

FREEDOM

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FIGHTING FIRE WITH FIRE

The spirit of Guy Fawkes set alight the firefighters dispute

By the time this issue of *Freedom* hits the streets, we will already know if the London firefighters have followed through on their threat to strike for the second time during the bonfire night period. Firefighters had been previously balloted by their union and voted overwhelmingly for strike action over the continued dispute with London Fire Brigade (LFB). The dispute centres on the proposal by LFB to sack all existing firefighters and re-employ them on downgraded terms and conditions, or face dismissal if they refuse to sign the new contract agreement.

Already they have been the subject of an intense negative media campaign, instigated by LFB, and the threat to strike over the busiest most dangerous period of the year is seen by the media as "reckless". In reality, striking during bonfire night is designed to highlight the essential role firefighters play in keeping people safe, and one that shouldn't be undermined with cutbacks to staffing levels, station closures and wage freezes imposed without consultation or negotiation. No other service can provide the necessary skills and coverage to tackle such a dangerous job.

Despite, or perhaps because of, this LFB **page 3** ▶▶

LENS CAP CITY OF LONDON



London expanded its role as the world's largest centre for currency trading, handling 37% of all foreign exchange trading conducted globally. It's estimated that the US\$4 trillion worth of currencies traded a day works out to be 70 times the value of goods and services that actually change hands. City bankers were heard to ask "what crisis?"

photo by Maggie Jones

POLITICAL CONVICTIONS

On Monday 25th October, six SHAC (Stop Huntington Animal Cruelty) campaigners were sentenced to a total of nearly 18 years by Judge Kutler at Winchester Crown Court. This is the second round of political convictions, first in 2008 when seven people were given a total of 50 years, with the maximum sentence being 11 years. When movements become effective and gain momentum, political convictions and imprisonment are common to suppress them. It is clear that a small group of individuals are being punished for what is a growing movement against profiting from animal cruelty.

SHAC does not recognise HLS as a lawful company, it has a proven track record of criminal history and animal cruelty, and is Europe's largest animal research laboratory, killing around 500 animals daily.

There have been solidarity demos throughout the UK and beyond, against companies connected to HLS in London. Fortress Investment Group, Nomura, JP Morgan and Bank of America (who recently bailed HLS out with a \$280 million loan) were all leafleted along with a noise demo.

These sentences are politically motivated and entirely unjust and have implications for the movement as a whole. In 2009, Corporate Watch produced a report *State Crackdown on Anti Corporate Dissent: The Animal Rights Movement* that explains how animal rights activists are used as a test case for repression, which is likely to be rolled out across the wider movement if and when the state chooses. It is essential that we all resist this repression, regardless of whether this is our activism of choice.

See www.shac.net and www.corporatewatch.org.uk

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NEWS

IN BRIEF

HEALTH: The Foundation Trust at the centre of a public inquiry over its “appalling” patient care is still falling short on 11 key standards.

The Care Quality Commission found Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust had complied with just five out of the 16 objectives set out by law to maintain quality and safety in hospitals. The independently run Trust was condemned in a 2009 report that found there had been at least 400 more deaths than expected at Stafford Hospital between 2005 and 2008. The inquiry into its failings begins on 8th November.

The same Trust has recently been accused of wasting money after paying a consultant £5,667 for a single 24-hour shift.

CONSTRUCTION: Analysis by the building union UCATT has discovered that six construction workers were killed in the week that the Government announced it was slashing funding to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) by 35%.

The recent deaths also coincided with Conservative MP Christopher Chope tabling a Private Members Bill which would loosen the rules governing accidents under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR).

Research by Liverpool University has found that just 32% of reportable injuries of employees and 12% of reportable injuries suffered by the self-employed were recorded under RIDDOR.

TELEVISION: Chat show host Paul O’Grady made a savage onscreen attack on George Osborne and the Tory cuts during his television show.

In an impassioned rant to camera, O’Grady accused backbench Tories of enjoying too much the proposed welfare cuts, calling them “bastards” as well as praising the French for their civil disobedience “we should take to the streets, we should fight for the rights of the sick, elderly and poor,” ending with “vive la revolution” to a cheering studio audience.

It’s odd, and perhaps encouraging, that TV celebrities are happy to publicly sound more ‘socialist’ than most high profile socialists.

COUNCIL: The deputy leader of Sunderland City Council said she hopes Margaret Thatcher “burns in hell” on social networking site Facebook.

Florence Anderson made the comment in a thread open to the public on the page ‘Stop Margaret Thatcher getting royal send off’, of which she is a member. Cllr Anderson, a grandmother who led the Eppleton Area Miners’ Wives Support Group during the strike, also flatly refused to retract her comments about the former Conservative leader. “I’m a miner’s widow,” she said. “I remember ’84/85 as if it was yesterday. I hate Thatcher for what she did to my community, what she did to the ordinary people who live here.” She added: “I stand by what I said.”

LENS CAP LAST ORDERS AT THE BAR



Photo: Dizzy Atmosphere

According to the British Beer and Pub Association 893 pubs served their last pint and closed their doors permanently in 2009, with the rate of pub closures now standing at 30 a week for the first half of 2010. For some it's the dying embers of a once thriving working class culture.

Hammerfest hammered

Emerging from the planning meeting the night before this Smash EDO action, one comrade remarked “let’s hope the cops don’t deploy a very large wet paper bag tomorrow, because our lot won’t be able to punch their way out of it.”

Come the morn, this proved all too true with 53 arrests out of a crowd it would be generous to call 200, EDO intact and generally unmolested and the cops thinking Christmas had come early.

So to the facts. Firstly there was the convergence centre. Very nice too by all accounts, but as dawn’s rosy fingers reached across the hills of Sussex, the county constabulary arrived outside.

Failing in their duty to facilitate peaceful protest, they searched and kettled the inhabitants of the said centre before frog-marching them to the meet up point at Forest Café. Here the 30 from the centre were unsettled and allowed to join another 100 running into the woods, slowly pursued by the law.

On the hill above the factory the grand showdown finally happened. The protesters marched down the hill behind their reinforced banner to meet the might of copperdom. But alas, those 150 protesters had melted to 25 by the crunch time, due to the well-known effect of ‘running away’. The banner was seized and then it was back into the kettle for the brave few who tried to save it.

The rest is too sad to tell, and on the tale of the mass arrest on the way back to town we will draw a discrete veil.

Cities of convergence.

While we do not wish to belittle the courage of many of the participants and the hard work of those behind the campaign, we reflect on the wise words of Field Marshal Slim who said that while soldiers may take solace in defeat that they had done their duty, a general cannot as his sole duty is to achieve victory. As anarchists we are all in the position of generalship. We all have a responsibility not just for planning particular actions but for the overall strategy of making demonstrations work. If we want our politics to be accepted we have to show they are effective in practice. So let’s start with two quick things.

Firstly, fields and convergence centres. The trouble with convergence centres is that they get converged on, by the police that is. Convergence centres are great for doing workshops, day schools, benefits and radical art exhibitions, but they are shit for actions. If the vast amount of effort that went into convergence centres was spent on strategic thinking, then we would be able to have ‘safer spaces’ on demos as well as in our own buildings.

Next, it is a sad truth going back to the defeat of Boudicca that enthusiastic mobs come a cropper against disciplined troops in open environments. Moving to more recent times we find ‘the battle of the beanfield’ wasn’t a battle but a massacre, but the ill-equipped but stout-hearted yeomanry of Broadwater Farm were able to keep their oppressors at arms length. So, cities good, fields bad is a good starting point for the next Smash EDO.



Laws and lies

A look at the recent 'outing' of an undercover cop

The hot gossip at this year's London Anarchist Bookfair was the revelation that Mark Stone, a well known activist from Nottingham, was in fact Mark Kennedy, an undercover cop for the last seven years.

Sitting at the Weatherspoons afterwards on the mildly disgruntled 'I thought he was a mate' table, while casting sheepish glances and wondering what the fuck to say to folk on the really rather cross 'yes, I did sleep with him actually' table, I pondered what we could usefully put in *Freedom* that would not have been said already by the time it came out.

When in doubt, turn to the web and, in this case the indymedia thread, two gems of advice quickly came to hand:

Quote one: "I think that by law, any undercover cop must admit that they are a police officer when asked that question directly. So, um, why didn't you just ask him in the first place?"

Quote two: "The undercovers I've known have refused offers of lie-detector tests, so why not buy or make the necessary kit and learn how to use it within one or two different groups, then offer it as a service to other groups or individuals. Lie detection is not proof, but it is indicative, so that's why they avoid it, and it could resolve a lot of disputes or claims that are just misunderstandings."

Now if I were head of the box or the branch, I would be down on my bended knees thanking the Good Lord Above for these people, and when PC Kennedy comes in for his debrief I'd want to know why the fuck I'd been paying good money for him for the last seven years.

"So, Kennedy, how did you undermine the anarchist movement?"

"I drove a van Guv, sorted out electrics and was generally a friendly, useful kind of guy."

"You idiot, I told you to act like a total numpty, no wonder they caught you! You're so big a muppet you can't even act like a muppet! Get back on the beat."

So the moral of the story is... well I'm not sure, but I live for the day we 'out' someone who *doesn't* buy his rounds.

Andy Meinke

Fighting fire with fire

◀ page 1

media department was instructed to "unleash the forces of Hell on the FBU" following a top level meeting by Brigade management. They provided confidential information to *The Sun* and *Daily Mail* who published deliberately false and damaging articles.

The firefighters union had promised to call off the strike as soon as the compulsory sacking process (known as the issuing of s188 notices) was lifted and all parties returned to the negotiating table. The real issue is that LFB's plan is to save money by closing stations and running the service with fewer fire engines. This means moving engines around London

according to fire statistics, thereby closing some stations at night in areas where calls are fewer. However, their own figures reveal that most fire deaths and injuries occur at night. In order to put the plan into action they need to equalise firefighters day and night shifts, which was laid out in a 'confidential' document drawn up by London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA), the fire service's governing body, detailing the long term proposals for the future of the London Fire Brigade.

The desire to force through 12-hour shifts is based on this plan of action. But if there are not enough firefighters, engines or operational

stations to cover the London area, it will inevitably lead to an even greater cost in terms of risking public safety and people's lives

London anarchists went down to pickets lines across London to show solidarity to the striking firefighters and offer practical support in terms of financial aid.

