

FREEDOM

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J30: STRIKING OUT

More than just a public sector strike

Unquestionably 30th June stands out as the biggest single day of industrial action in recent history. The fact that four major unions can call a day of co-ordinated mass strike action is an impressive feat in itself, and that rank and file members responded in such a positive manner against the backdrop of an unsympathetic media and downright hostile government. But the range of actions organised on the day and the level of participation from those not directly connected to the strike – student groups and claimants groups, anti-cuts groups and anarchist groups – indicates there's more to J30 than a simple industrial dispute.

The teachers unions NUT, UCU and ATL along with the civil service union PCS all have legitimate grievances concerning pensions contributions and cuts to public services. And no-one doubts that the government's 'austerity measures' are a direct assault on the working conditions of millions of public sector workers, but for those not directly involved, the narrative to 30th June was far more robust – just as the government attacks on the public sector is politically motivated so the response must be equally politically motivated.

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LENS CAP WHERE THE STARS HAVE NO SHAME



Multi-millionaire tax dodgers and faux liberal rock stars U2, who made £122m last year not singing rebel songs, came under fire at this year's Glastonbury festival when Art Uncut activists inflated a 20-foot balloon with the message 'U Pay Your Tax 2', only to be violently attacked by private security. The crowd responded by having a go at the security.

WHOSE RECESSION?

The rich are getting richer and that's official. Despite a government cabinet filled with multi-millionaires telling the rest of us we need 'austerity measures' because of the global recession and economic crisis, 2010 turned out to be a pretty good year for the worlds wealthy.

According to the annual World Wealth Report, compiled by financial services giants Capgemini and Merrill Lynch, the number of wealthy in the world and the amount of wealth they have is at an all time high. Which begs the question where is all this money coming from? And where is it going?

The figures published in the report relate to 'high net worth individuals' – people who have investable financial assets exceeding \$1million, and show that the accumulated

wealth of the world's millionaires actually increased by 9.7% in 2010, to a total of \$42.7 trillion. To put that into some perspective the gross domestic product (GDP) of the USA, the highest of any country in the world, only came to \$14.6 trillion last year. GDP is the total value of all goods and services produced within a country.

Not only that but the number of millionaires increased as well to an all time high of 10.9 million. To add insult to injury those who have assets exceeding \$30million did even better increasing their accumulated wealth by 11.5%. This is at a time when funding to essential services are being cut, teachers sacked and people thrown off incapacity benefits to save the government money.

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NEWS

NEWS IN BRIEF

HOUSING: The Council of Mortgage Lenders has published forecasts for the UK housing market, in which it predicts that arrears and repossessions are set to rise during the remainder of 2011 and throughout 2012. This comes on the back of newly published statistics compiled by the housing charity Shelter that says one in ten working Scottish households are currently living under the threat of home repossession. Shelter, which offers support to people facing homelessness, warned that poverty is set to engulf a “new demographic” – that of working families – in the coming months.

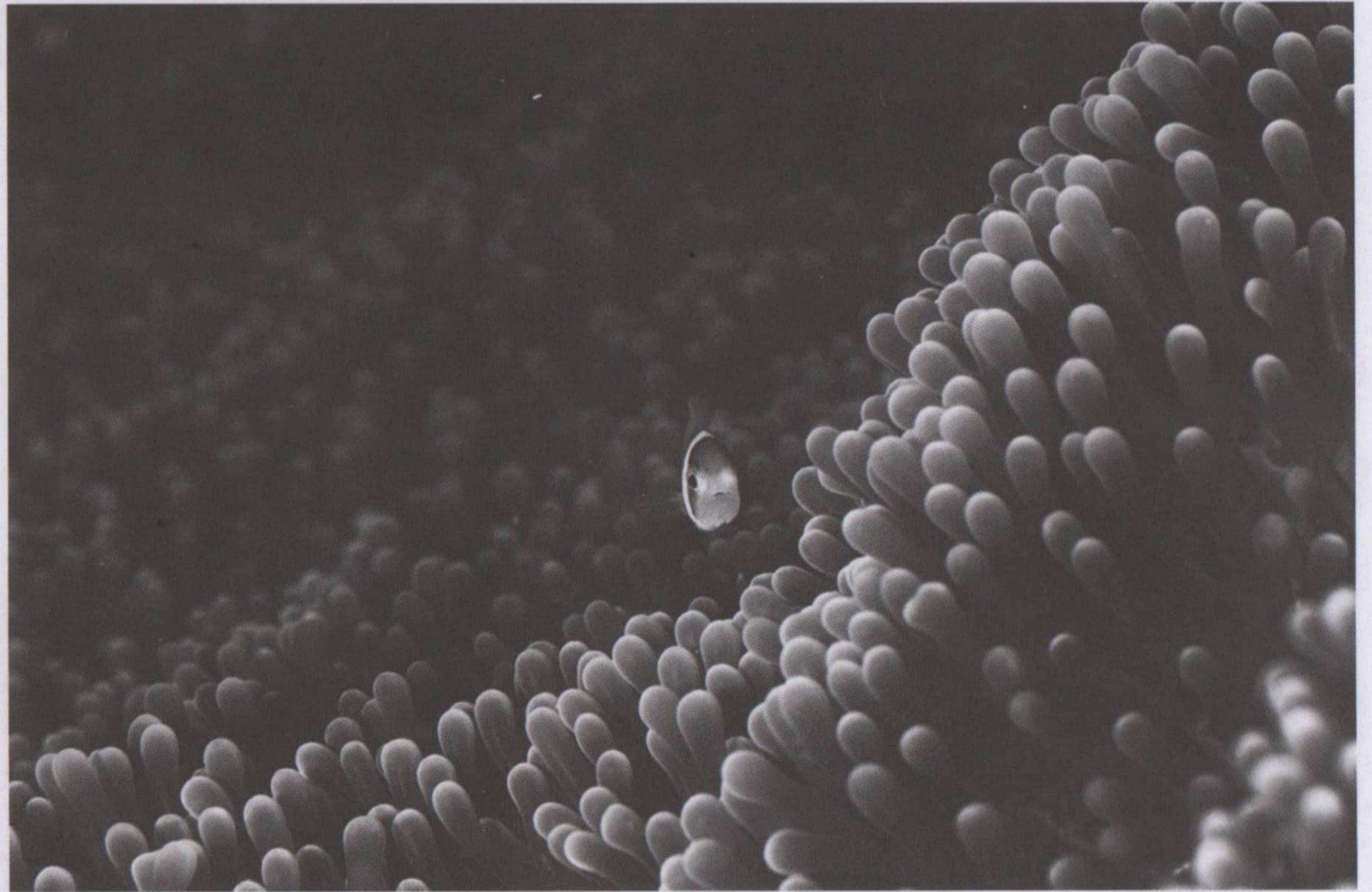
JUSTICE: Ian Tomlinson’s killer PC Simon Harwood is to stand trial at the Old Bailey in October. The police officer was part of the violent Territorial Support Group at the time he killed Tomlinson during the anti-G20 protests in the city of London in 2009. Originally Kier Starmer, the Director of Public Prosecutions, refused to bring criminal charges against Harwood and only changed his mind after the inquest jury returned a verdict of unlawful killing.

