

# FREEDOM

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## ELECTION FEVER, OR SLIGHT COLD

As some of our more observant readers may have already noticed, there is going to be a General Election in Britain on 6th June. Sadly this does not mean we get to elect the countries generals, but rather allows a free choice of who we want to fiddle expenses. This paper is not going to patronise our readers by giving the old classics of anarchist rhetoric like 'if voting changed anything they'd make it illegal/whoever you vote for the government gets in' (except we just did). Instead we have been working with comrades across the anarchist movement to provide an proper analysis of what's going on and how we can build alternatives.

We are bringing out a 12-page 'Election Special' supplement to examine the positions of our would-be rulers in detail and look at ways that we can move towards taking control of our own lives. If you would like to distribute this in your local area give us a call at the shop between 12 noon and 6pm on 020 7247 9249 or text your address and how many copies you would like to 07913 865928.

The format will be 12 pages with around a page each examining the programmes, public and unspoken, of the three main parties. There will be smaller analyses of the other significant parties, an insight to what the Trots are up to and special attention devoted to the menace of the BNP. In addition we will have a centre page spread on what an  
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### LENS CAP FIDDLING WHILE THE PLANET MELTS



The first round of UN climate talks since December's bitter Copenhagen summit has opened in Bonn. Meanwhile a new satellite, CryoSat-2, has been launched that can measure the thickness of Arctic sea ice from space for the first time.

## FERMENTING REVOLUTION

If Carlsberg did strikes they'd probably be the best strikes in the world. So readers will be glad to know that's exactly what they have done.

Carlsberg workers in Copenhagen have gone on strike against the introduction of new rules that restrict the amount of free beer that they can consume during their working day.

Regulations brought in at the start of the month stipulate that workers are no longer allowed beer throughout the day, and can now only drink at lunchtime.

Workers claim they were not consulted on the changes, which is why more than 250 have decided to strike in protest.

The mean bosses of Carlsberg said they would not be reversing the new policy.

"Carlsberg has pulled something over the heads of the workers. They won't have a dialogue with us," said Michael Christiansen, representing the striking employees. "We have never had a problem with accidents or anything with alcohol involved."

The strike has affected beer deliveries into the Danish capital as delivery drivers have gone on strike in sympathy with their co-workers.

Let us hope that the good proletarians of Denmark are willing to endure this beer famine in solidarity with the producers of such a vital product that lubricates the wheels of industry, not that we at *Freedom* would ever encourage comrades to become so inebriated that they cannot effectively contribute to the class struggle.

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## NEWS

## IN BRIEF

**PLANET:** Professor James Lovelock, the scientist who developed Gaia theory, has said it is too late to try and save the planet. The man who achieved global fame for his theory that the whole earth is a single organism now believes that we can only hope that the earth will take care of itself in the face of completely unpredictable climate change.

Interviewed by John Humphrys, he said that while the earth's future was utterly uncertain, mankind was not aware it had "pulled the trigger" on global warming as it built its civilisations.

**POLICE:** A Metropolitan Police officer accused of striking a woman with a metal baton at a G20 protest has been cleared of common assault.

Sgt Delroy Smellie denied attacking Nicola Fisher, 36, of Brighton, at the G20 demonstration in London in April last year. The officer told City of Westminster Magistrates' Court he feared objects in her hand were weapons.

District Judge Daphne Wickham cleared him of the attack. She found no evidence had been provided to show use of the baton was not measured or correct. She said: "It was for the prosecution to prove this defendant was not acting in lawful self-defence."

**MORE POLICE:** Disgraced senior officer Ali Dizaei has been dismissed from his job with immediate effect by the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA).

A tribunal had been deliberating on the action to be taken against the jailed police commander.

He was jailed in February for four years for misconduct and perverting the course of justice. The former senior police officer was found guilty of attacking and falsely arresting a web designer in 2008.

The 47-year-old commander had remained a police officer without powers at Scotland Yard since starting his jail term, but the MPA has now dismissed him.

**PUNK:** Malcolm McLaren, manager of the Sex Pistols, a "pop and roll band so beloved of young people today" as a judge once put it, has died.

McLaren once said that rock'n'roll "doesn't necessarily mean a band, it doesn't mean a singer, and it doesn't mean a lyric, really. It's that question of trying to be immortal."

McLaren, who died in Switzerland at the age of 64, was one of the tiny band of backstage figures who have left as indelible an imprint on popular culture as any singer or musician. As the manager and creator of the Sex Pistols and the owner, along with his then partner Vivienne Westwood, of the boutique Sex, he was the presiding impish visionary behind the punk movement that resulted in the revival of interest in anarchism in the 1970s.

## LENS CAP SECOND HONEST MAN TO ENTER PARLIAMENT



Everyone knows that Guy Fawkes was the only man to enter Parliament with honest intentions ... except there was another. John Bellingham paid a visit on 11th May 1812, and gave Prime Minister Spencer Perceval a lead-backed vote of no confidence that packed him off to the constituency of angels, or perhaps the wee guys with the three-pronged forks. Oh for the good ole days.

## BA strikers prepare for further action

Striking British Airways cabin crew remained defiant at the end of their latest walkout despite fears that chief executive Willie Walsh wants to 'break' their union.

At a noisy rally in central London on Tuesday 30th March union leaders vowed to support continued action until BA offers them an 'agreeable' settlement, including the reversal of moves to punish striking workers.

Tony Woodley, joint general secretary of Unite, the union that represents BA cabin crew, said "This vindictive removal of travel concessions is an impediment to a resolution".

The row between BA and its cabin crew threatens to become a protracted industrial dispute. On Monday 29th March Unite announced a special levy on all its branches to raise £70,000 to support BA staff through prolonged strike action.

Woodley warned the rally that "BA don't want concessions; they want capitulation".

BA management downplayed the impact of the strike. Chief executive Willie Walsh said that their "robust" contingency plans had "worked incredibly well". BA reported to the stock exchange that it was losing £7 million a day because of the strikes, but the airplane has a £1.5bn cash reserve to absorb losses.

Walsh may be gambling that new, flexible contracts with staff will more than offset the cost of industrial action. Shares in BA have risen by nearly a third since talks with Unite broke down at the end of last year.

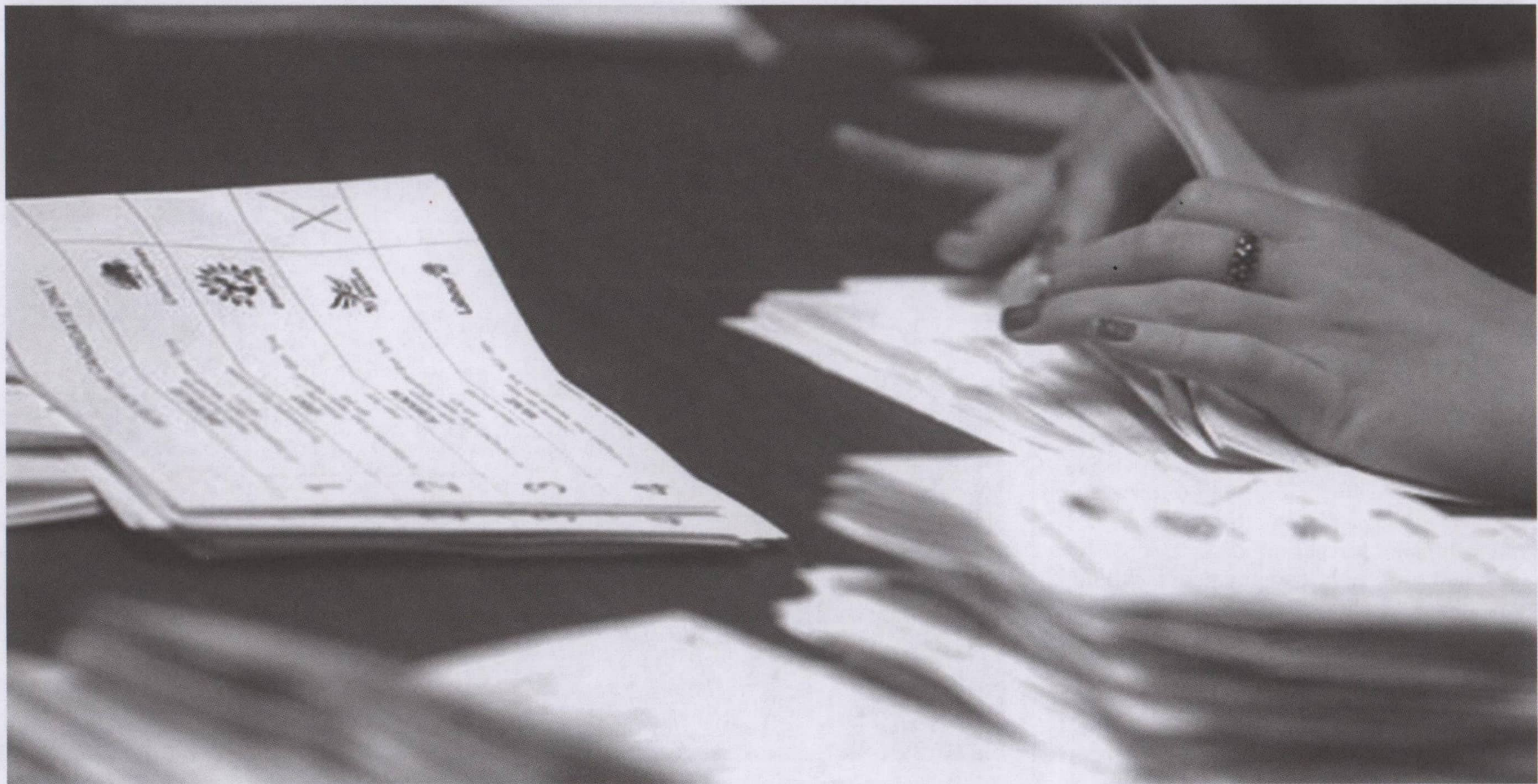
Earlier, hundreds of BA strikers gathered at a windswept sports clubhouse near Heathrow to be transported to pickets around the airport. Despite damp and unpredictable weather they maintained a carnival atmosphere with a sound system and bar.

Pickers were keen to vent their anger at Walsh and the BA management. All asked not to be named, out of fear of reprisals from bosses. Dozens of union organisers have already been put on disciplinary proceedings by the company.