London fire service is the fourth largest in the world (after Tokyo, New York and Paris) with nearly 7,000 staff, of which 5,800 are operational firefighters and officers. In 2008/09 firefighters mobilised to fight 29,215 fires of which 13,841 were of a serious nature, making it one of the busiest fire brigades in the world.

ANALYSIS

Water water everywhere...

Because it's a grand old money spinner, finds Rob Ray

It's always a happy day when a plan comes together, so Tories and new Labourites in the water sector must be beside themselves with joy following the news that one of their privatisation protégés has become the top profit-skimmer in Britain.

The operating profit margin for South East Water, which shows how a company's profits relate to its total income, hit 48.7% this year on sales of £181 million, well ahead of investor group Jerrold in second place.

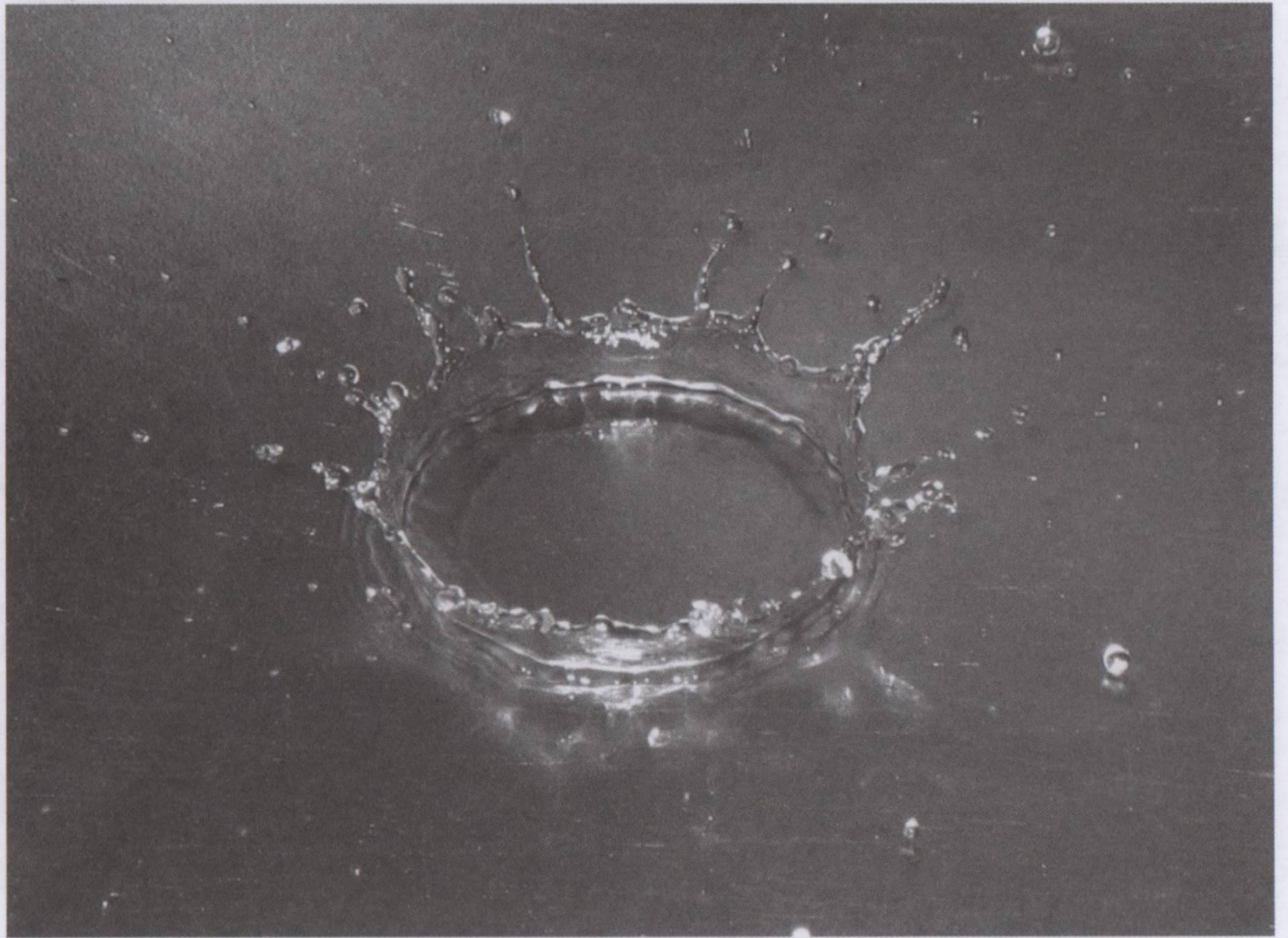
The figures, which suggest the company is pumping vast sums of cash out of the sector under the nose of watchdog organisation Ofwat, have been accompanied by a swelling in complaints and problems at the Australian-owned firm.

In September, it was reported as having received nearly double the industry's average number of complaints per customer served – with complaints about billing and charges amounting to nearly 65% of the total.

South East Water's position has seen little fanfare within the right-wing press, and well it might not, as it risks coming across as a huge scandal that a company which is not supposed to be able to make profits without paying for improvements is making such huge percentages providing a worse service, for more money.

When the industry was privatised in the 1990s, the public was told that measures would be put in place to prevent companies abusing their *de facto* monopoly positions and to promote upgrades of the system.

Yet in the last month, not just South East



water but a slew of other companies have been ticked off for the sheer volume of complaints being sent their way over rising prices. And these complaints are reflected by a failure to carry out proper maintenance work – Severn Water for example being caught “misreporting” £70 million worth of leaking pipes.

Ofwat pledged last year to crack down heavily on water companies for their “lacklustre” replacement and maintenance plans – as near as the toothless body gets to an outright admission that the system is being ignored as international capital makes mega-

bucks out of its captive audience – but little has materialised so far.

With massive cuts being implemented elsewhere – not least in oversight groups and legal controls – there are fears that the industry will be ignored and allowed to continue supersizing its profits.

But alongside the railways and electricity, water provides a strong argument against the idea that privatisation is more efficient than public sector services – and that the government, knowing this, is aiming not at efficiency savings, but at scuppering people's terms and conditions.

Social class and depression

A groundbreaking study by the University of Illinois, Chicago has found that present day treatments for depression do not benefit working-class and poor patients as compared to middle-class patients in enhancing performance at work.

According to Dr Lydia Falconnier, assistant professor in UIC's Jane Addams College of Social Work, who initiated the study, “depression has a profound impact on an individual's productivity, which is particularly true among individuals in lower social classes and with lower levels of education.”

Falconnier went on to review data from the National Institute of Mental Health Treatment of Depression Collaborative Research Program from 1982 to 1986, which included 239 patients with major depressive disorder. The research found that following the same treatment, middle-class patients saw daily improvements in their

ability to function at work, while poor and working-class patients responded less well, and conclude social class was a determinant feature in how people benefitted across all three treatments for depression.

The implications though are far from clear, with the study hinting at a greater intervention of current depression treatments to “help depressed working-class and poor mothers to improve the care they provide for their children.” And also raises questions about mandated depression treatment for working-class and poor mothers who are involved in the child welfare system.

What the report doesn't reveal, or even touch upon, is how these class dynamics reinforce the negative impacts of peoples social background, including poverty levels, working conditions and inequalities based around where you happen to live, general health care, education and job prospects.

Burying the past

The Manchester-based People's History Museum, who specialise in documenting the forgotten histories of ordinary working class lives, begins a six-monthly exhibition entitled ‘Death and the Working Class’.

The exhibition looks at the way perceptions of death and funeral customs have changed amongst the poor in the last 200 years with a large array of photos of funeral processions, posters and union banners.

The museum houses artefacts celebrating the lives of ordinary people at work, rest and play, including some 1,500 political posters relating to the Spanish Civil War. What other institution can boast of having Thomas Paine's death mask and Keir Hardie's pit lamp?

‘Death and the Working Class’, 23rd October 2010 to 2nd May 2011 at The People's History Museum, Left Bank, Spinningfields, Manchester M3 3ER

ANTI-CUTS UPDATE

BELFAST: An estimated 3,000 people took to the streets on Saturday 23rd October in protest at the loss of 50,000 public and private sector jobs in Northern Ireland. Despite the rain the demonstration was a noisy show of defiance to the proposals in the Comprehensive Spending Review where Northern Ireland stands to lose £4bn from its budget over the next four years.

BRISTOL: Thousands of banner-waving, whistle-blowing demonstrators descended on the city centre for a march and rally against the proposed cuts. Organised by the Bristol and District Anti-Cuts Alliance up to 4,000 trade unionists and community groups and political activists showed their anger at the 300 council jobs expected to be lost and in neighbouring Gloucestershire at least 5,000 public sector jobs are at risk.

EDINBURGH: A massive 20,000 people from all across Scotland converged on the capital and marched through Princes Street before a rally at the Ross Bandstand in Princes Street Gardens. Organised by Scottish TUC as part of their 'There Is Another Way' campaign.

HACKNEY: Hundreds of local residents protested outside the Town Hall during the first council meeting after the government announced cuts to the area which is likely to reach £60m next year. Organised by Hackney Alliance to Defend Public Services, about 250 campaigners, trade unionists and children held a loud demonstration on the steps of the town hall.

LONDON: Vodafone was forced to close its flagship store in Oxford Street, London, when protestors stormed the premises angry that the firm has been let off a £6bn tax bill amid deep welfare cuts. The 65 activists blockaded the doorway in protest at the HMRC's deal with Vodafone that will write off a unpaid tax bill worth £6bn to the public purse. This comes exactly a week after George Osborne announced that he will be cutting another £7bn from welfare services.

It is noted that one Andy Halford is both a financial advisor to Vodafone and a corporation tax advisor to the treasury.

NATIONWIDE: On the back of the London Vodafone protest, demonstrations were organised to target Vodafone in up to 10 cities, including Bournemouth, Liverpool, Hastings, York, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Leeds on Saturday 30th October. This is the first wave of protests to target specific companies involved in benefitting from the government's welfare cuts policy.

SHEFFIELD: Yorkshire and Humber TUC held a regional protest against the cuts outside Sheffield Town Hall. There were 1,000 mainly trade unionists who joined by over 200 who marched from the university, described as loud and angry.

