity for anarchist students, researchers and anarchist academics living, working or visiting the capital to meet, talk and socialise. Bring a bottle and get yourself down there.

7th Screening of *Everything's Cool* at The Common Place, Wharf Street, Leeds LS2 7EQ, at 7pm, see thecommonplace.org.uk/events-calendar/day.listevents/2010/03/07/ and everythingscool.org

14th Screening of *Everything's Cool* at the 1in12 Club, Albion Street, Bradford BD1 2LY, at 5.30pm, see everythingscool.org and 1in12.com/monthly/day.listevents/2010/03/14/

21st Screening of *Reformat the Planet* at The Common Place, Wharf Street, Leeds LS2 7EQ, at 7pm, see 2playerproductions.com and thecommonplace.org.uk/events-calendar/day.listevents/2010/03/21/

26th to 28th The Sixth Anarchist Bookfair in Zagreb, for more see ask-zagreb.org or email anarhisticki.sajam.knjiga@gmail.com

28th Screening of *Reformat the Planet* at the 1in12 Club, Albion Street, Bradford BD1 2LY, at 5.30pm, see 2playerproductions.com and 1in12.com/monthly/day.listevents/2010/03/28/

APRIL

10th Bradford Anarchist Bookfair at the 1in12 Club 21-23 Albion Street Bradford West Yorkshire BD1 2LY from 10am until 4pm, for details or to book a stall contact sam@samjackson6.orangehome.co.uk

Common's place

Tom Jennings thanks Keith Armstrong for Common Words and the Wandering Star, a comprehensive document of his efforts to keep Jack Common's legacy alive

Despite a typically hard-knocks working-class childhood in early twentieth-century Newcastle, young Jack didn't follow his dad into the railway yards when he left school at 14. Instead, partly thanks to family quirks, he did a stint learning secretarial skills in between running with mates and joining various local freethinking left-wing cultural activities, before moving south to pursue a writing career when the worst of the 1920s depression bit. After a lively and convincing reconstruction of this early formation, its consequences, contradictions and ramifications for his subsequent life, dissident socialist beliefs, and literary output of essays and novels form the core of Keith Armstrong's

careful, detailed account¹ of Common's significance – none of which has hitherto been properly bought together in the public realm. Moreover, while the experiences and perspectives described were highly specific and idiosyncratic, they could also be deemed representative of the problems and possibilities of lower-class intellectual and artistic enterprise as well as the texture of the Northern industrial human landscape of that time². Yet although the material conditions that spawned him might have largely disappeared, this writer's autobiographical fiction and more wide-ranging sociopolitical ruminations still resonate strongly today – not least to those who recognise in themselves aspects of his roots and the resulting subaltern dilemmas.

Therefore it seems simultaneously scandalous and unsurprising that his worth has been neglected – during his lifetime and since, among the metropolitan literati and its supposedly progressive alternatives.

Compared to considerably lesser contemporary lights – in terms of evocative talent or breadth of insight – whose fame and fortune followed entry into the high-cultural canon, our hero scarcely staved off destitution throughout his days and died in obscurity