The strike is ostensibly over plans by BA to reduce the number of cabin crew on long haul flights from four to three, but there are a number of deeper issues which staff are concerned about. Strikers said that they had already offered to take a pay cut, but wanted to retain benefits and maintain a high quality of service. Most had at least a decade's experience with the airline.

"It's about breaking the union, without a shadow of a doubt" said a part time flight attendant with 20 years experience. "The fact we've offered so many concessions and for all of them to be turned away."





# Why bother voting?

**As a taster to our forthcoming election special, the Anarchist Federation offers their take on voting**

Everyone knows that parties make promises in their manifestos that they have no intention of keeping. For example, when first elected 13 years ago, Labour promised to end child poverty by 2010. Today four million children in Britain are living in poverty – more than in any other European country. Events of 2009 further underlined how untrustworthy our rulers are, as many of them were revealed to be fiddling their expenses – despite earning £64,766 a year – and using various other sleazy tricks, such as employing members of their own families. Meanwhile many of the rest of have to scrape by on a

minimum wage of £5.80 an hour.

Despite superficial differences in their rhetoric, in reality life under any of the parties will feature the same things – cuts to public services, attacks on pensions, overcrowded classrooms, job losses, poor housing, under-equipped hospitals, poor public transport, and more war. Before the economic crisis, politicians were coming out with wild claims about the end of the cycle of boom and bust – an idea few of them would defend today. Then when the banks went into meltdown, they threw billions of pounds at them. The official cost of the bank bailout is a staggering £850 billion. That's a bill we will be forced to pay through cuts in public spending, no matter which party wins the election. Labour cuts will hurt as much as Tory cuts or Liberal Democrat cuts or Scottish or Welsh nationalist cuts.

The simple truth is that our 'representatives' don't represent us, and voting doesn't give us any say in the decisions that really matter.

That's why turnout in elections is dropping right across Europe – not because people are lazy or apathetic, but because they know that voting doesn't change anything.

In fact people are realising that voting isn't part of the solution – it's part of the problem. Voting means accepting this rotten set-up, pretending that we have a meaningful say in how things are run. The fact is that politicians couldn't really change anything even if they wanted to, because of the way the political system is set up. The main aim of Parliament is to keep things going the way they always have, so that a rich few at the top have all the power and the vast majority of us have none.

Not voting or spoiling your ballot paper is a symbol of wanting something better. The millions and millions of us who won't vote will be doing so because we don't believe the lies the politicians come out with, because we recognise that they're a part of our problems, not the answer to them, and because we want a better world.

## Election fever, or slight cold

◀ page 1

'Anarchist Manifesto' might look like, a page of practical tips on how to reclaim power over our own lives, contacts for local and national groups and a look at the nature of elections and democracy.

However, as a certain old bearded nearly said, 'lefties have only described elections, the point is to change them', so we're not planning to hide all the copies of this election special under our beds. We'll be

out on Brick Lane every Sunday along with our comrades from Whitechapel Anarchist Group engaging with the 'working class' – that is the people who do all the making and doing of useful things that allow the politicians, bankers and other rich parasites to live in luxury. We'll also be on the traditional Mayday March in London which goes from Clerkenwell Green to Trafalgar Square, scene of countless struggles against

authority, on 1st May. In a show of pleasing unity, all the national anarchist federations and many local groups are combining to form a block on this demo. A good sign, because we are going to need to show ever-greater solidarity and organisation as a class if we are to resist the cuts and attack on living standards that is the one jointly agreed plan of the professional political parties in this election.



## NEWS

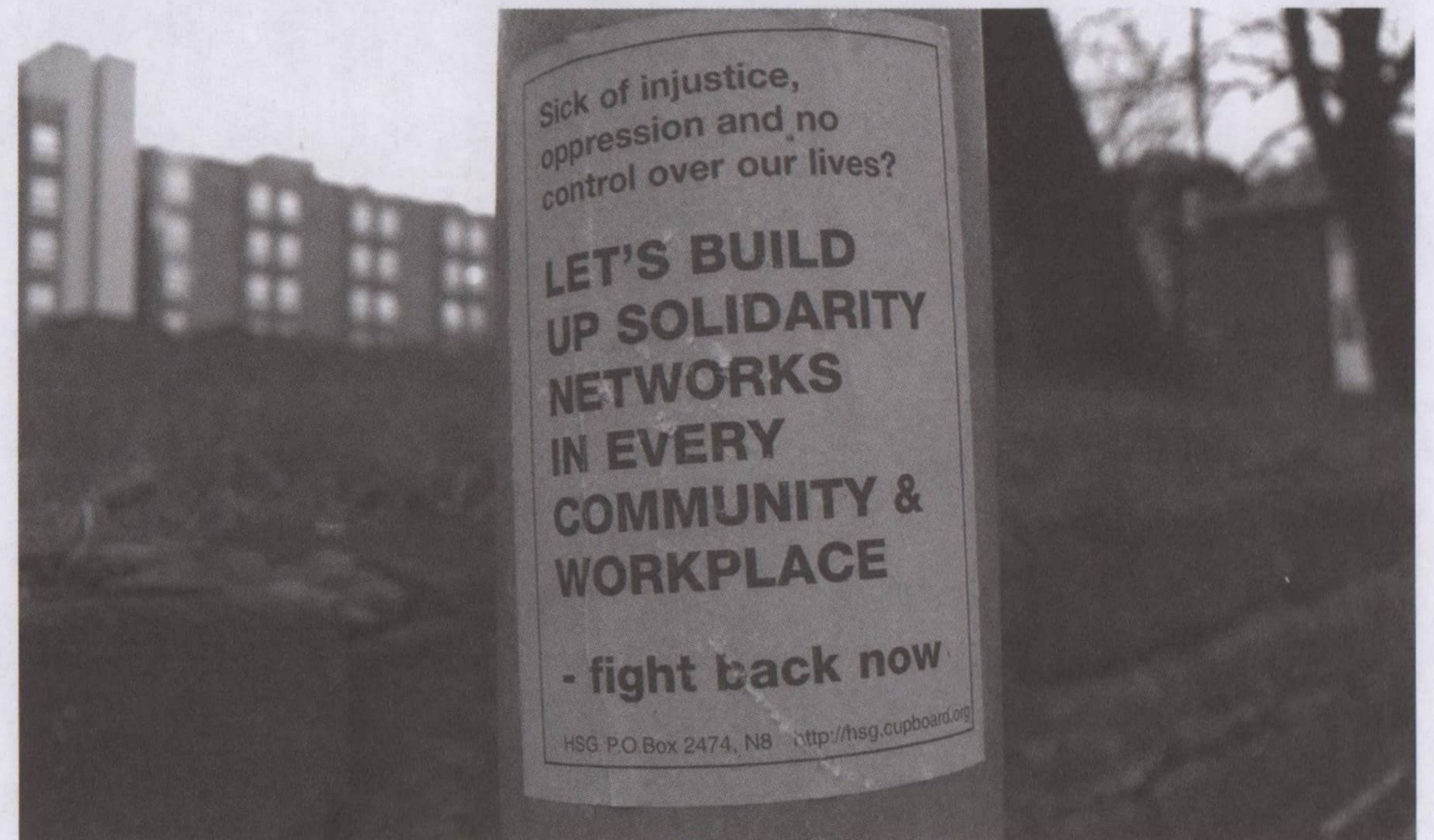
# Local groups for local people

About five years ago some of us organised the first Community Action Gathering at Oxford House in East London. The idea was to bring together activists from around the country who were working in their local areas on community based struggles. This could, for example, be working in a local tenants association or trying to save a local park, to people like us in Haringey Solidarity Group (HSG) who are a local-based libertarian group campaigning around a number of issues, pump out propaganda, ideas and information and have a bigger plan that just a single issue campaign for our area.

We had no idea how many people would come along, but in the end about 50 activists from around the country attended. The day-long event was really inspiring and the main concrete thing that came out of it was the setting up of the community action email list where we could share information and support each other. It also made us in HSG realise we needed groups similar to ourselves in every London borough and started in motion the present Radical London initiative.

Fast forward five years and a few people thought it was about time we met up again and moved the network on (well done James in south London for kicking it off). So, on Saturday 27th March about 30 of us from around the country met up at the Sumac Centre in Nottingham to discuss what we are all doing and see how we can be more organised and support each other better. There were people from local based libertarian/anarchist groups as well as others involved in their estate campaigns, local claimants groups, social centres and more.

Both in 2005 and in 2010, the general principles of the group were set out as to share information and experiences and to exchange our views as local activists. That way we



will be more effective and be able to make a real difference in our communities.

We aim to:

- share information, local experiences and views about some of the key issues affecting our communities;
- establish better links and communication channels among radical, community-orientated local groups and individuals;
- promote collective and non-hierarchical, open and horizontal forms of organisation;
- promote anti-authoritarian, anti-state, anti-capitalist and pro-community, pro-working class grass-roots politics – that is, the interests of people rather than of governments and corporations!

Without going into too much detail, there were a number of workshops discussing a variety of issues and strategies around local organising which everybody present seemed

excited about. To find out more about the day see [www.communityactionnetwork.wordpress.com](http://www.communityactionnetwork.wordpress.com).

As this wasn't and isn't presently intended to be a mandated body, no decisions could be or were made, but we did all share a lot of information and solidarity and we all left feeling a lot more inspired and realised we were not alone. The four of us who drove back to London managed to spend the next three hours continuing the discussion and buzzing from the day.

If there was a small criticism of the day, it was that a number of groups didn't come along. This could be that they didn't know about it, or couldn't get to it, but it might also be that we didn't build it up enough and groups might not have realised it was an event they would get something from and should be there. Hopefully in the future we can put this right and a lot more groups will come along and participate, share experiences and make links with others doing the same stuff in other parts of the country.

The Gathering felt it really important not to leave it another five years before we meet up again. So, we will be having a follow up gathering at the London Anarchist Bookfair on Saturday 23rd October, and a further gathering next year (details to follow nearer the time).

Secondly, we want to publicise the network and the email list set up all those years ago so that community-based groups and individuals have a place to network and swap information. To get yourself on the list email [CommunityActionList-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:CommunityActionList-subscribe@yahoo.com). The actual list is at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CommunityActionList>.