Militant atheism, yes please

Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the UK is thankfully over and, despite mainstream media blanket coverage, relatively small numbers of ordinary Catholics attended. The widespread anger felt at perpetration of child abuse by priests within the Catholic Church didn't discourage the Queen however, who greeted him on arrival in Scotland; nor the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chief Rabbi or Muslim Council of Britain, who, in a truly ecumenical act of collusion, welcomed the ultra-conservative, misogynistic homophobe to Britain with open arms. In farcical scenes the 'secular' political elite, including four former prime ministers, showered the pope with sustained applause after he reprimanded them for the "increasing marginalisation of religion" in the UK. All of this during a trip that cost the 'secular' state £12 million during a period of apparent fiscal crisis and service cuts.

There is significant correlation between the interests of the state and that of religious groups, particularly in relation to social order, 'family values' and the strengthening of patriarchy, heteronormativity and neo-liberal governance. It is a myth that Britain is a secular nation, never mind 'aggressively secular'. Although British society may largely consider religion irrelevant, it is deeply woven into the power structure of this country. Britain is a constitutional monarchy – officially and legally a Christian country, with an established religion (Protestant Christianity) and an established church (Church of England). By law, the monarch must be a Protestant and swears an oath to maintain the laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel. Some 26 Church of England bishops sit in the House of Lords, with plans to introduce religious representatives of other faiths.

Until relatively recently state sanctioning of faith was reserved for the Church of England and Catholicism, but recent successive governments have extended these rights, and associated financial benefits for other organised religions under the guise of 'multiculturalism',

'community cohesion' and now 'Big Society'. State sanctioned Jewish Beth Din courts have existed for more than a century in the UK, with recent developments giving legislative power to sharia judges ruling on cases ranging from financial disputes to divorce and domestic violence.

Perhaps the most disturbing and insidious manifestation of the interconnectivity between church and state is the pervasiveness of religious dogma in the education of children and young people. One third of schools in Britain are faith schools, the majority being Anglican and Roman Catholic. David Cameron, who sends his daughter to a sought-after Church of England primary in west London, has said that he is a "strong supporter personally and politically" of faith schools. His Free Schools programme is likely to increase numbers of faith schools of all religions because they have the resources, experience and influence to make the most of the policy and funding.

Strong lobbying by the Catholic Education Service secured amendments to the Children, Schools and Families Act 2010, allowing education to "reflect a school's religious character". These amendments give faith schools the legal right to provide sex education to children and young people in ways that reflect their particular beliefs. Faith schools are free to push highly restrictive stances on sexuality and to condemn sex outside marriage, homosexuality, contraception, abortion rights and sexual autonomy. Despite this, the myth of religious schools as somehow providing better education for our children is going strong and waiting lists for faith schools have never been longer.

Organised religion, like the state, institutionalises race and gender inequality, and inequality on the basis of sexual orientation. Secularism is not enough; we need to go beyond a separation of church and state and smash both, or at least undermine the effects of religious fundamentalism and state authoritarianism on our everyday lives.

London anarcha feminist kolektiv



INTERNATIONAL

IN BRIEF

FRANCE: Following the adoption by the lower house of parliament of the unpopular pension bill, trade unions have resolved to continue to strike. There were demonstrations in more than hundred towns and cities and several flights were cancelled. More strikes are planned for 6th November. Although the votes were 336 for and 233 against, amazingly the union leaders are hoping the Sarkozy might buckle and not sign the law.

GERMANY: About 1,700 regional railway workers across the country took industrial action on 26th October demanding higher wages. The workers represented by ITF-affiliated Transnet and GDBA work for the Deutsche Bahn (DB). They were joined by the employees of DB's subsidiary companies Veolia and Arriva. There have been some protests against Metro Group's decision to get rid of 450 jobs around the world, with Germany being worst affected.

INDIA: Tribal and Dalit communities of the state of Orissa breathe a sigh of relief as the Indian government rejected the expansion of an aluminium refinery owned by Vedanta Resources, a UK-based company. However, the villagers continue to live in a highly polluted environment due to the industries operating in Orissa, which is rich in metal resources, especially bauxite. Villagers continue to fight to get the pollution cleared up.

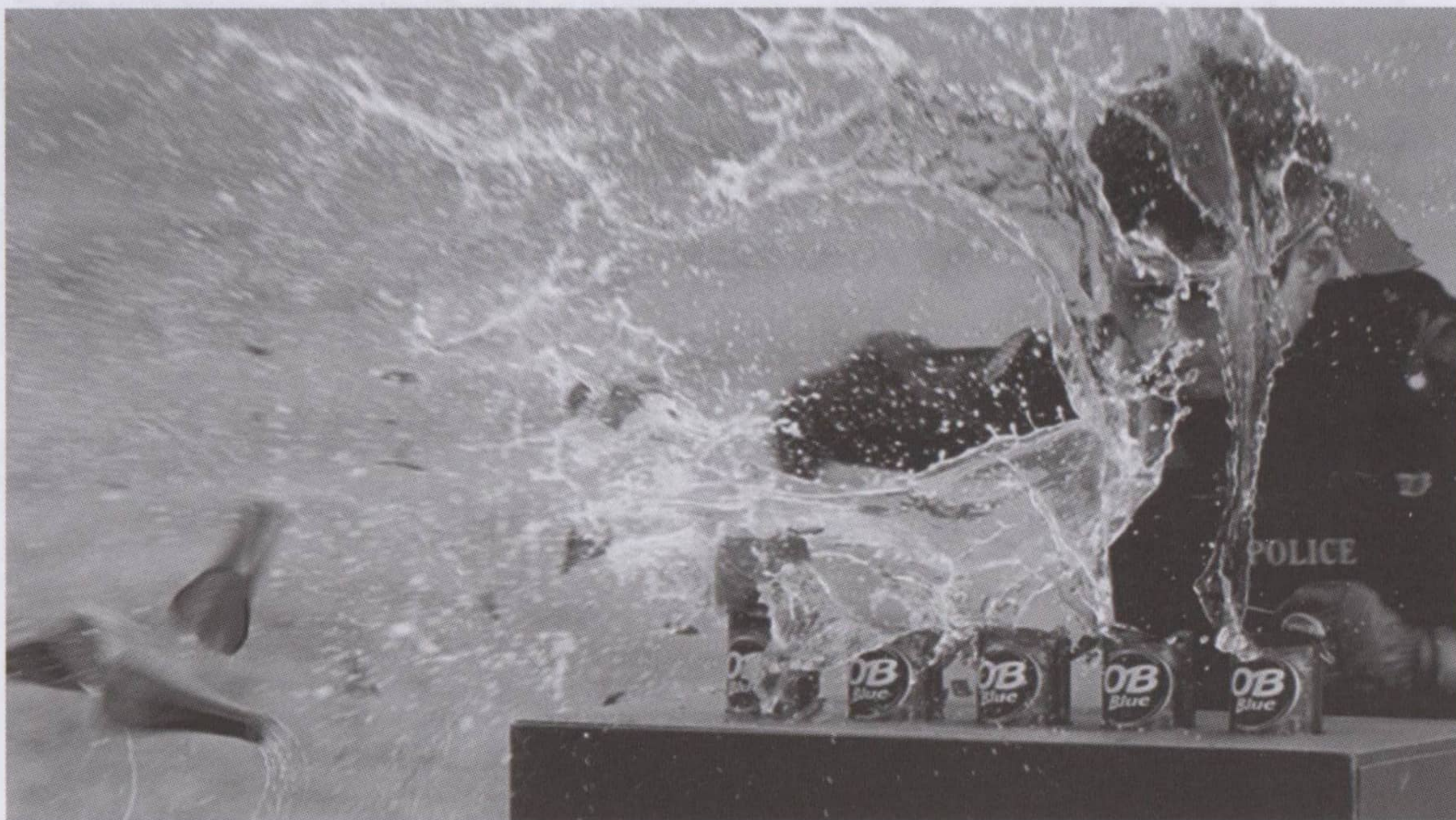
ISRAEL: Protesters clashed with riot cops on 27th October in the Arab Israeli city of Uhm el-Fahm, leading to several arrests. About 350 protesters had gathered to oppose a march by Jewish extremists commemorating the death of an anti-Arab Rabbi in 1990 at the hands of an Arab gunman.

KAZAKHSTAN: Poultry workers in the region of Cheremshanskaya are preparing to go on strike on 15th November against the closing of the plant, which is the only source of employment in that region. Even as the management claims bankruptcy, the 360 employees demand intervention to save the plant, payment of full wages and pension arrears and maintenance of employment.

RUSSIA: On 22nd October anti-fascist and civil rights activist Alexei Gaskarov was released from what can only be described as illegal arrest and detention. He was held since July without evidence or witnesses after he took part in an environmental protest in the town of Khimki in the same month, which was disrupted by hooded neo-nazis.

VENEZUELA: 'Neither capitalists nor bureaucrats' is the slogan of workers across a range of state-owned and private companies. Let down by the government and unions, these workers are demanding contracts for collectivisation, that is, effective workers' control of their workplaces, and change of labour law. A march is scheduled for the 9th November.

LENS CAP PREPARING FOR TROUBLE



A Korean policeman smashes bottles at a training centre in Seoul during a photo call to show preparations for security measures in the upcoming G20 summit on 11th and 12th November. Over 80 groups launched an umbrella organisation vowing to protest against the summit. All demonstrations are banned within a 2km radius of the venue, with 20,000 riot police on call.

Civil rights in danger in 'Nam

In a regular state crackdown three labour rights organisers, all in their 20s, were sentenced to heavy jail terms for trying to organise a 20,000-strong strike for higher wages at the My Phong shoe factory earlier on this year. Nguyen Hoang Quoc Hung received the longest – nine years. Don Huy Chuong and Do Thi Minh Hanh got seven years each. The charge? Instigating strikes and distributing pamphlets.

The three had been arrested in February and kept incommunicado. Chuong had been arrested once before and spent 18 months in prison in 2007–08 for being one of the founding members of United Workers-Farmers Organisation, an independent body. The charges were 'abusing democratic freedoms' and 'spreading distorted information to undermine the state'.

The sentencing, in a trial that took under a day, comes just before the ASEAN summit in Hanoi and it would be interesting to see

how the member countries react. Especially since more such absurd arrests are being made regularly. In the second half of October two bloggers were arrested on the charge of slander for posting something about an official. One Nguyen Van Hai alias Dieu Cay has been detained in prison despite serving his 30-month sentence for 'tax evasion'.