page 15 ►►

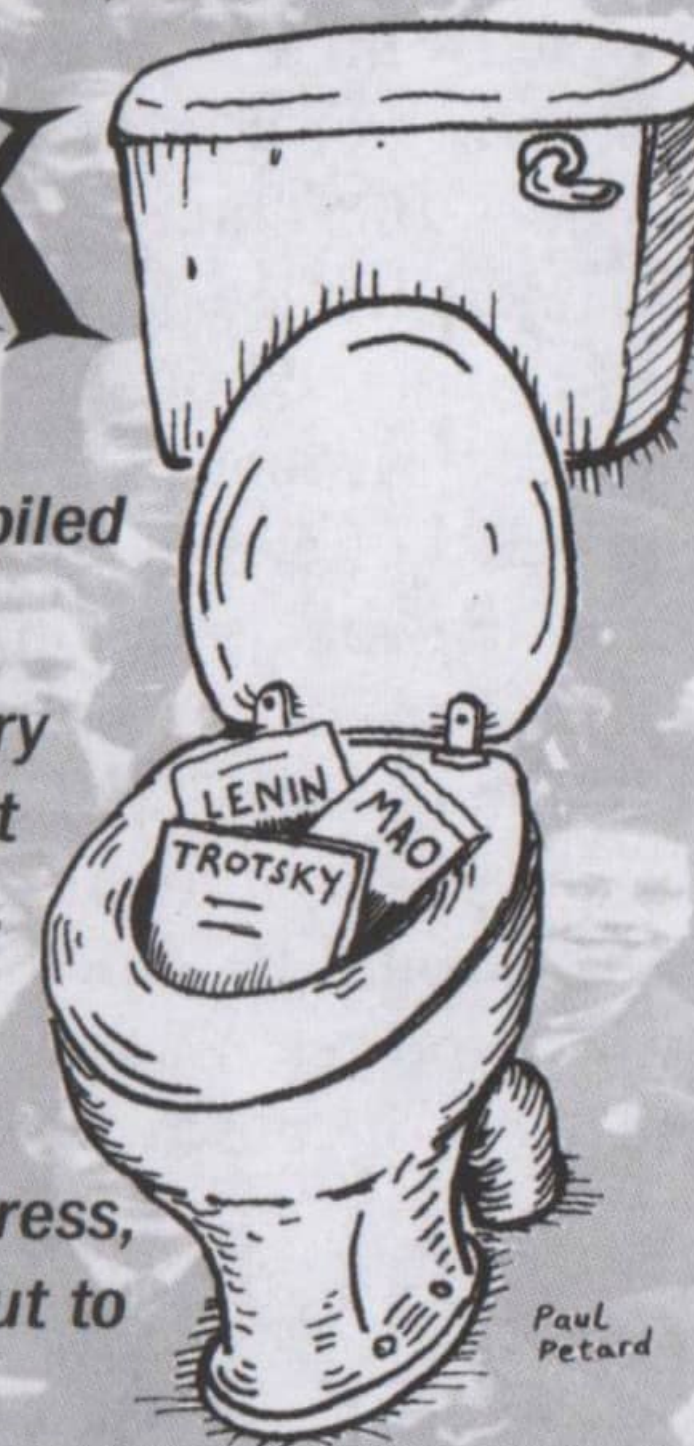
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QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Playing the fantasy role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons in prison. Prison officials said the game "promotes fantasy role playing, competitive hostility, violence, addictive escape behaviours, and possible gambling".
2. The players of Chester City Football Club, who are still owed nine weeks wages, finally got paid at the end of January.
3. Zhang, a dairy farmer, was executed for endangering public safety, and Geng for

producing and selling toxic food. They were sentenced for their part in the tainted baby milk scandal that left six dead and made 300,000 ill.

4. A cesspit. He went on to say that "England is the breeding ground of fundamentalist Muslims". He was speaking after being asked about the Nigerian Muslim underpants bomber, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who Soyinka claimed was radicalised in London.

Common's place

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having yielded but a small fraction of his capability. So it's no mean feat, and ample reason to treasure *Common Words*, that its author has so painstakingly gathered together and organised the material necessary to weigh his subject's place in history and potential usefulness now. Plus, since the wherewithal for others to undertake that task is now available, it would be churlish to complain that this biography neither deploys the necessary critical tools nor has the space to accomplish it. As Jack Common himself found, not kowtowing to the weight, inertia and disdain of the establishment (including its 'loyal oppositions') – not only refusing to play by the rules, but precisely endeavouring to expose their deadening effects – means struggling to find a forum, let alone the chance to fully flower. And, invaluable though they are, grass-roots publishing initiatives seldom penetrate as far as the academic respectability conferred by PhD research and a university press³. In any case neither, sadly, were possible soon enough to help Common.

Uncommon Sense

Armstrong vividly illustrates Jack's wanderings around London and the Home Counties after fortuitously falling in with eccentric well-to-do socialists John Middleton Murry and Max Plowman at the non-conformist Adelphi magazine. There he honed skills as columnist, critic, editor and essayist – hobnobbing with various of its milieu such as D.H. Lawrence, Dylan Thomas, and especially George Orwell with whom he formed a lifelong friendship. But having no 'independent income', precarious editorial work had to be juggled with sundry dead-end drudgeries to support a young family, involving frequent upheavals to successive short-term tenancies and leases. Subsequent script-doctoring for the film sector further squeezed time and energy available for his own writing but, in addition to journalism, he did manage to get four books published. Unique at the time, *Seven Shifts* (1938) was an edited set of accounts of working life by Northern friends and acquaintances, and *Freedom of the Streets* (1938) a comparably unusual collection of the best of his own political essays skewering the pretensions of genteel socialism⁴. These were followed by imaginatively twisted tales of childhood and teenage in *Kiddar's Luck* (1951) and *The Ampersand* (1954), which surely rank among the very best descriptions of growing up working-class ever committed to paper.