If you want to know more about the gathering, or want support setting up a local group, or just want to swap information, you can also email us at Haringey Solidarity Group at [info@haringey.org.uk](mailto:info@haringey.org.uk).

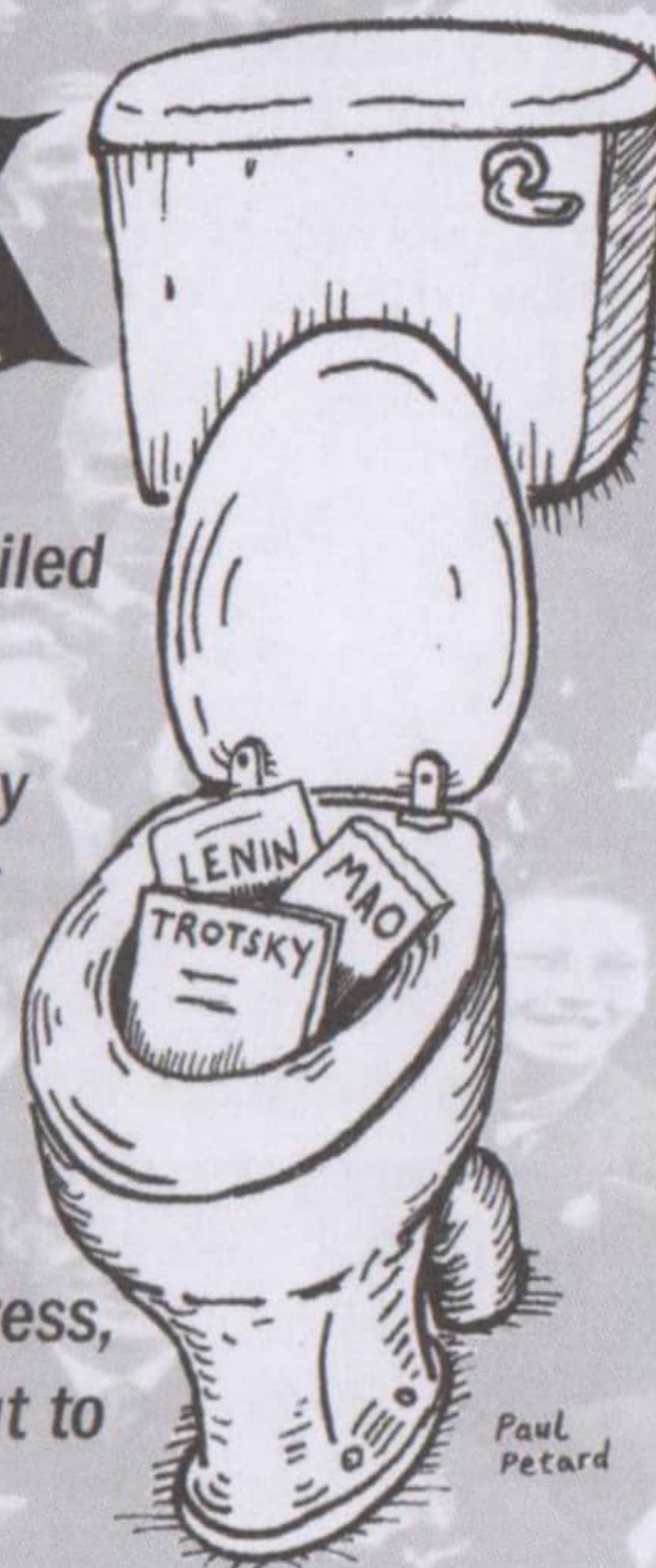
Tony Wood

## The Anarchist Quiz Book

Who said "I shit on all the revolutionary vanguards of this planet"?  
Find out in the new Anarchist Quiz Book from Freedom Press, compiled by Martin Howard and illustrated by Paul Petard.

Some say that it should not be the highest priority of a revolutionary movement to ask itself obscure questions, but it's good fun and if it encourages an enquiring mind to find out more, than all the better. So agitate, educate and organise, all in this very handy question and answer format!

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## IN BRIEF

In our last issue we said that even BAE Systems would suffer as whoever wins the election will struggle to pay off the bankers' bailout. However it looks like they still have some clout, as we learn from recent news:

**FRIGATES:** The Ministry of Defence has announced plans to spend £127m to design a new warship for the Royal Navy. The four-year contract to develop a design for a new frigate, the Type 26, has been won by BAE Systems. BAE was also given the go-ahead to start building the latest Astute Class nuclear submarine in Barrow-in-Furness.

The government says the new vessels will help to give the navy "cutting edge capabilities" while safeguarding the UK defence industry.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has confirmed the contract in spite of the £700m worth of efficiency savings it has promised to make as part of the government's overall spending cuts.

The Type 26 will be a frigate, like the Types 22 and 23 it will replace. But the MoD refers to it as a "combat ship" because it will be expected to be more flexible than its predecessors. An MoD spokesperson called it "the workhorse of the navy". In addition to being used in anti-submarine warfare, the Type 26 will be expected to provide support for land operations, carry out surveillance, intelligence, counter-terrorism and piracy operations and help with disaster relief and humanitarian aid projects.

**SUBMARINES:** Defence Secretary, Bob Ainsworth, said he had also agreed for BAE to start building the fifth of a planned seven Astute Class submarines in Barrow-in-Furness in the north-west of England, and begin procurement for the sixth. The contract is worth £300m to BAE. Mr Ainsworth said programmes like the Type 26 and Astute "not only ensure the Royal Navy continues to have cutting edge capability but also sustain the industry that supports them".

The Astute Class are "next generation" nuclear-powered submarines, described by the MoD as "the biggest and most advanced attack submarines ever ordered for the Royal Navy". BAE's website, which describes the Astute as an "underwater hunter-killer", says it will undertake a range of tasks including intelligence gathering, Special Forces and anti-submarine warfare. The company says Astute has greater weapons and operations capabilities and improved communications facilities compared to existing submarines. Armed with Tomahawk cruise missiles, BAE says it has a strike range of up to 2,000km.

**ADD-ONS:** Babcock International has also won a new MoD contract. The 15-year deal, worth around £1.2bn, is for provision of submarine support, maintenance and decommissioning services at Royal Navy bases at Devonport in the south-west of England and on Clydeside, Scotland.

# The ones to watch

## Six seats to watch at the General Election

Okay Comrades we're all agreed that elections are shit, but with your crate of brown ale and swingometer at your side here's the armchair anarchist's guide to election fun – the six seats to watch out for.

Barking is the BNP's only chance of winning a seat – but the only other possible winner is the equally loathsome Margaret Hodge. The Christian Party will take a chunk of the black vote away from Hodge so it could be close. If Griffin fails to win what will happen to the BNP'S electoral strategy?

In Poplar and Canning Town, will Galloway hang on to his MP's salary after moving across from Bethnal Green – very doubtful – more likely to come third. But George harbours dreams that Respect may win three seats and hold the balance of power! Crazy – but Respect is likely to be the only party of the left to poll at all well in certain seats...

... apart from Ricky Tomlinson, who may run against Luciana Berger in Liverpool

Wavertree in opposition to her not knowing who Bill Shankly was. Ricky will stand for the SLP and after deserved years in the sectarian wilderness Scargill may actually win a seat – then be afraid!

Caroline Lucas may win the Greens first seat in Brighton. I'd have wished Peter Tatchell well if illness had not made him stand down from the winnable Oxford seat for the Greens, otherwise I'll be looking for Derek Wall to win a Green landslide in Windsor and Eton.

Salford seems to be one of the few seats where the community has chosen an independent candidate to stand against a sitting MP. The Hazel Blears must go campaign has chosen David Henry with the support of the local community paper *The Salford Star*. Let's hope he wins.

Hampstead: where Tamsin Omond will be battling against Beatrice Campbell. Tamsin has formed her own party, whereas the Witchfinder General Campbell will be standing for the Greens who do well in leafy Hampstead. Glenda Jackson will see them both off.

Captain Swingometer





## INTERNATIONAL

### IN BRIEF

**COLOMBIA:** Hated president Alvaro Uribe has announced the expansion of his controversial Democratic Security Plan, which aims to build an extensive network of civilian spies across the country. As his second term ends Uribe has said the programme will be targeted towards rebellious students at the country's universities.

**FRANCE:** More than 500 people marched in the town of Chauny on 27th March against rising fascist activity in the area. A group of neo-nazis have been regularly 'taking over' the town square in recent months and intimidating locals. Police have been accused of turning a blind eye to their behaviour.

**GAZA:** The ruling Hamas party is expected to carry out its first executions since 2005 on the grounds of collaboration with Israel and on murder charges as *Freedom* goes to press. The group's military court has so far handed down 14 execution sentences for treason and murder and is expected to extend the verdict to drug dealers after a legal change in November of last year.

**GREECE:** Hundreds of Afghans have rejected proffered state sympathies after the killing of 15-year-old Afghan boy Hamidullah Najafi in a bombing on 29th March. A communiqué from 200 demonstrators at the Greek Parliament noted: "Is it simply that the government is trying to whitewash its zero-tolerance policy, which manifests itself daily in sweeping operations, deportations, tortures and dungeons called detention centres?"

**HUNGARY:** The country seems likely to continue its lurch to the far-right in upcoming elections, as racist nationalist group Jobbik is poised to become the second-largest party. It has capitalised on discontent in the country by blaming jews and gypsies for its economic woes.

**IRELAND:** Critics have slammed a recent deal between unions and public sector bosses which will cut wages, lose jobs and ban strikes for the next three years. The Workers Solidarity Movement noted: "We must reject this deal. But by rejecting it – we are also rejecting our union leadership. This is all they can do and all they can deliver for us."

**MALAYSIA:** Mass arrests have been carried out in the last few weeks as part of a major crackdown on migrants. Anyone found to have violated immigration law faces large fines, jail and caning. Refugee status is not officially recognised by the state.

**ZIMBABWE:** The government arrested well-known artist Owen Maseko on 26th March for his depiction of 1980s atrocities at a Bulawayo National Art Gallery exhibition. He faces charges of "undermining the authority of the President" and "causing offence to people of a particular tribe, race, religion".