This cleansing of political dissidents is occurring in the backdrop of the Communist Party Congress to be held in January next year. Massive police surveillance, whimsical interrogation and searching of homes has become a regular pattern. Anyone from villagers, to independent unionists, journalists, activists and bloggers can be arrested on Stalin-style charges like 'disrupting security', or 'spreading propaganda against the state', 'attempting to overthrow the state' etc. Even ordinary rights guaranteed by Vietnam's Constitution have now become crimes.

Notes from the US

It's election season in the United States. And there have been some real gems.

The new rave is the 'Tea Party', a right wing, 'back-to-basics' bunch who seem to know no bounds: Ilario Pantano, a candidate in North Carolina, said he has no regrets about shooting dead two unarmed Iraqis at point blank range after detaining them near Fallujah in April 2004. Violence is important to them: a volunteer for Senate candidate, Ron Paul, was filmed harshly assaulting a protester. Tim Profitt, a coordinator for Paul's campaign in central Kentucky, stamped on her head. The Tea

Party Nation emailed its growing list of supporters in late October giving reasons why representative Keith Ellison should be voted out of office "He is the only Muslim member of congress." Meanwhile a Republican in Texas, Stephen Broden, a Christian minister, told a local TV station that a violent revolution might be needed if Republicans don't win control of Congress. Good to see all parties getting in on the act. Well, not all: Laura Wells, the Green Party candidate for governor in California was arrested when she tried to attend a debate.

Kenyan tea workers strike

It is well into the second week for the tea plantation workers fighting to keep their jobs. Some of the companies affected are multinationals like Unilever Tea, James Finlay, George Williamson, Sotik Tea and Eastern Produce. But the bosses in charge are adamant not to give in. About 20,000 to 50,000 workers are on strike under the Central Organisation of Trade Unions (COTU) and the Kenyan Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union, which is affiliated to the COTU.

The striking workers have been demanding their employers stop using tea-plucking machines, which were first introduced in the Kenyan Rift Valley ten years ago. The initial deal between the companies, the union and the government was to introduce these machines only as an experiment which was to cover 3% of the plucking.

However, despite the deal, many of the companies used the machines to pluck 80% of their tea. Employees were being persuaded to retire early and 10,000 workers have been laid off since the introduction of the machines. And why not? Each machine equals sixty labourers. When the workers decided to strike they sent seven days' prior notice but received no answer from the Federation of Kenyan Employers (FKE).

The strike started on 18th of October as scheduled, even as the tea bosses brought a court order to block the strike. Although the strike is still deemed illegal, the workers are sticking to their guns. Worryingly, so are the employers. They accuse the unions of trying to drag the companies back from computers to the age of typewriters and of not "looking at other reasonable avenues."

The unions claim that the tea-plucking machines, although fast, aren't clean. They



don't sort the tea leaves out from dirt and other undesirables. Also there is a drastic cut in employment as there are few humans required to do the job. The unions also claim that the ones who get to remain in the jobs are those who are prepared to toe the line and cosy up to the bosses.

The unions are threatening to persuade the international market to boycott Kenyan tea, since Kenya is the world's leading exporter of black tea. It is the country's second largest source of foreign exchange income after horticulture.

There have already been some incidents of

burning of the tea-plucking machines in Nandi district. Cops have been deployed by tea firms to protect their plantations even as workers threatened to break in. Meanwhile the firms are using highly 'persuasive' methods, like evicting striking staff from company houses and disconnecting water and electricity.

Workers are walking a razor's edge in Kenya as the strikes could also mean massive sackings – about 800,000 – by the unfazed firms. The unions have been distributing several kilos of food to the striking workers facing food shortage.

Notes from the US

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Foreclosures

Earlier in October, some of the biggest banks (including Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase) suspended foreclosures in 23 states following revelations that employees at several lenders had approved thousands of foreclosure affidavits and other documents without proper examination; sometimes without even seeing the paperwork! This belated action spread until there was an on-off-on moratorium on foreclosures. Obama's gang blew hot and cold about the need for and extent of official support for the suspension.

Stories hit the press: in Massachusetts, for example, one Bank of America employee admitted she signed as many as 8,000 foreclosure documents a month and 'typically did not read any of them' because of the high volume. This caused lawyers (Attorneys General) originally in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois and Ohio and eventually

in all 50 states to launch investigations into what's hard to see as anything other than widespread fraud by the country's major banks and lenders. Banks are expected to seize a record 1.2 million homes this year, an increase of 1,200% since 2005.

The Florida Attorney General, for instance, revealed the existence of a 'foreclosure mill'. Employees at the office(s) were actually bribed with free houses, expensive cars, jewellery and cell phones to alter and forge key documents in order to obtain foreclosures. They were often hired with little or no experience and expertise in finance, let alone in foreclosures. A lawyer in Florida, Peter Ticktin, says he deposed 150 workers who say they signed foreclosure affidavits without ever looking at them. They had been previously working as hairstylists, shelf-stackers, and assembly line employees.

Louis Further

The EDL abroad

The English Defence League's planned weekend trip to Amsterdam ended in disaster as Dutch anti-fascist groups and local football fans mobilised in their hundreds to confront them.

The demonstration had been planned in support of the right-wing anti-Islam Dutch politician Geert Wilders, but less than 60 EDL made it to Amsterdam.

They were hounded by Antifa!-Amsterdam and AntiFascistische Aktie-Nederland throughout the day, and had to be escorted by a massive police presence for their own protection. Football fans from Ajax called for action by the club's supporters to "not tolerate fascists in our town," and hundreds had to be cordoned off at the metro station by police to prevent them getting to the EDL.

In an ironic twist, Wilders distanced himself from the activities of the EDL in Holland.

No Borders Camp 2010 – Brussels and Calais

Personal accounts of the two recent No Borders mobilisations in Europe

BRUSSELS: BECOMING A MOVEMENT

25th June 2010: Steenokkerzeel, by the airport outside Brussels, 60 people occupy the building site of the new '127 tris' immigration detention centre, shutting down work for a day, taking direct action against the construction site, and upping the ante in a campaign of resistance against the border regime in Belgium. Over the past year: successful blockades of most of the six existing detention centres, including the simultaneous blockade of Bruges and Vottem by over 150 people last October. Well planned, media savvy, acts of surprise. And these little bursts of 'activism' sit against a background of what has become one of Europe's most active *sans-papiers* (undocumented) movements – mass occupations, hunger strikes, practical solidarity. Sometimes flaring into direct revolt – back to 24 August 2008 when the existing Steenokkerzeel immigration prison '127 bis' burst into flames at midnight, two of its three wings burnt to the ground.

29th September 2010: Steenokkerzeel again, with our faces pressed into the mud along the road from the same building site, hearing a friend screaming as a boot twists her neck. The first demonstration during the No Border camp, just 150 of us were there, but met by overwhelming force – riot police bussed in from as far away as Antwerp, with horses and water cannon. They call it 'zero tolerance' policing, and we are going to see plenty more of it through the coming week. It means they're afraid of us.

Two points on the 'repression' of the No Border Camp in Brussels. Firstly, the treat-

ment we're getting is just a little taster of what our comrades without documents have for a daily diet. Second, we can take it as a sign of the success of No Borders in Belgium. Here (as also in Calais, where we are regularly targeted with surveillance, arbitrary arrest, beatings and humiliation tactics) we're becoming a movement that has to be taken seriously.

That was my overwhelming, surprising, reviving feeling during last week – the feeling of actually being part of a movement, of something moving. With maybe 800 people and so much activity going on in and around the camp, of course I only caught glimpses. Six months of solid organising by our Belgian comrades; logistics down to four kitchens and an onsite bakery; the media centre like some command base from '24' with all night video editing, radio streaming, live action feeds, fuelled by the world's best beer; all those quick warm hugs with friends rushing off purposefully into the night; I never actually made it to a timetabled workshop, but so much networking, information sharing, catching up, ideas sparking, seeds of plans; reflecting on all we have done, all we've been learning in Brussels and Calais and Amsterdam and... and the panoramas ahead.

Are we ready to take ourselves seriously? We talk about fighting injustice, we want to turn the world upside down – do we really mean it? Becoming serious doesn't just mean facing beatings, prison, maybe death. It also means facing ourselves – and taking the time and care to look carefully at what we do.

If I'd had more time in Brussels ... I'd have investigated more the connections with *sans-papiers* movements. Maybe spent more time in the occupied Gesu monastery, where squatter activists with papers live and work together with 150 undocumented comrades. Or got involved in mobilising for the big demo with asylum-seekers staying in the Petit Chateau complex. The police clampdown undoubtedly succeeded in scaring many



Photo: Julie Rebouillat

undocumented people away from the camp; though on the other hand, as we've seen in Calais, if anything brings people from different backgrounds together it is a shared experience of repression and building resistance. That was the energy you could feel on the final Saturday demo: 1,500 of us, with and without papers (and most of us with ID documents left them behind) taking the street together – celebrating our solidarity, and prepared to defend it.

Where does No Borders go from here? In Brussels and Calais, especially, the last year has seen us taking action, building networks, learning and growing – becoming a movement. What I find particularly exciting is the way our more spectacular 'actions' are rooted in everyday practices of solidarity. No Borders is not just an occupied detention centre, but a communal kitchen, a squatted housing project, a night shelter, a visiting clinic, a legal advice drop-in, a film/discussion night. Bringing together our styles and tendencies: it's great to see adrenaline junkies getting involved in grassroots community building; and community organisers getting a taste for direct action. We should keep spreading and growing these practices and networks – back in the UK, too.

Some comrades dismiss No Borders as a 'single issue' campaign, or charity work. In fact what we are doing is putting militant grassroots struggle into practice on one of the harshest frontlines of the class war. But the lessons we are learning, the practices we are developing, don't just apply to migration, but wherever we're attacked with poverty, criminalisation, surveillance, and techniques of control in home, workplace, public spaces. Particularly as the economic conditions worsen in Europe, the solidarity hubs and networks we create now will become the ground level of our resistance.

Dariusz Sokolov



Photo: Julie Rebouillat

CALAIS: HOW TO ORGANISE A SECRET FESTIVAL

"Dwelling, moving about, speaking, reading, shopping, and cooking are activities that seem to correspond to the characteristics of tactical ruses and surprises: clever tricks of the 'weak' within the order established by the 'strong', an art of putting one over on the adversary on his own turf, hunter's tricks, manoeuvrable, polymorph mobilities, jubilant, poetic and warlike discoveries" (Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*).