What Common apparently didn't get round to attempting was to expressively integrate his radical political speculations into renderings of personal experience projected into other characters and contexts – which Lawrence and Orwell, for instance, among his peers, and many later, did (arguably) achieve. A turning-point here would be the 'Angry Young Man' phenomenon of the 1950s and 60s wherein grammar-school graduates like Stan Barstow, John Braine or Keith Waterhouse



Jack Common

fulminated against the barriers their lowly origins imposed on status prospects – incidentally impeccably reflecting conservative 'lace-curtain working-class' parental aspiration bursting with its suppressed soul-destroying resentment. Doubtless Common wasn't young and fashionable enough to tickle this niche's fancy, but anyway these new writers rarely extended their ambitions to consider tackling positively the refusal of logics of upward-mobility⁵. More recently, however, quite a few highly skilled, honestly working-class writers have thrived without falsifying, betraying or abandoning their backgrounds – with James Kelman, for example, even winning the Booker Prize (amid much disquiet from most of the Great and Good).

But such vexed questions of 'authentic' working-class or regional voices, and which experiences and perspectives get attributed cultural merit, miss larger problematics which I suspect Armstrong glimpsed – though his conclusions merely second-guess if Common might have sympathised with a seemingly random selection of contemporary commentators. A better strategy would be to ask what happens to latterday Jacks. Or, if he had scraped a comfortable living from his

craft, would that have affected the critical edge of his work? What about the many potential subversives since who, dipping toes above their station, were similarly unwilling or unable to assimilate to any version of middle-class individualism? Irrespective of artistic intentions or outcomes, how might it affect their political activity or influence? Contrariwise, in the more complex fragmentations of class and community we now inhabit, what parallels can be drawn from Common's exhilarating excoriations of the baleful blind-spots of bourgeois socialist complacency with today's relatively privileged rebels and anti-capitalists? Yet matters of the significance of fidelity to or estrangement from divergent cultural origins and roots, and how it affects politics and attracts or repels constituencies, seem as far away from both mainstream and radical common currency as ever. This, to me, is why Jack Common's ideas stand stubbornly as a continuing challenge, and why this book (as well as *Freedom of the Streets* itself, if you can get hold of it) are essential starting-points for anyone taking it up.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

<http://libcom.org/blog/4271>

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WILDCAT

The Pentagon said "face death three months, we'll let you home for a long time."

I was home for a week. They ordered me back to face death for another three months.

So I wrote a song, saying the Pentagon themselves should be facing death.