### LENS CAP ARGENTINA



Thousands turn out in Rosario, Argentina, to march for the jobs of 26 media workers laid off from Group Onea, the country's second largest media group. The huge turnout was in support of left-wing staff who had declined major payouts to keep their mouths shut about a company purge of people considered too pro-worker in their outlook.

## Reprisals hit Belgrade Six after release

One of the Belgrade Six, recently released from jail and facing reduced charges after a highly politicised indictment for 'international terrorism', has spoken out about the aftermath of his and his comrades' release.

Ratibor Trivunac, who was general secretary of the IWA anarcho-syndicalist union when he was jailed, has warned that the Serbian government is looking to retaliate for its humiliation in court.

Serbian President Boris Tadic attempted to use a minor Molotov attack on the Greek Embassy in Belgrade as an excuse for a crackdown on the left last year.

The courts, picking up on Tadic's cue, tried to charge the Six with 'international terrorism', carrying a sentence of up to 15 years.

After a major international campaign, the

courts were forced to admit the existing charges were too harsh and have downgraded them to more minor vandalism.

However the defeat has angered the state, according to Ratibor. He said: "Experiencing a first defeat the state decided to use alternative forms of repression.

"Fascist posters titled 'Know your neighbourhood! Know the enemies of Serbia' emerged with the photo of one Belgrade anarcho-syndicalist and a member of the Six, Ivan Vulović, who lives there.

"A call to lynch them holds a fictional list of 'crimes' that ASI has committed and the phrase 'if a corrupt court will not judge them, there are those who will'.

"Many ASI members are under constant police surveillance and regularly threatened and interviewed by the police."

## Notes from the United States

Closures, sackings and a general destruction of the schooling system have been increasing in recent months, as have protests in reaction to it.

In Missouri in March, for example, the Kansas City Board of Education voted to close almost half of the city's schools. The budget deficit ostensibly causing this is US\$50 million (£33 million).

The board's response, the 'Right-Size' plan, would shut 28 of Kansas City's 61 schools and cut nearly a quarter of the city's 3,000 jobs, including 285 teaching roles.

In mid-March, city officials in Detroit also announced plans to close 44 of its publicly-funded schools later this year. That number might well go up – a further 13 closures are rumoured for 2011.

But protests continue. Also in middle of last month hundreds of college students rallied in Atlanta (Georgia) to protest at budget cuts, staff layoffs and increases in tuition fees in state-funded colleges. The university system of Georgia faces at least US\$350 million



# Haiti: back to guns and stitch-ups

## Rob Ray looks at the quiet takeover

As the media and US drift away from earthquake-stricken Haiti, remaining international troops are reinstating old oppressions, observers have warned.

The news undermines claims that the international community is pulling its troops out of the area and allowing civilian-led reconstruction efforts.

It also adds to fears raised by proposals to put Haitian reconstruction under the control of 'trustees' including a major US presence and allowing only a select group of Haitian elites a say in where a proposed \$9.9bn pot of aid money is spent.

As initial relief operations subside the original 9,000-strong UN peacekeeping force, comprised mainly of Brazilian troops, has reasserted control on the streets.

The force has been largely discredited in Haiti since 2005 when a dawn raid in Port-au-Prince saw 23 people killed as part of a campaign of harassment against slums which supported ousted left-wing president Jean Aristide.

The largest in a series of raids that year, the spectacle of blue-helmeted UN troopers burning buildings alongside the hated Haitian police force led to widespread condemnation and set the tone for four years of right-wing intimidation.

And in a new round of violence, on 29th March UN peacekeeping troops sprayed tear gas into a group of women who had been peacefully dividing up a sack of white rice –



UN peacekeepers try to control Haitians queueing for aid in Port-au-Prince

which an aid group had given to them just hours earlier.

"That's the way they act with us, they treat us like animals," one woman told a worker for the relief group World Vision.

The peacekeeping force, also known as Minustah, has set up a similar system to that used by the US in Iraq, with Green, Yellow and Red zones of control – Red zones are exclusively made up of slums.

The stepping up of UN security operations in Port-au-Prince comes as US troops are removed from the country.

Around 2,400 personnel are said to have remained from the original 20,000 sent in the aftermath of the recent earthquake and will be stood down entirely.

However critics have argued that the securing of key facilities and effective protection of political assets in the region has allowed the US, with UN backing, to

withdraw while retaining a huge influence over the country.

Most important has been the Obama administration's capturing of control over the spending of reconstruction money in Haiti – a technique which was notoriously used in the Iraq invasion.

All money pledged by the international community has been earmarked for a special fund supervised by the World Bank, which will then dole out money via a board of trustees led by hand-picked Haitians and some of the largest donors.

The US is by far the largest donor to the pot and has appointed Bill Clinton, along with Haitian prime minister Jean-Max Bellerive, to the group.

The setup allows the west unprecedented control of the country, effectively sealing a 'trusteeship' which one senior US Senator, Chris Dodd, had suggested last month.

## Notes from the Unites States

### ◀ page 6

(£230 million) in cuts in the next fiscal year.

At the same time in California teachers staged a protest by delivering 'pink slips' (notices of dismissal) to legislators and to governor Schwarzenegger. That state too is experiencing massive cuts – over 23,000 teachers there have recently received layoff notices.

When not being stripped back, the school system is often dominated by conservatism. The high school prom is the highlight of its social year, so the reaction of a Mississippi board to a lesbian student's choice to bring her partner as a date and wear a tuxedo seemed like overkill.

Itawamba Agricultural High School cancelled the prom.

Constance McMillen challenged the decision: "The message they are sending is that if they have to let gay people go to prom that they are not going to have one."

Conservatives on the Texas Board of Education have been working toward similar ends – but in different ways. In March they

approved a series of major changes to the state's social studies curriculum.

It now emphasises the superiority of American capitalism, questions the separation of church and state and emphasises Republican politics.

For example, pupils are now forced to study the conservative resurgence of the 1980s and 1990s, including Phyllis Schlafly, the Contract With America, the Heritage Foundation, the Moral Majority and the National Rifle Association – all doctrinaire right wing or proto-fascist pressure groups. In economics classes, free market advocates Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek will be required reading.

Half the state's four million students are Hispanic; yet attempts by Hispanic board members to include more Latino figures as role models in schools were defeated.

The legendary farm worker organiser Dolores Huerta was removed from the curriculum, as was the Mexican American painter Santa Barraza.

Louis Further

## French stomach for fight 'must go further'

Libertarian groups have called for mass action to 'go beyond pounding the pavement' in the wake of France's nationwide mobilisation on 23rd March, which has seen huge support from the general public.

In a communiqué, the Federation Anarchiste noted: "Social movements have been fragmented, but conflict is steadily increasing, taking on more radical forms. But this struggle is only being seen in closely monitored 'days of action'. We need a common response of the exploited, for a self-managed general strike."

Polls are indicating that up to 68% of the French public want unions to keep up the pressure on premier Nicholas Sarkozy in the wake of marches and walkouts in which some 800,000 people participated.

A survey by the CSA group found 84% of public sector staff and 63% in the private sector were in favour of taking further action.



# Elections: global and local issues

This issue we feature two articles looking at what's behind electoral politics on a macro and micro scale

## DEBT ROULETTE

Are the policies of the UK election being dictated by the ongoing financial disintegration taking place in the political margins of Europe?

In the last week the EU provided Greece with one of the most begrudging bailouts ever seen, Portugal saw its credit rating cut and Ireland nationalised a number of its banks. Scandinavian banks have been shivering over their exposure to the ongoing crises in the Baltic States, while Spain is relieved that so much of the speculators' attention remains on Greece as they struggle with their own economic problems.

In the UK the politicians are reduced to music hall magician acts, promising cuts with minimum of pain and the ability to magic savings while guaranteeing all important frontline services. What none of them are confessing to is why they feel they have to do this in the first place. None of them want to admit that the UK is as financially shaky as other marginal European nations. The system of debt has them by the balls and they know it. The decision-making power they have is superficial at best.

So far, the UK has kept its head above water through the promise of a general election, which allows big decisions to be postponed. All the politicians need to do at the moment is to make the right noises to keep the financiers who own the UK's government debt happy, while making promises to the electorate that they have not ability to keep.

Behind the scenes pressure is building up in the international financial markets for Britain to get its act together over the unsustainable

debt levels. Currently 10% of all tax revenues go to pay off the interest on the UK's debt, and the UK is looking to borrow more in the near future – and it is going to get more expensive.

In the UK government's favour is that most of its debt is in long term bonds with an average of 14 years before they have to be redeemed. This gives some breathing space, but whether it is enough is the big question exercising the finance markets. These are playing a waiting game while the 'Club Med' states of Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal hold their attention for the moment.

Most of the troubled countries focused on short term debt, which they would normally have renewed to avoid paying back the capital. As the financial crises deepened this became next to impossible for as the markets insisted on punishing them, either through demanding spending cuts or by increasing the cost of borrowing. So the money available to governments is drying up to, as happened to Greece. This of course being modern speculative capitalism there is plenty of money to be made, like Soros did a decade ago forcing Sterling out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism.

The politicians know all this and are playing to this audience, desperate to keep them sweet. Yet to admit it publicly is to accept that they have no real power over the economic situation. Hence the fiction of being tough on inefficiency, but protecting public services at the same time. Behind all their talk is the fear that if they do not get it right, the world of international finance will turn on the UK, slash its credit rating and even more of our taxes will go to pay off debt. With government spending amounting to around 45% of the UK economy, that translates into a lot of job cuts.

When the international financial markets of capitalism gamble on a country's debt like this, it forces the government to focus on its own gambles to hold them off.

Thus all political parties are claiming that their policies will stimulate economic growth and this in turn will give them the breathing



space to keep their promises while paying off the huge debt. With the housing market yet to make up its mind and the Irish experience showing that the financial sectors are still capable of draining billions, it remains quite a gamble.

However, it is increasingly clear that the people who are going to become the first victims of the cuts will be the public sector workers.

In most businesses the largest overheads are wages and pensions. It is even more so in the civil service and all its appendages and support organisations. So if you want to save money, the simplest course is fire people, the more the better. Thus, ordinary people will pay for the mistakes of politicians and the incompetence of consultants, while managers will continue to go on junkets to help them come to terms with them being able to keep their jobs.