We actually did it. No Borders Calais organised a successful week-long music festival in Calais (6th to 12th September 2010), one of the shittiest towns in Europe, in the teeth of the French police and the local authorities, with no publicity at all, a few hundred Euros, and little of what you could call organisation. And some of us say it was just about the best party we've ever been to.

It's safe now to let the cat out of the bag – anyhow there's a crop of videos up on YouTube already, and a few references to 'Hafla bila Hudud / Festival Without Borders' have scattered themselves across the web. At the time, though, there was every need of secrecy. In February, when No Borders legally rented a warehouse (the 'Kronstadt Hangar') as a social and sleeping space to be shared with undocumented migrants, it was raided and closed down twice in two days by French riot police. Immigration minister Eric Besson appeared on national television denouncing No Borders as "violent left extremists" and repeating his vow to make Calais a "migrant free zone". We knew that any public event would be met with gendarmes and batons, so the festival was announced only by word of mouth and on closed email networks. Even so, around 100 international supporters came from all over Europe, from Ireland to Poland, to join migrants and local Calaisiens for a

week of music, art, and festivity.

Since last November the number of migrants in Calais, trying to cross the channel, has fallen to perhaps less than 200. But, if anything, the number of police has increased: there is still the permanent presence of the notorious CRS (Compagnies Republicaines de Securite) riot police who make constant raids and patrols against migrants, and the PAF (Police Aux Frontieres) border police have become increasingly active alongside them. The grim everyday for Calais *sans papiers* goes on: raids, beatings, arbitrary arrests, bedding and belongings destroyed and stolen, teargas in the water, pepper spray in the sleeping bags, etc.

In Calais a party, a night out, a simple gathering of friends, is much more than just hedonism. A party in Calais is something extraordinary. A music festival is an insurrection. We held concerts in the park and in some friendly local bars, as well as at the camps ('jungles') and squats where people live. The first night in the park we were sniffed at by undercover police: but when they saw our numbers they had to back off, and through the week our numbers grew. Internationals and locals with papers stood in the street outside events ready to form protection rings around migrants if the police moved in to snatch. The CRS looked on bemused – where had all these pesky No Borders come from? – and drove past empty handed. And that is what solidarity means – that is what we can do when we simply stand together.

In Calais, cooking and sharing a meal together is an act of rebellion. The routine: philanthropic associations hand out tasteless food, truly reminiscent of Dickensian gruel, in a bare yard surrounded by barbed wire, overlooked by undercover cops, council inspectors, and racist charity bosses. The festival took place at the end of Ramadan, the Islamic fasting month, a particularly

hard time in Calais with hunger and thirst compounding fear and exhaustion. And through Ramadan the police customarily raided at sunset to catch Muslim migrants gathering together to break their fast with heated-up charity slop. For the festival, the Dutch activist kitchen Rampenplan came to cook nutritious meals at lunch and sunset. We ate the evening meal together in the park, in the town square, and in the open space opposite the official 'food distro' point. People with and without papers, sharing food with music, banners, laughter, comradeship.

Just a few highlights. The massive Eid (end of Ramadan) party in Africa House (the squatted ex-factory which is the home of mainly Sudanese migrants), which brought together all the migrant communities of Calais – Sudanese and Eritreans and Pashtuns and Hazara and Kurds and Iranians and more, eating and dancing together. Saturday night's final party in the park with Pashtun dancing and Kurdish singing, followed by a parade up the main street to a bar for sets from Combat Wombat (Australia) and WildKatz Project (Brighton). Rebel recording sessions in the jungles, and in our short-lived new No Borders squat which for two days became a cauldron of sound and visual creation. The 'Food not Borders' stall in Place D'Armes. Taking over the food distro yard for weekend picnics with klezmer music, football, and multilingual chalking everywhere.

Everything is possible if people work together – even stopping Calais from being Calais (Arnaud Borderer)

"For a few days," said one *sans papier*, "I felt I wasn't in Calais." Yes, it was only a few days. The next Monday, the biggest police raid seen since February fell on Africa House, this time particularly targeting No Borders activists in a 'revenge' attack. Since then, the daily grind of raids and brutality continues – back to normality. But in those few energetic days we won something longer lasting: not just a vital breather, a glimpse of life beyond state repression, sweet sustaining memories, but the creation of new links of solidarity that we will continue to build on. That brief breathing space brought Calaisiens, visitors, and migrants from different, sometimes mutually suspicious, communities together like never before, creating new connections and relationships, deepening trust, knitting together our resistance. Not to mention: we learnt how to organise a secret festival. What next?

Noah Bordas

For more info see <http://calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com/> or <http://www.noborders.org.uk/>



Photo: Julie Rebouillat

COMMENT

ABOUT FREEDOM

ANGEL ALLEY

It was great to see so many comrades, and better still subscribers, over 'Anarchist Christmas'. So, first off thanks to all who helped out on the Freedom stall at the London Anarchist Bookfair, and especially to Tony who drove all our stuff there on Friday. We're pleased to say that sales were much improved on last year, thanks in large part to our new book, *Beating the Fascists* (available at £15 post free from a website not far from the bottom of this page).

We also had a very successful after party in Angel Alley, and apologies to anyone expecting to find us open on the Sunday as we were out celebrating anarchist Boxing Day with various comrades from around the country who strangely preferred inebriating liquor to reading books.

Slowly the shop is getting back to normal, but with a lot more work in the mail order department, again thanks to *BTF*.

Lastly but, as they say, by no means least, our latest art display starts this week. 'What They Want Is What They Get' is a selection of images and documentary film footage following the lives of a group of families at Dale Farm, Essex, which is currently the largest traveller site in Europe and has, for the past eight years, been constantly under the threat of eviction by Basildon Council.

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 20th November 2010 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 11th November. You can send your articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post addressed to 'The Editors', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

A sideways look

by SVARTFROSK

It used to be a boast for previous governments that they were 'joined up'. It meant they thought they had consistent policies and were not undermining one effect with another. It is a claim that appears to be a bit beyond the Coalition, particularly when it comes to housing.

On the one hand, there are changes proposed for housing benefit which will have two effects. The first is to set a local cap on the amount that can be claimed. The second is to reduce the amount payable if someone has been out of work for over a year. At the same time, building new affordable housing is cut particularly hard, and secure tenancies are being abolished.

The message from the government is that benefit claimants shouldn't be able to live in expensive homes in expensive areas – that is a privilege only afforded to their tax-dodging mates. The thrust of the policy has support from many working people who are amazed that anyone can afford to live in the more salubrious bits of inner London. This lack of solidarity has been inflamed by tabloid stories of large families, often foreign, living it up in mansions on the social.

What really underlies the government's proposed changes to housing benefit is its cost. It used to be that housing benefit was recycled into building new homes. Since about 1992, the number of homes built has been low. Most of the investment since 1997, when Labour began to reverse the worst of the Tory excesses, has been in refurbishment rather than new build. Again, no surprise here as massive under-investment needed fixing. But it does nothing to increase supply. Instead, both parties have been relaxed about promoting the private sector. The last Labour government practically subsidised the buy-to-let landlords.

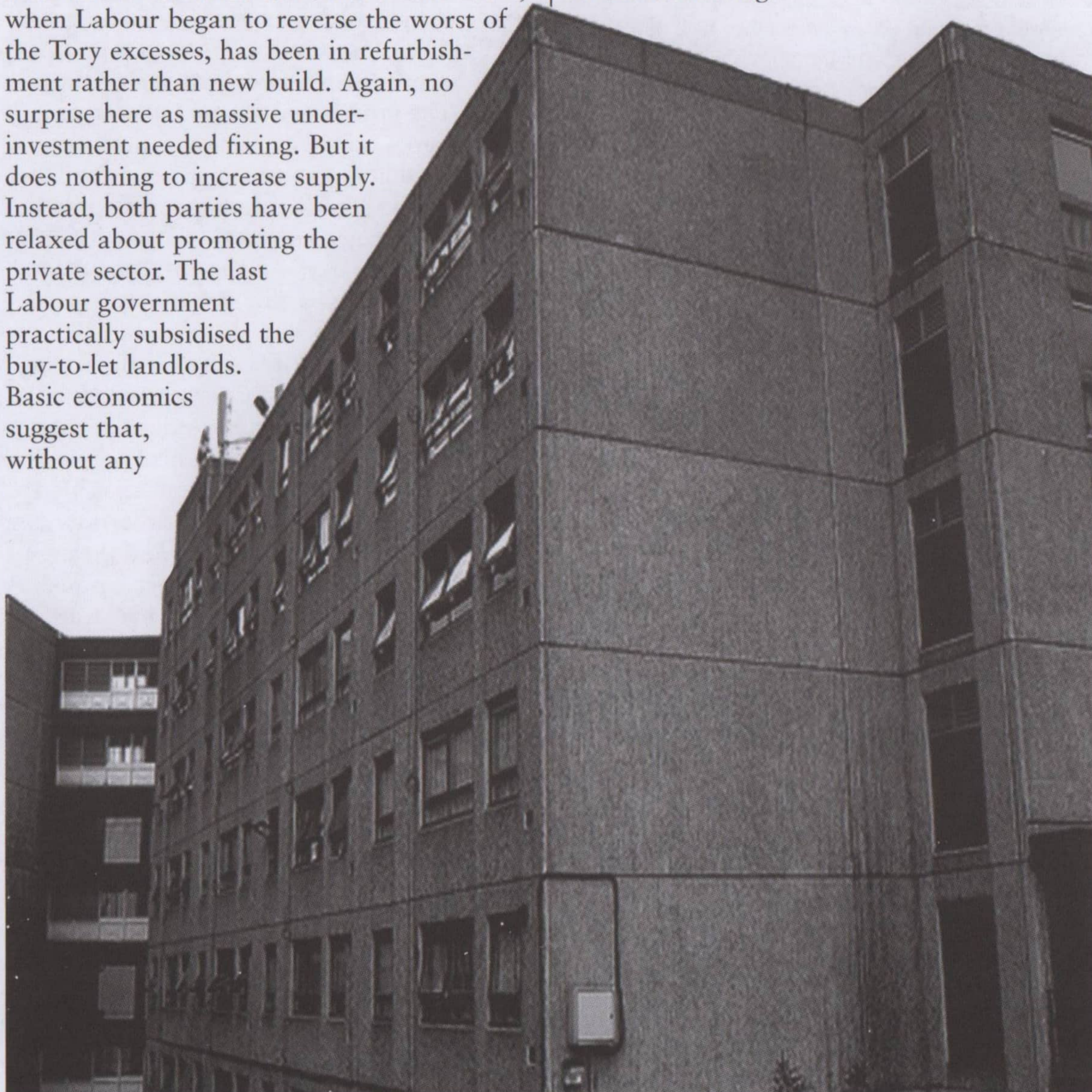
Basic economics suggest that, without any

rent controls, if supply is less than demand market rents will grow until demand is put off by high prices. So, rents are high, and being subsidised through housing benefit.