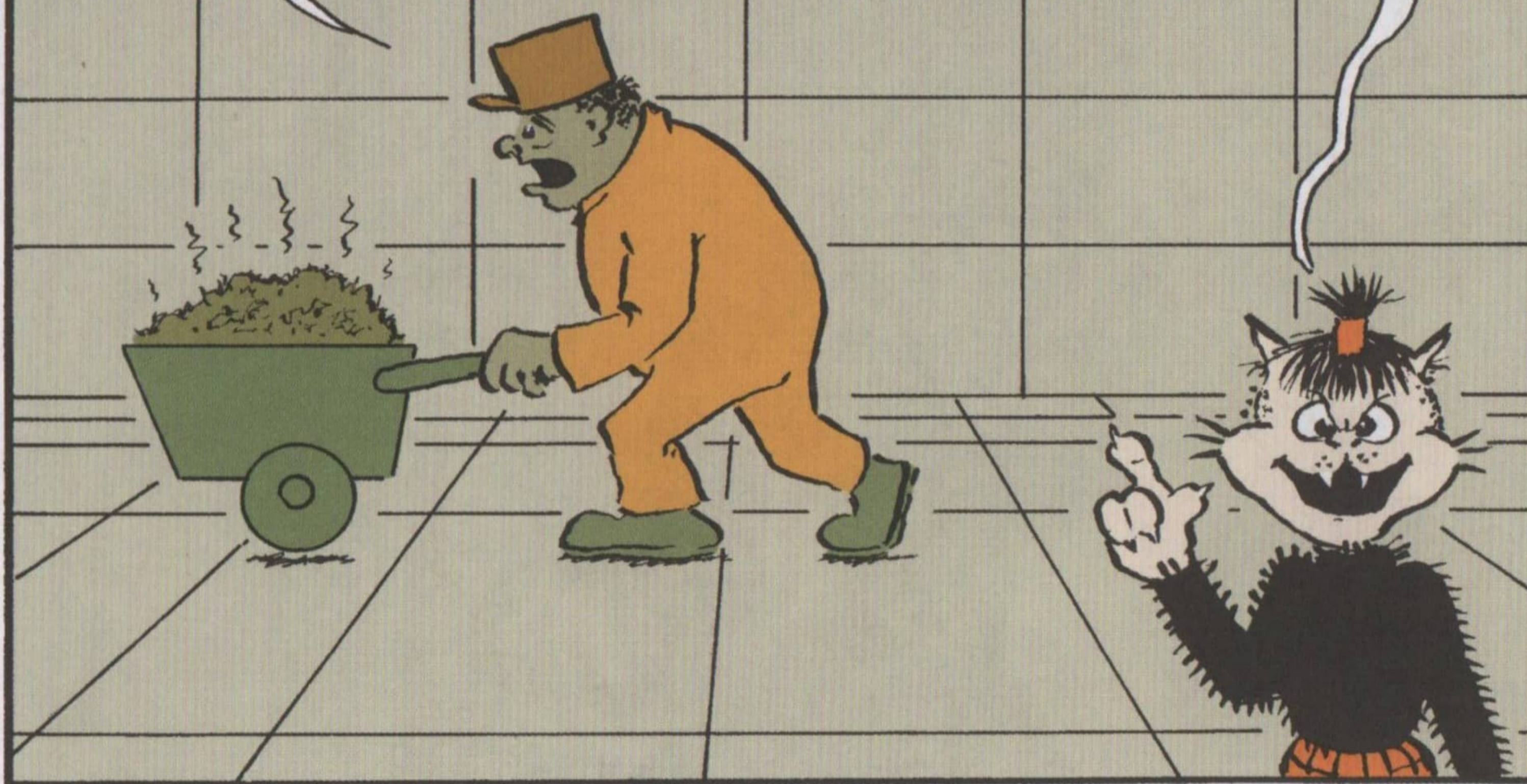
And that's why I'm in jail.

That reminds me of the old army marching song:

*it serves you right.
You shouldn't a' joined.
it jolly well serves you right.
It serves you right. You shouldn't a' joined.*

*You might a' been sitting tight,
But now you're in the army
And your life ain't worth a light
It serves you right. You shouldn't a' joined
It jolly well serves you right.*

*Glory! Glory! (With a he'lluva bang he'll do)
Glory! Glory! (With a he'lluva bang he'll do)
Glory! Glory! (With a he'lluva bang he'll do)
And the wife never leaves the house!*



Review

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- 1 *Common Words and the Wandering Star: A Biographical Study of Culture and Social Change in the Life and Work of Writer Jack Common (1903-1968)*, published in October 2009 by the University of Sunderland Press (288pp, priced £7.95).
- 2 On this score, see 'A Northern Giant' (review by Dave Douglass), at www.minersadvice.co.uk.
- 3 The book draws on Armstrong's Durham University doctoral dissertation. His long-standing involvement in North-East regional publishing includes his own and others' poetry, the Strong Words and Northern Voices projects, the 1988 People's Publications and Common Trust edition of Jack Common's *Freedom of the Streets*, and the Thomas Spence Trust pamphlet *The Hive of Liberty: The*

Life and Work of Thomas Spence (reviewed in *Freedom*, 24th March 2007).

- 4 A couple of which are online in the <http://libcom.org> library along with a few of Common's other essays.
- 5 An exception would be Alan Sillitoe, unapologetically from Nottingham's 'underclass' and whose William Posters trilogy (1965-74) had a huge impact on this reviewer but is ignored by literary critics. See, for example, Richard Bradford's biography, *The Life of A Long-Distance Writer* (Peter Owen, 2008), and D.J. Taylor's interesting review (subtitled 'How Sillitoe stood apart from the tradition of Northern novelists going soft and successful in the South') in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 1st October 2008).

Common Words and the Wandering Star: a biographical study of culture and social change in the life and

work of writer Jack Common (1903-1968) by Keith Armstrong, University of Sunderland Press, Learning Development Services, £7.95.

THE QUIZ

1. On 25th January this year, a ban on what activity was upheld by a US court?
2. Which unlikely group of workers in Cheshire called off a strike after they were finally paid?
3. Why were Zhang Yujun and Geng Jinping executed in China last year?
4. According to Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka, what is England? And why?

Answers on page 14

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