So beware of politicians bearing gifts. The Tories new found love for co-operatives and New Labour's 'Mutuals' manifesto are ways of pushing the pain on to others. History shows that inclusive power-sharing only happens when there is pain to be shared around. It will be frontline public services who will have to make the difficult choices of which services to cut.

Donal

bills which in some cases were more than £12k, and which most had no choice over; the campaign which emerged in response has since shown that fraud and corruption riddled the 'investment' process).

The *Digger* magazine came to focus on crime and corruption in the council. Its editor, a paranoid La Ruche enthusiast, publishes weekly 'crime stocks' from the sheriff court. Many of its frequent stories about mobsters and gangland murders which are an everyday reality for much of its readership, came to provide an interesting backdrop to the eventual part-privatisation of Culture and Leisure Services, which itself provides the mis-ense for the city's great white hope, the 2014 Commonwealth Games.

In 2006, Cllr Gary Gray resigned from his seat in Milton over dodgy expense claims. There then followed the election of community campaigner Billy McAllister, on an SNP ticket. The main feature of the election campaign was the running of Chirnsyde Community Initiative (a youth football coaching club and community centre), and Chirnsyde Community Council, by the area's heroin dealing crime lord, Edward Lyons. For nearly a decade parents in the Milton area had been trying to oust Lyons from the role. Lyons (big pals with Bridget McConnell, the then Scottish First Minister's wife, who headed up the Council's Culture and Leisure Services), had secured over £200,000 in funding to the local community council to 'fight crime'. Lyons business (which on occasion saw him pull shotguns and attempt to murder rivals on-site) consisted of using children to run heroin, around the housing scheme. The police and McConnell protected him. Including during 2006, when the Lyons clan attacked the house of parents campaigners with a firebomb. However under pressure from locals and McAllister and the SNP, when a drugs war between the neighbouring heroin bigmen, in Possil, the Daniels family, escalated into a spate of shootings and arson attacks, McConnell could no longer protect Edward Lyons, and the centre was closed. An ignominious end to her premiership as, within months, her agency was farmed out to a limited liability partnership.

Now, as the bankrupt Labour Council suffers a series of shock resignations over 100,000 expense claim fiddles, mysterious deaths, allegations of 'chemical dependencies' and the revelation that the chief throughout this whole period has fled the country, it is high time we begin to investigate quite how the mob took over politics in this city, and the working class was missing, while much of the city's jewels were 'lost'. If we are to stand any chance of coming out of the next 'decade of austerity' with any quality of life remaining, Glasgow, and the past ten years of working class defeat, and drug-fuelled mob excess is a good place to look.

Nick Durie

## GLASGOW LOST

Glasgow Lost is the title of an influential website that was produced when Glasgow sold off its Culture and Leisure Services a few years ago to create a Limited Liability Partnership, Culture and Sport Glasgow, which is part of the way down the road to privatising museums, sports and recreational facilities. In the past couple of weeks, Steven Purcell, the disgraced head of Glasgow City Council for the past few years – a time of profound (and destructive) change for the city – has been missing from the public eye after he fled the country amid reports of mob connections, a 'chemical dependency' and the story that his 18 year old 'close personal friend' (a Labour aide) turned up dead outside the City Chambers, having died of a heart attack. Glasgow 'lost' is also the story that 100,000 voters have dropped off the city's voter roll since the last election. In a city of under 600,000 people that's a very significant number. This is the first in a series of short articles examining what it is that is missing to explain why a city with a strong left wing tradition and a numerically strong socialist movement has been comprehensively sold off, chopped up and mobbed up.

There is a popular magazine in Glasgow called the *Digger*. It began publishing in 2004. This was around the time that things started to go disastrously wrong in the city. (To put this comment in context, Glasgow has had near 50% unemployment levels since the 1980s saw the closure of most of the city's industries; the jobs have never been replaced, and many communities lie in ruins as a result. Things were already bad.) In 2003 the city had been the test bed for the largest wholesale stock transfer in history. The Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) was to be a clearing house before former council housing stock was carved up amongst 'social landlords' or demolished within ten years. But by 2004 things were beginning to become unstuck, and the right wing populist magazine ran a series of (sometimes extremely paranoid) housing exposes that many in the North West of the city could relate to. Council boss Purcell emerged as the city's figurehead in 2005.

By the end of the financial year, 2005–06, council parks had been semi-privatised. The for-profit factoring firm GHA Management Ltd had raised £2 million in profit, making a number of pensioners and vulnerable people homeless in the process, from massive fees slapped on right to buy homeowners (working class 'owners' were given up to a year to pay





## COMMENT

## ABOUT FREEDOM

## ANGEL ALLEY

It's been another two weeks of seemingly endless drizzle in the alley. Despite this, the occupants of 84b are all cheery and busy with the class struggle. Our local anarchist group WAG (yes, you guessed it, the Whitechapel Anarchist Group) have been dishing out their free news-sheet in Brick Lane and we have gone along as well to give out the last copies of the old edition of *Freedom* to save them from recycling.

Our Sunday opening at the bookshop is going well and sales are nearly as good as an average weekday even though we're only open until 4pm.

Our apologies to subscribers in the UK who have got the last two issues by second class mail. This is not a desperate cost-cutting measure but the result of what we are calling the 'great stamp fiasco'.

Anticipating the rise in stamp prices on 6th April, we resolved to stock up in advance on first class (for single-issue UK posting) and second class large letter stamps for bundles (which were going up by 4p, an 8.5% rise, and thus the biggest saving we could make). Tragically the noble comrade who volunteered to go to the Post Office got ordinary second class stamps instead, which we now have to use up, but even worse was when we ordered the first class stamps on the interwebnet and the Royal Mail sent us non-sticky stamps, so we are now looking for comrades with especially licky tongues to help with future mailouts.

The owl we featured in issue 7104 (27th February) was, of course, a Blakiston's Fish Owl, a native of north-eastern Asia and one of the world's two largest owls. The non-prize for closest guess goes to Paul Newton for picking the closely related Brown Fish Owl, while the non-prize for worst guess goes to Gawain Williams for suggesting it was one of the Angel Alley rats in drag.

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## NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 24th April 2010 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 16th April. You can send your articles to us by email to [copy@freedompress.org.uk](mailto:copy@freedompress.org.uk) or by post addressed to 'The Editors', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

## A sideways look

by SVARTFROSK

The late Colin Ward used to write approvingly of the plotlanders, free spirits who built their own homes out of what they could find on scraps of land in Essex, in the years before planning laws. I used to feel that at least some regulation of their buildings was a good idea, if only to stop unsafe buildings and keep the eyesores to a minimum. I'm coming round more to his idea that people should be allowed to just get on with it. The current situation only benefits the wealthy, who can always get round planning laws. It's also an excuse for some thinly-disguised racism whenever the plots being built on are inhabited by gypsies or travellers.

My local paper is filled with stories about planning and development decisions – apart from crime stories it's pretty much all they have. Often, local residents object, the council supports them, but then ends up granting planning permission anyway because they can't afford to fight the court case.

If politics is about how resources are divided up and used, it's perhaps understandable why local politics is dominated by property development issues. Local councils have no real powers on most things. Education is controlled by central government through the national curriculum and funding. Social services are subject to central planning and tied into the NHS. Most local authorities have little sway over things except in planning, where there is both money and the ability to influence what happens.

It's also why passions can run so high. My local primary school was due to be decanted and rebuilt this Easter. The Brockley Society, an amenity society based in a nearby conservation area, successfully mounted a legal challenge to the development on a technicality in the planning application. The council admitted that they were at fault, the decant was cancelled with a week's notice and parents are now having to wait to see what will happen, while thousands are spent on security for the decant buildings.

What's interesting about this is that the reaction of the majority of the parents at the

school has been very hostile to the Brockley Society, more so than the council who messed up the planning process. Aside from the disruption to the planned decant, what's concerned most parents is that any chance of a rebuild could be lost. With an election looming and cuts promised by everyone, keeping inadequate school buildings, especially if some conservation-minded people like them, would be a quick win for the Treasury. Most of the pro-rebuild parents aren't massively happy with the plans or the scale of the decant, but recognise that the school desperately needs a rebuild, having had funding pulled five years ago.

But class is also a factor – the school is very mixed, both racially and socially. When there was a meeting at the school about what would happen next, one of the Brockley Society parents told everyone that they had been 'brainwashed' if they disagreed with her! While the council and politicians present said that the money was safe for now, the local MP said that if the work hadn't started by March 2011, it couldn't be guaranteed – even under her Labour government! Many of the parents I spoke to felt disempowered by the whole process. The Brockley Society is made up of relatively well-off people in nice Victorian houses who are good at getting objections to changes in. They say on their website that their resources are meagre, but they were still sufficient to mount a legal challenge and get a glossy brochure done with a draft alternative plan. They also present themselves as representing a majority of parents but it certainly appears to me to be a minority, and quite a small one at that.

With more money or time, the site could be designed to please everyone – except it is opposite the cemetery, which is listed, thus restricting what can be built opposite it. So whatever is built will be a compromise. I note that such considerations don't apply to Hampton Court or the City of London skyline, both threatened by overbearing developments, but in Lewisham the dead count for more than the living it seems.



Brockley cemetery: do the dead count for more than the living in Lewisham?



## LETTERS

## History repeats itself

How things don't change! In the eighteenth century, the vast majority of the population were excluded from power by a corrupt political elite, who had the parliamentary processes all sown up in the interests of the rich, i.e. themselves and their mates (sound familiar?). The poor could see that the electoral circus meant nothing to them.

In response, some set out to take the piss out of the whole charade. In the South London village of Garratt (in modern Wandsworth), from the 1740s to the 1790s, mock elections were held for the fictional office of Mayor of Garratt. Huge crowds flocked to a rowdy and fantastic parade and drinking spree, centred on a fake contest, featuring ridiculous candidates making grandiose speeches, promising the impossible if elected and swearing oaths filled with sexual innuendo? The candidates were always poor tradesmen, usually with a drink problem and sometimes with a physical deformity. The main qualification was a quick wit and lively personality. Candidates assumed fake aristocratic names, and members of the crowd dressed up in gaudy clothes mocking the finery of the rich.