The Tories think that capping housing benefit will make rents come down, thus making savings. And they're meant to be the Party that understands the market! Unless there is an increase in supply, cuts to housing benefit will mean existing tenants being replaced by those prepared to pay more.

London councils estimate they have 82,000 families who will be affected by the cap. This is bad enough, but they'd reckoned without another Tory policy which wants to see rents in council and housing association homes rise to about 80% of local market rents. Imagine you're on the dole, for over a year, and your rent for your council flat has just gone up to £300 a week. Even if you're not hit by the cap, you will need to find £30 a week from your £65 a week dole. Get a low paid job at minimum wage and your pay won't even cover your rent, even before tax. And if you live in an unemployment black-spot, you'll be hectored to move to somewhere else and find a job, but never be able to afford to live there.

So, this is either a model for welfare dependency and a symbol of confusion in the heart of the government: or it is the opening salvo in a full-on assault on the idea of social housing.



What's the future for trade unions

The link of the trade unions to the Labour Party is a hindrance to the unions response to the Coalition Government, and it's not the only one. The trade unions like to think that they founded and they own the Labour Party, but in truth that is not the case and never has been. The Labour Party was founded by a coalition of the trade unions, the Independent Labour Party, the intellectuals of the Fabian Society and a host of other interested bodies. The trade unions were only dragged into the coalition after the Taff Vale judgment, when it became obvious that the Liberals alone were not going to repeal this judgement. And I suppose that the alliance worked well enough for the moderate minded, so that by the sixties and seventies, whole bodies of opinion from Tory to right wing Labour believed that the country was heading for socialism. There was full employment, council houses were plentiful (the waiting list in London was about a year), wages were being forced up. You could argue that what the Labour Party set out to do was give the working class beer and baths. That has completely broken down. New Labour, as generally agreed, was merely a continuation of Thatcherism. All that the Labour Party can offer the trade unions is to

take their money and to make their officials into Lords. Prime example being Brenda 'the members will decide' Dean. Do we really want to promote this behaviour? The trade unions' relationship with the Labour Party is that of a tenant who has been evicted, but still hangs about the street hoping that someone will let him in.

In the coming struggle against the cuts, the trade unions are not the only people in that struggle. Indeed the trade unions are unlikely to win the struggle without support from people who are not in trade unions. Making alliances with those other groups could well be crucial part of that struggle. And there is a new radical movement growing that the trade unions are not part of. From the Poll Tax struggle, the climate change groups, the EDO struggle in Brighton, the No Borders campaign, etc. Many of these groups draw inspiration from the Greenham Women (one of the struggles of the eighties that was successful) and they have non-hierarchical organisation. Of course, as anarchists this is the organisation that we find ourselves at ease in. Our idea of a union is like the Spanish CNT with three million members who paid no subs and there was one full time official. This was the powerhouse of the Spanish Revolution.

Trade unions in this country are very hierarchical and all the leaderships guard their power with extreme jealousy. The thought of having to co-operate with other groups will not please them one bit and they

will shy away from this struggle. No surprise there – the TUC has shied away from many a struggle and, in its present form, it merely says the cuts are too much and should be moderated. This, therefore, is an opportunity for us, and some of the more militant trade unions have realised it. The RMT sent their London Regional Organiser to speak at the Whitechapel Anarchist Group recently. I have never witnessed this before, as the idea of a trade union official speaking at an anarchist meeting would not have been tolerated – clearly times have changed and the RMT at least has seen that.

To facilitate that alliance the link with the Labour Party has to be ended. The Green Party has a much more pro-trade union policy – it is in favour of repealing the anti-union legislation and, though it is small, it is growing and will mushroom when an ecological disaster happens (not if, when). This is a growing political party. All the arguments like 'they may be bastards, but they are *our* bastards', 'we need a seat at the top table' and 'we can change the Labour Party' are complete nonsense. To make any sort of alliance with these groups the trade unions need to prove that they are not part of the establishment and that the struggle of these groups is the same as the struggle of the trade unions. Breaking the link with the Labour Party would be a first step. Other than that, we carry on paying for our oppressors.

Pete Gold

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GETTING ACTIVE

PRISON NEWS

Since the last column covering the ConDem Coalition's announcement on possible changes to prisoners' pay regulations, allowing deductions to be made into a central 'victims fund', the accompanying apparent casual aside from Justice Secretary Ken Clarke about his aspiration that prisoners might in future receive the minimum wage has taken centre stage. Rather than being an off-the-cuff remark, it turned out to be a carefully planned preparing of the ground in advance of his keynote speech to the Conservative Party conference.

Clarke's 'Rehabilitation Revolution' has already raised cries of disbelief amongst the punitive Tory faithful, so it was no surprise that his speech was made to a half-full hall and was greeted with a less than rapturous response. As an experienced politician, he had prepared some more traditional 'hang 'em flog 'em' fare to put on the menu, putting the boot into prisoners: "We need, in my opinion, to instil in our jails, a regime of hard work. Most prisoners lead a life of enforced, bored idleness, where even getting out of bed is optional. If we want to reduce the crimes ... we need as many as possible to get used to working hard for regular working hours ... to get those with the backbone to go straight, to handle a life without crime when they have finished their punishment."

Could almost have been Michael Howard up there, especially when he added: "So we will make it easier for Prison Governors to bring more private companies into jails to create well-run businesses employing prisoners in nine-to-five jobs." But this is not some revisiting of Thatcherite privatisation or a part of the ConDem Coalition agenda of a return to the Victorian values of thrift and self-reliance, of philanthropy and charities running basic public services and talk of the undeserving poor. It is in reality the long established pattern of importing practices from the US version of the Prison Industrial Complex, in this case the use of long-term prisoners as a pool of cheap labour.

Visit most maximum security prisons in the US and you'll find a call centre operated by prisoners booking flights, or prisoners assembling and repairing circuit boards for the big computer companies or making uniforms for McDonalds. It's big business and this is apparently what Clarke aims to do. However, the problems behind this idea are enormous, not least the financing the building of new workshops at a time of massive cutbacks. And the idea of paying a select group of apparently volunteer prisoners – those who had completed all the offending behaviour courses, i.e. long-term prisoners – the minimum wage whilst the remaining prisoners are forced to compete for a limited number of compulsory shitty jobs for mere peanuts will inevitably lead to divisions amongst prisoners.

For more background on this issue see <http://www.againstprisonslavery.org/>



● London anarchists came out in force to support tube drivers, maintenance workers and station cleaners of the RMT union who had organised a 2,000 strong march on Saturday 23th October. The aim of the central London march was to lobby the TUC to play a more militant role in fighting the government cuts. The **Radical Workers Bloc** was originally called by Solidarity Federation and, despite the march falling on the same day as the London Anarchist Bookfair, the bloc itself proved to be successful in promoting a healthy visible anarchist presence in support of the RMT's call for direct action and civil disobedience. As the propaganda stated "We are ... forming a 'Radical Worker's Bloc' on the demonstration, not to beg the trade union bureaucrats to take action, but to argue that we fight the cuts based on the principles of solidarity, direct action, and control of our own struggles."

● In **Bristol** anti-police sabotage actions were executed on the nights of the 8th and 9th October in solidarity with all those inside and outside prison who have been beaten, abused and murdered by police. Both marked and unmarked police cars were targeted in various stations around the city, including Avonmouth police garage and CID regional HQ. Although no group claimed responsibility, it is an example of the ongoing and escalating campaign of sabotage against state institutions around the city.

Bath Bomb, the city's monthly radical free sheet, who proudly declare they have been "abusing authority figures and the English

language since 2007", is officially skint and it looking for donations to be able to keep the project going. Their latest issue (#34) looks like it could be the last, unless they receive much needed financial help. They are asking activists if they can make a donation. Contact them at bathbombpress@yahoo.co.uk or alternatively, for armchair activists, £15 gets you a year of *Bath Bombs* posted to your door.

● The **Just Books** fundraiser and new *Leveller* newspaper winter issue (now in colour!) launch party took place on Thursday 28th October to raise funds for their new premises. The money will go towards creating a labour resource and solidarity centre in Belfast that will incorporate accessible resources and information for workers in struggle – in a premises providing a multi-lingual resource library, a bookshop, meeting space, internet access and a coffee shop.

Just Books Collective, PO Box 505, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT12 6BQ, or email: jst_books@yahoo.com

● The **Solidarity Federation** has updated its website to make it more user friendly and easier to access. The front page is now dominated by the activities of the group, with reports from various actions, demonstrations and meetings along with useful propaganda material. Not only does it promote the group much more effectively, it looks much cleaner, well thought out and certainly more inviting for the casual browser to engage with – it looks like a website from a group who wants to be taken seriously. Check it out for yourself. <http://www.solidarityfederation.org.uk/>

Ideas on revolutionary struggle

Anarcho-syndicalism and the rank and file movement

This edited article on the attempt to formulate a workers rank and file group during the early 1960s involving the Syndicalist Workers Federation, forerunner to Direct Action Movement and Solidarity Federation, originally appeared in *Freedom* on 28th January 1961.

This weekend there is to be held in London the first Conference of the newly-formed Rank and File Movement. Much work has been put into the preparation of this conference by liaison committees; discussion meetings have been going on in London, resolutions and amendments have been drawn up, and it may well be that this event will be a significant one for the militants among the industrial workers at least.

Today, few workers are satisfied with the official trade union leadership. They may not be sufficiently interested to want to help to create any alternative, but there is little illusion left among the rank and file in general that the trade union leaders are anything more than careerists feathering their own nests, playing the bosses' game and, in effect an arm of the State for the purpose of maintaining discipline over the workers.

The significance of this weekend's conference lies in the very fact that it could provide that alternative – *as long as the form decided upon for the proposal Rank and File movement does break new ground and avoids the pitfalls of leadership and authoritarianism.*

This, it seems to us, is where anarcho-syndicalism has something to offer. It presents a ready-made body of ideas which fits the situation perfectly. It always has, of course, but until the easy, authoritarian, ideologies had been tried and found wanting, the libertarian alternative has had to wait. In other words, until the rank and file were prepared to take responsibility, anarcho-syndicalism was not a practical possibility. If the militants have really learned the lessons of working class history, now is the time to make a significant breakthrough.