From the 1760s the elections were associated with radical politics: demands for reform of the political system and protests against economic hardships and the lack of liberty for the labouring classes began to appear in the speeches. Gradually the fake elections became more and more subversive, especially in the 1790s, following the French Revolution and widespread agitation for reform or even revolution in England. The governing classes, scared stiff of uprisings, the loss of their wealth, property and control of society – and the removal of rich heads, as in France – cracked down on the reformists. The Garratt election didn't escape. In 1793, Jeffrey Dunstan, the drunken, satirical Mayor of Garratt, four feet tall, funny, filthy and wildly popular, was jailed for seditious speechifying. The Garratt election gradually died out. The idea was so much fun though that in 1827 inmates in the Kings Bench Prison in Southwark organised their own election for an MP to represent them. It went so well the prison governor sent in the warders to beat them all up and a riot followed.

It may not change the world, but why don't we revive the Garratt tradition, with a vengeance this time, everywhere? We could hold mock elections, in the streets, parks, or even inside the polling stations on election day (till they chuck us out!), at work, school or on the bus, we could stir up a huge non-stop mickey-take of the meaningless parliamentary smokescreen, disrupting, engaging with others, having a laugh, but showing we aren't taken in? Why not elect your ranty mates, or whoever – maybe they could all turn up at the House of Commons on opening day and claim to be an Honourable Member too? Would your pet gerbil make a good MP? We could also revive other fun practices from our history. The Suffragettes were fond of following candidates they opposed around and disrupting all their elections speeches, which would be a laugh, especially with mega-

phones or sound systems. These are just two ideas – there's a million more ways to trash the dash for cash. Let's use our imaginations, go for it, and not get nicked! Having fun together is more real than parliamentary puppet shows. The more chaos and disorder, the more disruption, the more open rejection of the empty lie of democracy, the more fun we'll have the more potential for real change.

Past Tense

For more on the Mayors of Garratt, the pamphlet *The Mayor of Garratt*, published by Past Tense, is available at £1.50 (including postage), cheques payable to Past Tense Publications and sent to: Past Tense, c/o 56a Info Shop, 56 Crampton Street, London SE17 3AE.

## On prison riots

There has been a tremendous amount of media space devoted to recalling the Strangeways prisoner rebellion in the run up to the 20th anniversary, mostly in the form of reminiscences of those who took part. Paul Taylor, putative 'leader' of the prisoners, has even been commissioned by the *Manchester Evening News* to write a week's worth of articles and was also on the news warning today's prisoners not to riot as prison officers might get hurt (I thought it might be one of the BBC's April Fool's Day pieces, but clearly not).

There have also been column inches devoted to Brendan O'Friel's (the governor at the time) revisionist and self-justificatory version of history: 'I didn't see it coming but I could have retaken the prison on day one had the Home Office allowed me to', to paraphrase his claims. The first one may be true but later is definitely fantasy and would have led to fatalities. Interestingly, the screws involved, and the POA, itself have been largely silent on the subject; not surprising really given that endemic brutality by prison officers was the spark that set off the explosion.

Much has also been made about the reforms in the wider prison regime that came as a

direct result of the Woolf inquiry into the riot: the pledge to end slopping out; the introduction of payphones (even if the call rates are currently extortionate); lower security categorisation for remand prisoners and a Prisons Ombudsman; the division of prison establishments into small and more manageable and secure units (we're still waiting).

However, there are two important results of these 'reforms' that have had no coverage: the introduction of the Incentive and earned Privileges Scheme (IEPS) and prison privatisation. The first was the government's response to Woolf's recommendation for a 'compact' or 'contract' for each prisoner setting out the prisoner's expectations and responsibilities whilst in the prison system. Inevitably the powers that be choose to use it to introduce a new system for controlling prisoners' behaviour, one based on earned rewards or privileges (IEPS – money, extra visits, hire a TV, be able to smoke) versus an ostensibly separate system of punishment (the Prison Rules).

IEPS is also directly tied into the prison labour system, in that unless you are willing to work you get no prison pay, and if you don't work to a high enough standard you get that pay reduced or taken away completely. And these jobs are strictly limited, so prisoners are directly in competition with each other. The result: a well-behaved work force that do not take holidays or days off and a loath to go 'on strike'. Thus the prison system has become ripe for exploitation by private enterprise via Prison Industries' workshops and wholesale privatisation of the prisons themselves. A brave new world, and one that will become even more entrenched whoever gets in after the next election.

Joe Black

Campaign Against Prison Slavery (CAPS)

CAPS is currently massively expanding its on-line database of private companies involved in exploiting forced prison labour in the UK following a series of successful Freedom of Information applications. See <http://www.againstprisonslavery.org/>

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## GETTING ACTIVE

### PRISON NEWS

In the last issue we reported on recent prison deaths in Mexico. The Mexican prison system has been back in the news again, this time for a mass prison breakout on 25th March involving 41 prisoners. The prisoners, mostly being held on federal charges such as murder and kidnapping, were being held at the Centro de Ejecución de Sanciones in Matamoros, close to the US-Mexico border. Two prison guards were also reported as missing and are presumed to have aided the escape. As a result, the prison governor and the state director of remand prisons were both sacked and the entire prison staff placed under investigation for complicity in the escape.

Two days prior to the Mexican breakout, an unnamed prisoner also managed to go on the lam from Butyrka prison, the largest and oldest pre-trial detention centre in Moscow. Prison authorities are baffled as to how he managed to scale the 5-metre high outer wall topped with razor wire. The last prisoners to escape from the notorious detention centre was in 2001 when three inmates dug a tunnel under the wall. All were later recaptured.

In the US on the same day, 25-year-old Sylvester Jiles was sentenced to 15 years for trying to break into the prison he had been released from just three days before. Having taken a plea deal of eight years probation on a manslaughter charge, he returned to the prison begging guards to lock him up for his own protection as his victim's family had threatened to kill him. They refused, so he scaled a 4-metre high wall into the prison. He was arrested for parole violation and hospitalised for the deep cuts he sustained from the razor wire-topped fence. His crime: trespassing on jail property.

#### Con fax hacks facts

The ingenuity of prisoners in getting around the rules never ceases to amaze. In a system where phone calls are strictly monitored and far more expensive than for those on the outside, it has recently been discovered that prisoners in Miami-Dade jails managed to hack into home fax lines. They ran up tens of thousands of dollars in collect calls billed to unsuspecting people, amongst whom were a South Florida federal court judge and the county architect who helped design one of the Miami-Dade jails. Global Tel\*Link® – who operate the jail collect- and prepaid-call systems across the US – has had to reimburse customers nearly \$200,000 for almost two years worth of these prisoner-made calls.

#### Sounds of silence

As part of the government's recent cutbacks in the Prison Service, screws will no longer be able to listen to the radio whilst they sit with their feet up struggling through their sudoku or quick crossword puzzle, as the Prison Service are now refusing to pay fees to the Performing Rights Society. Fortunately, as cells are classed as 'homes', cons can continue to listen, providing they have been allowed under the IEP scheme to have a radio, cassette or CD player in the first place.



● Another national planning meeting under the heading **No to Welfare Abolition** has been set for 17th April in Manchester. It is an opportunity for welfare and disability rights activists, members of unemployed workers' groups and trade unionists to get together, build links of solidarity and plan their strategies over the introduction of New Labour's controversial Welfare Reform Act. People who are organising to defend welfare or want to start doing so, are invited to come along and get involved in the day event. Free lunch will be provided.

The organisers ask people who are attending to email [hackneyunemployedworkers@gmail.com](mailto:hackneyunemployedworkers@gmail.com) for confirmation.

Contact [rebecca.galbraith@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rebecca.galbraith@yahoo.co.uk) if you want to use the free crèche.

Join the email discussion list at: <http://groups.google.com/group/no-to-welfare-abolition>

● East London's **Hackney Housing Group** pulled off a successful demonstration on Friday 9th April by fasting for a day outside the council town hall. Along with London Coalition Against Poverty and Hackney Unemployed Workers the day was organised to highlight the poor housing conditions suffered by those living in either temporary accommodation, or overcrowded and unsuitable premises. Amongst their demands were that the local council should spend what resources they have on social housing, not 'affordable' housing and increase their social housing stock.

They also accused the council's housing and overcrowding strategies of not meeting the needs of ordinary people in the area.

● The recently formed **Tyneside Claimants Union** has now gone online with its own

website. The group itself continues to meet every other Tuesday at 11am at the Star and Shadow Cinema, Stepney Bank, Battlefield, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 2NP, and is open to anyone claiming benefits in the Newcastle area, or need advice, support or help as an unemployed worker.

Their web address is: <http://tynesideclaimantsunion.wordpress.com/about/> or they can be contacted by email: [tynesideclaimantsunion@googlemail.com](mailto:tynesideclaimantsunion@googlemail.com)

● The **London Education Workers Group**, who have been active in the recent English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers dispute at Tower Hamlets College, are holding a public meeting on Thursday 29th April to discuss the continued attack on the education system and ways workers in education can mobilise effectively against it. It is free and open to all.

Speakers will include members from both Solidarity Federation and Anarchist Federation and, hopefully, someone active in the Sussex university occupation. The meeting will be at the Lucas Arms on the corner of Grays Inn Road and Cromer Street, London WC1. Any education workers interested in getting involved should contact the group via email at [londonewg@gmail.com](mailto:londonewg@gmail.com)

● Anarchists braved the damp spring weather and met on 31st March in London's Trafalgar Square to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the **Poll Tax riots**. Despite not as many people turning out as they did for the original demo in 1990 (see picture above), there was no shortage of angry speakers to recreate the fiery passions that were evident twenty years ago, as a defiant working class brought down the dreaded tax and the dreaded Tory prime minister.



# The Summer of Rage?

## A critical look at the G20 protests in London, one year on...

The piece below first appeared anonymously on the Indymedia website. We recreate here in an attempt to provoke debate amongst anarchists on the future of political activism in this country.

At the beginning of the year, the forecast was hopeful. We were told we were in the midst of a crisis. Each week another bank/factory/country went bankrupt. And everywhere a response: riots in Greece, unrest in France, occupations in Italy. Even in Britain, people were responding. The unions, the Stop the War Coalition, were losing control: workers went on wildcat strikes and February's Stop the War trudge turned into something approaching a riot.

And we were told that the summer would kick off at the G20 counter-summit, when the recession's 'victims' would come out to fight. We were told when, where and how we would protest – and the invite was made by no less than the country's most senior police officer, delivered via the great British media. Mobs and cells of hate-filled, masked-up, dirty-sofa-owning anarchists, who recruit children and foment protest, were to be hosted by hundreds of riot cops, all leave cancelled. The date: April Fools' Day.

Any suspicion over accepting an invitation from a cop was forgotten in our desperate hope that this time it was for real, that this was the beginning of the end of capitalism – after all, didn't they say something like that on *Newsnight*? – that this would be a counter-summit that went over the summit and out the other side.

We made our separate ways there and our separate ways home. Gone were the days of the anti-road protests, when the meeting at Bank was the culmination of something more – a mass movement apparently moving somewhere. All that united us now was nostalgia, a sense of not being quite sure what we were doing, where we were going – Have we met before? Shall we dance? Whose streets? – rage diffused to confusion.

A decade on, and the terrain hadn't changed – we were even using the same map, still 'Squaring Up to the Square Mile', acting out the same roles, in the same place, but this time the cops were directing. While in those ten years we had lost any kind of strength, the police had been perfecting their response – to learn when to contain, when to hit out, when to arrest, when to take pictures, when to go home.

And they told us why we were there – our battle was with the banks. After all, we were reminded time and time again that this was a crisis not of economics, but of finance; not



systemic, but cultural. The Bank of England would play its role as the physical centre of the crisis. Bankers had long ago been auditioned as the baddies: in the media, by the politicians, by the *Socialist Worker*. Old anarchists were wheeled out by the BBC to warn that bankers would be hung from lampposts, and cops told city workers to disguise themselves in casual clothes, presumably to avoid a hanging. We were provided with a symbolic outlet for the rage – RBS, the baddest of all the bad banks, was left as bait: its windows unboarded.

And we fell for it. For every protestor there were five cameras: smash, smash, smash; flash, flash, flash. The climax – again and again on televisions across the country. Each time a little more unsatisfactory, each time a little more removed – they frame us to act, then frame us in photographs. If our action was ever ours in the first place, it certainly wasn't any longer. Watching from their living rooms, people were replayed the powerlessness of the protestors, the power of the police; the powerlessness of protestors, the power of the police. Later, arrests. The window is repaired. You won't try that again.

Nearby, Climate Camp looks like a bad memory of the sixties: tents, flowers, samba, baked potatoes... except now there's a CCTV camera watching it all. But the 'good protestors' don't get away without a good battering. The cops go in with truncheons. The campers, with upraised and open hands, chant the last words of the day: 'This is not a riot'.

There would be no riots that summer. Any pretensions we might have had about our power were shown to be foolish: we had been got. Nothing is more indicative of this than that somebody was murdered without a response – we hardly even noticed. The repercussion consisted of a couple of funereal marches, a few letters in the *Guardian*, an enquiry in the distant future, a new Climate Camp that made friends with the cops, and praise for police reform, again – a summer of middle class 'outrage' and reconciliation. The cops weren't afraid of beating to kill, for they knew – as we should – that there would be no fighting back, because there was nothing there to fight back – we were nothing more than those few hours at Bank. 'We' do not exist.

Capitalism might be in crisis, but its defences are alive and well. When *Newsnight* asked whether Marx was right – is this the end of capitalism? – it was proof of the opposite, proof of a confidence that such a question would be answered with little more than knowing chuckles in middle-class living rooms. The real crisis is not in the state, but in resistance.

If whatever it was that turned up at Bank last year – this weak, containable, directionless scene of a 'scene' – means anything to capitalism, it is as assistance not resistance. And if the cops were fighting anything that day, it was the threat of something else: some other people, some other ways, some other summers.



## REVIEWS

## WHAT'S ON

## 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](mailto:sam@samjackson6.orangehome.co.uk).

**10th** Anarcha-Feminist Weekend, two days of workshops, skill sharing and fun from 10am on Saturday until 4pm on Sunday at Manchester Students Union, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PR, for details email [anarchafeminist@af-north.org](mailto:anarchafeminist@af-north.org) or see <http://af-north.org/?q=anarcha-feminist> or <http://tinyurl.com/anarchafeminist>

**14th** Confront Counter Terror: Expose the Expo, demo outside the two-day exhibition of arms and surveillance technology at Olympia, Olympia Way, Kensington, London W14 8UX from midday, for details email [counterterror@dsei.org](mailto:counterterror@dsei.org) or see [dsei.org/confront-counter-terror](http://dsei.org/confront-counter-terror)

**17th** The ninth Anarchist Bookfair in Ghent at 'De Centrale', Kraankinderstraat 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium, from 10am until 8pm, for more details or to book a stall email [aboekenbeurs@yahoo.com](mailto:aboekenbeurs@yahoo.com) or see [www.aboekenbeurs.be](http://www.aboekenbeurs.be)

**17th** No to Welfare Abolition national planning meeting at Manchester University Students Union, Rooms MR1 and MR2, Steve Biko Building, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PR, from 11.30am for 12 noon start until 5.30pm, email [hackneyunemployedworkers@gmail.com](mailto:hackneyunemployedworkers@gmail.com) to say you're coming along, for free crèche contact [rebecca.galbraith@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rebecca.galbraith@yahoo.co.uk) or join the email discussion list at: <http://groups.google.com/group/no-to-welfare-abolition>

**17th and 18th** Social centres in times of crisis, a weekend of workshops, discussions and socialising at The Commonplace, 23-25 Wharf Street, Leeds LS2 7EQ, Saturday 10am until 6pm, Sunday 11am until 1pm, for details email [socialcentres2010@googlemail.com](mailto:socialcentres2010@googlemail.com) or see [thecommonplace.org.uk](http://thecommonplace.org.uk)

**24th** Campaign Against the Arms Trade gathering, your chance to meet supporters of CAAT and get involved, meet at The Anglican/Methodist Church Centre, Prewett Street, Redcliffe, Bristol BS1 6PB from 10.30am until 4.30pm, see [caat.org.uk](http://caat.org.uk) for details or call 020 7281 0297 or email [rhiannon@caat.org.uk](mailto:rhiannon@caat.org.uk)

**29th** London Education Workers Group public meeting – education, education, education or cuts, cuts, cuts? – at the Lucas Arms 245a Grays Inn Road, Kings Cross, London WC1X 8QZ at 7pm, contact [londonewg@gmail.com](mailto:londonewg@gmail.com)

## MAY

**1st** Mayday Meltdown, meet at 1pm and 2pm at various points around central London, see [http://meltdown.uk.net/election/The\\_Plan\\_Mayday.html](http://meltdown.uk.net/election/The_Plan_Mayday.html) for details.

**8th** Working Class Bookfair, from 11am until 5pm at Museum Vaults, 33 Silkworth Row, Sunderland, call 07931201901 or see <http://workingclassbookfair.vpweb.com>

## FILM

## Precious

directed by Lee Daniels

Lee Daniels consistently chooses interesting projects transgressing conventional boundaries of race, class and sexuality – producing *Monster's Ball* (2001: Halle Berry's widow of executed murderer falling in love with Billy Bob Thornton's prison guard), *The Woodsman* (2004: Kevin Bacon's convicted paedophile struggling against reoffending), and *Tennessee* (2008: Mariah Carey's battered wife fleeing to Country & Western stardom); and directing *Shadowboxer* (2005: Helen Mirren's elite assassin having 'incestuous' relationship with adopted son Cuba Gooding Jr), and now *Precious*. Championed from obscurity to major distribution by high-liberals like Oprah Winfrey and sundry music industry pals, this film condenses the novel *Push* (1996) by performance poet and literacy teacher Sapphire which chronicles the 1987 Harlem passage of overweight, illiterate teenager Clareece 'Precious' Jones (Gabourey Sidibe) from passive household slave of her monstrous mother (Mo'Nique) to relative independence with her own two young children.

Our heroine's suspended spiritual animation in a poverty-stricken, crack-ravaged family finds respite only in a blinged-out music video fantasy world where, at last, she feels valued. Expelled from school when her second pregnancy is discovered (resulting from regular rape by her father), she escapes physical, emotional and sexual maternal violence into a special educational programme. Here, thanks to fractious camaraderie among peers and the caring ministrations of welfare professionals (whose saintliness enormously strained my credulity), she slowly gains self-confidence, finally confronting her maternal nemesis. Overall, the sentimental trajectory recalls Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* – thankfully without Spielberg's glossy aestheticisation; instead Daniels focuses closely on Precious

awakening from her lurid nightmare to the downbeat realism of muted light and colour, coaxing a tremendous restrained performance from the debutant Sidibe. But this hyper-individualisation hides the complexity of the social and cultural environment, encouraging purely personalised judgments about characters without sufficient context to understand them.

## Squaring the vicious circle

If Mo'Nique deserves acclaim for her blistering but nuanced portrait of an infantile narcissistic 'bad mother', it's ironic that the film was released contemporaneously with John Lee Hancock's *The Blind Side*, featuring Sandra Bullock's pitiful Oscar-winning Sarah Palin shtick as a rich Southern mom mentoring a homeless black kid to sports fame. Whether elite private or state-funded PC philanthropy, the cinematic goodness of paleface hearts remains, it seems, key to African-American uplift – despite a somewhat Pyrrhic victory for Precious (a 1980s HIV diagnosis being a likely death sentence). Daniels' dedication – 'To all the precious girls' – is surely genuine, based on personal knowledge from a rough Philadelphia childhood, honouring all those from abusive backgrounds who don't visit similar horrors on others. Unusually enough, he successfully depicts this hellish family anti-romance without succumbing to risks of 'poverty porn'. But skimping on crucial social and historical detail as well as, cripplingly, convincing evidence of this survivor's personal flowering, creates equally dishonest wish-fulfilment. Self-esteem after soul-destroying early years is hard-won enough, without pandering to the complacency not just of charitable celebrities but everyone whose relative privilege depends on a system devoted to reproducing the conditions which nourish depravity.

[www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)  
<http://libcom.org/blog/4271>



## QUIZ ANSWERS

1. In 1998, the Criminal Justice Act changed the penalties for piracy with violence and treason to a maximum of life imprisonment, thus abolishing the death penalty.
2. It came from the Joe Hill song *The Preacher and the Slave*, which parodied a hymn with the refrain "You'll get pie in the sky when you die".
3. It is one of the world's hottest chillies, known as 'ghost chilli', and Indian officials

want to use it for teargas-like grenades to immobilise suspects.