Let us state simply the basis of anarcho-syndicalism as we see it. First of all, though, sorry about the long name! But since there is syndicalism and syndicalism (in Franco's Spain and Peron's Argentina there have been state syndicates, and the French word for the ordinary reformist trade union is *syndicat*) it is necessary for us to specify which kind of syndicalism we advocate. *Anarcho-syndicalism* means the coming together of workers under their own steam to form their own organisation for their own purposes inspired by the ideas of anarchism.

This means that the organisation has a clearly defined goal: the achievement of a free society where all the institutions of authority,



all the means by which man dominates and exploits man, have been done away with. Where everyone has free and equal access to the means of life, where the productive and distributive industries are controlled by those who work in them on behalf of the community as a whole. Syndicalism provides the means for achieving this goal and the organisational framework for this concept to be applied to modern industry, and broadly its principles are these: the aim is workers' control of industry. Now since we believe that our aim conditions our means, it follows that our organisation must reflect and be an expression of that aim. In other words, that the workers must have control of their organisation, and, if their goal is freedom, that organisation must have a libertarian basis.

Therefore we suggest that any rank and file organisation which aims at workers' control must guard from the beginning against the emergence of a leadership. It can do this as follows:

1. There should be no full-time paid officials.
2. Any individual chosen to speak or carry out any function on behalf of the membership should be a delegate and not a representative, i.e. he should speak or act as instructed by the rank and file and not be given powers to take decisions affecting them without full consultation.
3. If such activity does result in a loss of earnings by the delegate, he should be compensated by the organisation at the rate he would have earned at his job, no more.
4. It should be recognised that the workers' greatest influence exists *at the point of production*, not in Parliament or in trade

union headquarters. Action should therefore always be *direct action* on the job. In this way the workers' responsibility at their place of work, and their importance there is always stressed. These methods of direct action include the strike, but the simple walk-out strike is rarely the most effective. Variations upon it should be preferred, demonstrating the workers' importance and their right to the factory, the machinery, the materials and the goods they create from them

5. Organisation should be by *industry* not by trade. The present ridiculous methods of craft unions do more to divide workers than unite them, and only provide opportunities for careerists. Within each industry and between industries, organisation should be established on a *federal*, decentralised basis, rooted in the Works Council.
6. It should be clearly understood that the State is the implacable enemy of the working class. The State consists of the combined institutions of government and can only exist in a class-divided society. It follows that where there is a State there must be a subject working class.

This is a very brief outline of the anarcho-syndicalist position, but it does provide a basis for an organic set-up of which a truly libertarian organisation can be built. One thing is absolutely certain. If the Rank and File Movement is not established upon some such foundation, with an essentially anarchistic inspiration, it will fall prey to the machinations of political tricksters and either collapse or go the same way as the official trade union movement.

REVIEWS

WHAT'S ON

NOVEMBER

■ **until 30th** Photo and documentary film exhibition by Unmanageable TV about Dale Farm, Essex the largest traveller site in Europe, currently under threat of eviction, 12 noon to 6pm Monday to Saturday, Sundays 12 noon until 4pm at the Freedom Bookshop and Autonomy Club, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX, see freedompress.org.uk/news/2010/10/28/what-they-want-what-they-get/ or <http://2010.photomonth.org/listings#F> for details.

■ **6th** Lancaster Anarchist Fair at Friends Meeting House, Meeting House Lane, Lancaster LA1 1TX, from 10.30am until 5pm, a day to explore ideas central to anarchy, what it is and how it could provide us with the tools for a fair, co-operative and fun future, with workshops, stalls and food, email anarchyupnorth@riseup.net for details.

■ **7th** Spirit of Christmas Fair demo. Clarion Events (promoters of the DSEi Arms Fair) are holding a Spirit of Christmas Fair at Olympia, so come and help draw attention to this – leaflets will be provided, meet 11am at Olympia Exhibition Centre, Hammersmith Road, London W14 8UX or contact londoncaat@riseup.net for more.

■ **7th** SchNEWS Benefit with The Don Bradmans, plus The Meow Meows and Crispian Baker at Hectors House, 52–54 Grand Parade, Brighton BN2 9QA, from 8pm, £5, for details phone 01273 685913, email mail@schnews.org.uk or see schnews.org.uk.

■ **10th** National anti-education cuts demo, assemble at 12 noon at Horse Guards Avenue, Westminster, London SW1A for a 1pm start, march through Westminster to the rally with speakers, see demo2010.org for details.

■ **13th** Leeds Zine Fair at Leeds University Union, Conference room from 10am, plus co-hosts, the radical printing collective Footprints, will be celebrating their 10th birthday with an after-party at The Common Place, 23-25 Wharf Street, Leeds LS2 7EQ, see footprinters.co.uk for more.

■ **26th to 28th** Dissent! A counter-summit camp in response to the G8-G20 in Dijon, France – we propose to bring our stories, experiences, political perceptions, thematic concerns, types of action, to think together on new forms of resistance, full details of locations and times will be sent out by email, contact dissent_fr@riseup.net or see www.dissent-fr.eu for details.

DECEMBER

■ **4th** Global Day of Action on climate change, march on Parliament for Climate Justice and be part of a Global Day of Action on climate, assemble at 12 noon at Speakers Corner, Hyde Park, London for Zero Carbon March, then 2pm rally in Parliament Square, for details phone 020 7833 9311, see globalclimatecampaign.org or campaigncc.org.

Our mutualist friend

Iain McKay pays a long overdue visit on an old comrade and finds him still as congenial as ever

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon made his name with his first *Memoir* on property, 1840's *What is Property?* After two more *Memoirs* in 1841 and 1842, his next major work was 1846's *System of Economic Contradictions* in which he first used "mutualism" to describe his libertarian socialism (inspired by the workers in Lyons where he stayed in 1843).

Only the first volume has been translated into English, although here I cover both. As with later anarchists, Proudhon critiques and rejects the twin evils of capitalism ("monopoly and what follows") and nationalisation ("exploitation by the State") in favour of "a solution based upon equality – in other words, the organisation of labour, which involves the negation of political economy and the end of property."

Rejecting the utopian socialists and their visions, Proudhon analysed how the actual economy was changing and built a socialism rooted in that evolution. He argued that capitalism was the latest economy of many,

denouncing "the radical vice of political economy" that affirms "as a definitive state a transitory condition – namely, the division of society into patricians and proletaires," which is "distinguished by a special characteristic: *wage-labour*." As political economy defends this "inadequate and transitory" form of organising labour, it is "truly the theory of misfortune and the organisation of misery" as well as a fertile source for apologetics: "Political economy – that is, proprietary despotism – can never be in the wrong: it must be the proletariat."

A key contribution to socialist theory is Proudhon's analysis of how exploitation occurs in production. Labour, he argued, produces value only as *active* labour engaged in the production process: "Labour is said to have value, not as merchandise itself, but in view of the values supposed to be contained in it potentially. The value of labour is a figurative expression, an anticipation of effect from cause ... it becomes a reality through its product." Consequently, when workers are hired by a boss there is no guarantee that the value of the goods produced equals their wage. The boss controls both product and labour:

"Do you know what it is to be a wage-worker? It is to labour under a master, watchful for his prejudices even more than

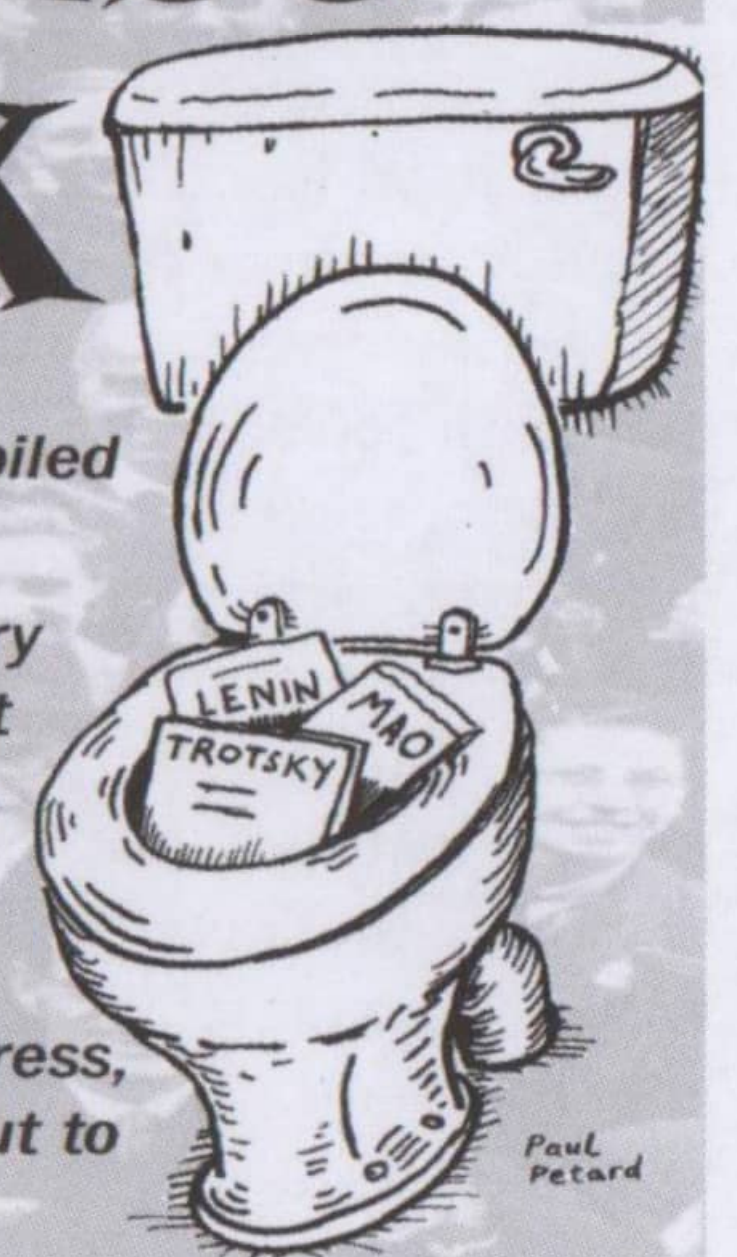
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The Anarchist Quiz Book

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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QUIZ ANSWERS

1. CABE found that in many cases the 'luxury flats' in these 'stunning developments' were well below the Parker Morris minimum standards established for council housing in the early 1960s.
2. The British National Party. BNP fuhrer Nick Griffin used a variation on the Marmite 'Love it or Hate it' advert for election material (you can guess how). Marmite's owners protested and, after the BNP ignored them, sued for breach of copyright, costing the fascists more than £100,000.
3. The CPS dropped 200 fines and 130 summonses. Griffin is a major donor to the Conservative Party and his taxis ferried the Tories about in the run up to the election.
4. Amazingly, Tory Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, talking about the government's proposed changes to housing benefit. Though he did backtrack after getting a bollocking from Central Office.

Our mutualist friend

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for his orders ... It is to have no mind of your own ... to know no stimulus save your daily bread and the fear of losing your job.

“The wage-worker is a man to whom the property owner who hires him says: What you have to make is none of your business; you do not control it.”

Thus the capitalist firm “with its hierarchical organisation” meant workers had “parted with their liberty” and “sold their arms” to a boss who exploits them:

“the labourer ... create[s], on top of his subsistence, a capital always greater. Under the regime of property, the surplus of labour, essentially collective, passes entirely, like the revenue, to the proprietor...”

“The consequence of that usurpation is that the labourer, whose share of the collective product is constantly confiscated by the entrepreneur, is always on his uppers, while the capitalist is always in profit ... political economy, that upholds and advocates that regime, is the theory of theft.”

He critically discusses many subjects – division of labour, machinery, competition, monopoly, etc. – and shows their contradictions when applied within capitalism. So machinery “promised us an increase of wealth” but also produced “an increase of poverty” as well as bringing us “slavery,” deepening “the abyss which separates the class that commands and enjoys from the class that obeys and suffers.”

Such contradictions could only be solved by transcending capitalism. While Proudhon prefaces his work with the Latin for “I shall destroy and I shall build” there is far more of the former than the latter. However, glimpses of his alternative come through in his critique, confirming his claim that “to unfold the system of economical contradictions is to lay the foundations of universal association.”

Proudhon’s analysis of how exploitation occurred in production and the authoritarian nature of the capitalist workplace is reflected in his arguments for workers’ associations and socialisation. As “all labour must leave a surplus, all wages [must] be equal to product” and so “[b]y virtue of the principle of collective force, labourers are the equals and associates of their leaders.” There would be free access to the means of life (workplaces “should allow access to all who might present themselves”), self-management (all workers “to straightway enjoy the rights and prerogatives of associates and even managers”) and workers co-operatives: “it is necessary to destroy ... the predominance of capital over labour, to change the relations between employer and worker ... it is necessary to *organise labour*.”

Myths notwithstanding, he considered a return to small-scale production “retrograde” and “impossible.” With labour “socialised” and organised, mutualism would ensure “equality of fortunes, voluntary and free association, universal solidarity, material comfort and luxury, and public order without



prisons, courts, police, or hangmen.”

Another important contribution to anarchist theory is Proudhon’s analysis of the state as an instrument of class rule which cannot be captured for social reform. The state, he stressed, is “inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat” and so “it is of no use to change the holders of power or introduce some variation into its workings.” Hence the need for change by the workers themselves as “socialism loudly declares itself anarchistic” and social life “springs up and grows from below.”

He was well aware of the class nature of capitalism, arguing that “the war that you have to sustain” is “a war of labour against capital; a war of liberty against authority” and recognising the oscillations of profits and wages “are the most salient episodes and the most remarkable phases of the war between labour and capital.” Thus the “problem before the labouring classes ... consists not in capturing, but in subduing both power and monopoly – that is, in generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the state and subjugate them.”

While you may think Proudhon, like revolutionary anarchists, would have applied this insight to the labour movement, he did not. He was against strikes and unions, arguing they would simply increase prices and that it is “not by such methods” that workers “will attain to wealth and – what is a thousand times more precious than wealth

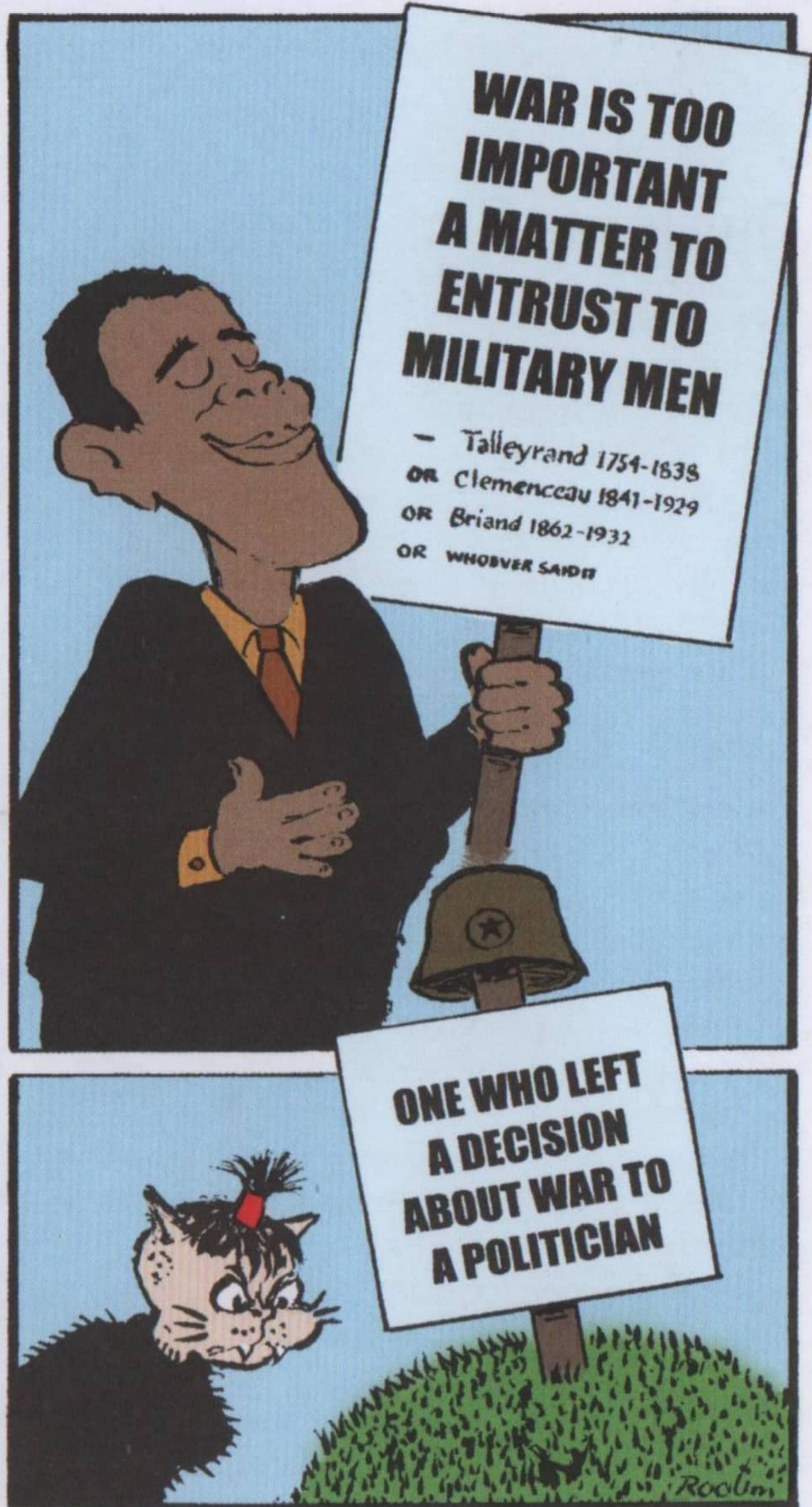
– liberty.” Few anarchists today would agree – and rightly so! Instead, we argue that unions and workers councils must be the basis of the “agricultural and industrial combination” which Proudhon argued would ensure that “power, today the ruler of society, shall become its slave.”

Before finishing, Marx’s *The Poverty of Philosophy* must be mentioned. While Marx makes some valid points (Proudhon’s “constituted value” is under-developed and his opposition to unions is misguided), his selective quoting, quote tampering and false attribution drain those of value. It can only be taken seriously if you have not read Proudhon’s work as can be seen when Marx ignores his critique of bourgeois relations within production and proclaims his “whole system rests on the labour commodity, on labour which is trafficked, bought and sold, exchanged for products.”

While Proudhon’s reformist market socialism needs a (libertarian) communist critique, Marx’s book with its confusions, distortions and inventions has little to offer such a task. In contrast, Proudhon’s critiques of *state socialism* have proven prescient.

Marx’s task was aided by the book being badly organised. By breaking his critique into specific “epochs” it makes it harder to show the interrelationships between them. It also makes understanding both Proudhon’s critique of capitalism and his vision of a better future much harder, as related aspects of both are scattered in different chapters

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Review

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(a key insight into his theory of association is mentioned, in passing, in his discussion of God!).

This presentation may also make the casual reader think that Proudhon was presenting a historical account, but no: "we are not constructing a history in accordance with the order of events, but in accordance with the succession of ideas. The economic phases or categories are now contemporary, now inverted, in their manifestation." Marx, deliberately or not, fell into that misunderstanding. Evidence is marshalled to bolster his arguments but within a framework which can, at times, appear less materialist than it actually is.

In short, it is a book with important insights and critiques as well as parts which are under-developed, tedious, obscure and, such as opposing strikes, simply wrong. Acknowledging its faults that should not put you off reading it – when Proudhon gets it right his arguments *are* cogent, significant and have become standard aspects of anarchist theory. With an open mind and patience, the reader will gain a lot – not least an appreciation of how Marx distorted Proudhon's ideas and how Marxists (and a few libertarians!) parrot those misrepresentations to this day.

System of Economic Contradictions by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon is out of print, but extracts will appear in Iain McKay's forthcoming Proudhon anthology to be published by AK Press.

THE QUIZ

1. According to the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), how good are a lot of the 'luxury flats' built in the last decade?
2. Who might be bankrupted by Marmite?
3. Since August, mini-cab firm Addison Lee, owned by John Griffin, has been using the M4 bus lane, in anticipation of it being abolished. What was the response of the Crown Prosecution Service? And what other public role does John Griffin have?
4. Who claimed that he was against "Kosovo-style social cleansing" in London?

Answers on page 14

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