4. Companies buy life insurance policies off older people, then pay the premiums hoping for a quick death. The business was worth an estimated \$31bn in 2008 and the FSA has "significant concerns" over their marketing. They are euphemistically known as 'high-yield senior life settlement bonds'.



# A lost world

Anton Pawluk sifts through the findings of a new history offering evidence of anarchy in action since the very outset of civilisation

Much of our understanding of human history, certainly if we take the long view, stands reality on its head. Such is the argument of James C. Scott's recently published *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009), a work which appears neatly to combine two chief concerns of his past research into a radical new theory about humanity's movement towards civilisation.

Throughout his writing Scott has consistently argued that the everyday resistance of subalterns (the dumped on and dispossessed, to you and me) clearly demonstrates that they have not consented to the dominance they experience. The much vaunted social contract – that precarious keystone of liberal mythology – is a specious nonsense. *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) studied the varied but parallel ways peasant peoples throughout the world resist authority. Following on from this, in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990) he broadened his focus in order to argue that all subordinate groups resist in ways similar to peasants. More recently, *Seeing Like a State* (1998) surveyed numerous instances of authoritarian state planning, all of them with calamitous outcomes, and argued that centrally-managed social plans tend to fail because they attempt invariably to force 'legibility' upon their subjects (i.e. impose a fixed, ordered and regulated structure open to ready administration by state authorities), and thereby lose access to local customs and practical knowledge that are better suited to their environment.

His latest book brings his analysis of subalterns and state practice together to provide, as the sub-title suggests, an anarchist history of Zomia, a mountainous region of South-East Asia roughly the size of Europe that comprises the upland portions of seven different countries (India, Burma, China, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia). The result is a fascinating insight into the region that brings Scott to a radical conclusion with regard to the conventionally understood history of the subject's relationship to the state.

The traditional and somewhat patronising narrative of civilisation is that of a voluntary, progressive, unidirectional movement from 'barbarian' forms to 'civilised' subjecthood under the state, a process naturalised as analogous to the growth from childhood into adulthood. Those that remain stateless are



Swidden farming in the hills of Southeast Asia

backward, politically and socially immature, the childlike victims of an arrested development that is to be deplored, even pitied.

Not so, Scott argues. The process of state-formation throughout South-East Asia – a story which takes us on a dizzying journey spanning several millennia – points to a very different interpretation, one which construes the imposition of state structures upon the populace as a form of 'internal colonialism' that many people, far from welcoming with open arms, tried determinedly to resist or even avoid altogether. The book is, then, to quote the blurb, the "first ever examination of the huge literature on state-making that evaluates why people would deliberately and reactively remain stateless". Many, it seems, when faced with the relentless march of the state, have broken ranks and *opted* precisely to go 'backwards'.

For your average subaltern, state-making brought with it a number of burdens as well as the much vaunted boons: corvée labour, slavery, taxes, conscription, war, the imposition of religious uniformity, to name but a few. When these burdens grew so great as to press too heavily upon people's highly cherished sense of autonomy, many quite literally fled to the hills. Zomia is precisely the *upland* region of South-East Asia. Most commonly states formed in the valleys, on terrain that was flatter and more even, and thus both more conducive to larger-scale irrigated rice agriculture and more easily traversable, a feature that greatly facilitated administration by incipient state bureaucracies.

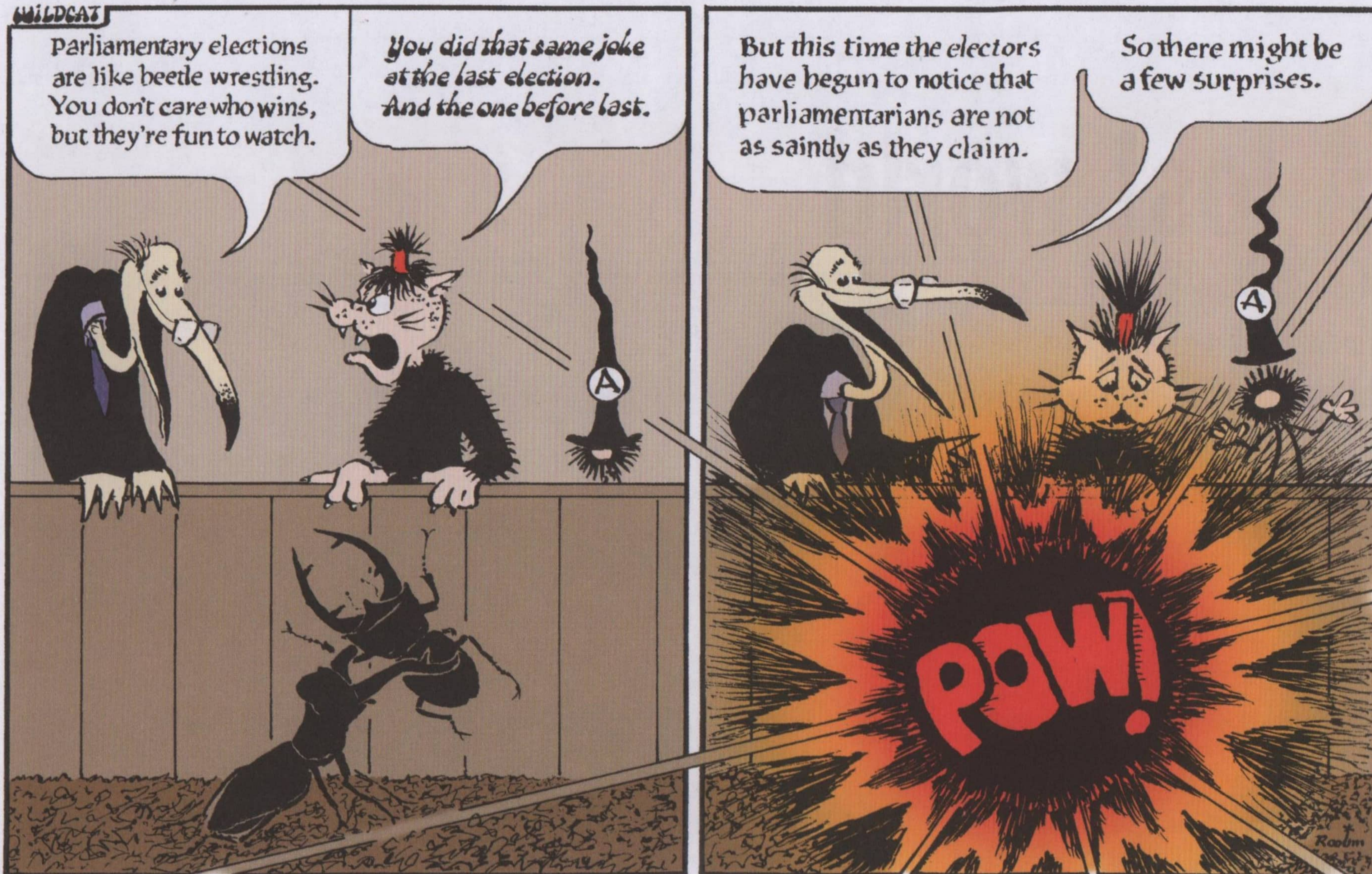
The hills were another matter entirely. Without modern-day distance reducing

technologies (planes, geostationary satellites etc.), terrain that was frequently impassible other than on foot made the uplands all but inaccessible to would-be administrators, and such obstacles to 'legibility' often meant the bureaucratic tasks necessary for state-making proved more trouble than they were worth – the drawing up of cadastral maps, for example, became almost impossible. Moreover, communities that chose to live in the hills purposely exploited this friction of distance the terrain offered, opting for settlement patterns that were widely dispersed across a rugged topography.

Scott outlines a number of additional devices that he argues those fleeing the heavy burdens of Leviathan sought deliberately to employ to preserve their autonomy, constituting "a fairly comprehensive cultural portfolio of techniques for evading state incorporation". Unlike the Padi-states in the valleys, hill communities chose smaller scale cropping practices – such as foraging and swiddening – that enhanced mobility, thereby allowing them to strike camp at the drop of a hat, or the rattle of a slave-trader's chain.

But they did not keep their bags packed merely for flight across space, but across identities as well. They maintained a bewildering flux of pliable ethnic identities over time, assisted, Scott claims, by the deliberate adoption and preservation of an oral rather than written culture that allowed them to reinvent histories and genealogies as they moved through different settlements and communities. Lastly, and perhaps most obscurely, in times of upheaval, devotion to





## Review

◀ page 15

prophetic, millenarian leaders offering utopian visions of change tended to facilitate rapid adaptation to altered circumstances.

All of this, of course, is of little immediate relevance to present-day opposition to capital and state; it's a book for comrades in armchairs rather than comrades in arms. But Scott has written a history, not a manifesto – this is no crass primitivist screed. He fully admits that the relationship to the state he describes is a vision of a lost world. With modern advances in technology and the expansion of the nation state to the furthest reaches of the globe, there is less and less scope for evasion. "In the contemporary world," he argues, "the future of our freedom

lies in the daunting task of taming Leviathan, not evading it." However, his book opens up a small chink in the wall. It offers a picture of history that in some small way liberates, and should be hung in the same gallery as hitherto better known advocates of evasion: the Gypsies, the Cossacks (famously admired by Bakunin), and the pirate communities. And perhaps it even bears comparison with the 'Balkanisation of Utopia' among contemporary activists championed by Maurice Brinton: that "sole guarantee that 'utopia', if we ever get near it, will be worth living in". That's got to be worth a read.

*The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* by James C. Scott, published by Yale University Press (2009), £20. Available, of course, from Freedom bookshop.

## THE QUIZ

1. When was the death penalty abolished in England?
2. What are the origins of the phrase 'pie in the sky'?
3. What is 'bhut jolokhia' and what role is it due to play in the fight against terrorism?
4. What are 'death bonds'?

Answers on page 14

*The Anarchist Quiz Book* compiled by Martin Howard with illustrations by Paul Petard, is available at £5 (post free) from Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX or you can order online at [freedompress.org.uk](http://freedompress.org.uk).

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