LEGAL: The government’s legal reform bill is set to wipe away access to legal representation for the vast majority of ordinary people as employment, debt and education advice, and a good proportion of housing and immigration advice, are all being removed from future government funding. A total of £350m is to be cut meaning legal aid “will no longer routinely be available for employment, immigration, some debt and housing issues, some education cases, and welfare benefits” according to the Justice minister Ken Clarke.

PROTEST: Activists from Citizens United Against Public Sector Cuts, occupied the public advice centre at an HM Revenue and Customs building in Glasgow in protest at the disability allowance being abolished and at disabled people being labelled ‘scroungers’. The 16-strong group entered the public advice centre at an HM Revenue and Customs building in Glasgow and held up placards, shouting ‘No to the rich’. One activist stated: “We are protesting about a £120bn tax gap owed by corporations and private individuals. Why should disabled people suffer for a crisis that was caused by systemic flaws in the financial system?”

TRANSPORT: Workers on the Heathrow Express rail service won a significant victory in an improved pay deal after they voted overwhelmingly for further strike action. Heathrow Express management initially offered the rail link workers a “completely unacceptable pay offer... loaded with strings” and refused to sit round the table to negotiate. It was only after workers voted in favour of strike action, refuse overtime and work to rule that the company, whose profits exceeded £6m last year, offered an improved pay package.

LENS CAP OCEANS NIL



The world’s oceans are faced with an unprecedented loss of species comparable to the great mass extinctions of prehistory as the seas are degenerating far faster than anyone has predicted says a report from a panel of leading marine scientists. The report’s conclusions will be presented at the UN in New York where discussions begin on reforming governance of the oceans.

Clause 12 – no justice for some

If David Cameron gets his way on the government’s proposed Sentencing and Legal Aid bill it could have serious repercussions for political activists, radicals and especially those arrested on demonstrations and protests. Under new proposals put forward in his legal reform bill the right to legal representation will cease to be automatic for all those arrested and held in custody by police.

Currently anyone who is arrested is entitled to free legal advice from a solicitor paid for through the legal aid process which comes out of the government spending budget. In attempt to save £350m Cameron wants to introduce a means test for those arrested. This has been slipped in the bill under ‘Clause 12’ which states only those who pass the test will be entitled to free legal assistance.

The bill states that a Director of Legal Aid Case Work, a civil servant designated by the Lord Chancellor, will be appointed to determine whether the arrested person qualifies for legal advice or assistance and will make that determination on financial considerations and tellingly “in the interests of justice”. It is



not clear how this will play out when, for example, we have already seen it is in the interests of justice to arrest and charge 145 peaceful demonstrators. What is clear is that an arrested person will only get advice in the police station if the government decides in the individual case that it is in the interests of justice for you to do so. If you are arrested for protesting against the government this makes the law a very fragile tool indeed.

In real terms it looks likely the police will once again hold all the cards during an arrested person’s time in custody. Once it was the police who had the power to charge people with a criminal offence – this was taken away from them and handed directly to the Crown Prosecution Service as the police were incapable of charging people correctly and without prejudice, especially relating to public order offences or offences against the police. With the inclusion of Clause 12 it guarantees the ‘interests of justice’ will no longer be independent and universal but in the hands of the very people whose interests are best served in charging you. In assessing a person’s right to justice the director will be guided by the police’s interpretation of the facts.

It is a shoddy piece of legislation open to all manner of interpretation and abuse if implemented. It also shows the absolute contempt rich right-wing politicians have for the universal rights of ordinary people. If ‘Clause 12’ does get passed into law it will have far reaching consequences on the nature of political policing and opens up the way for even greater miscarriages of justice.



The successful blockade of Harmondsworth and Colnbrook on 21st June which prevented a mass deportation flight to Baghdad.

Activists stop deportation flight

Blockade prevents mass deportation of refugees

No Borders and refugee solidarity activists successfully blockaded the Harmondsworth and Colnbrook immigration prisons on 21st June to stop a mass deportation flight to Baghdad. About 70 Iraqi refugees, mostly Kurds, were due to be forcibly flown on a specially chartered flight from an undisclosed airport at 11pm. Campaigners quickly mobilised to prevent the illegal transport of refugees out of the country.

By mid afternoon over 30 angry protesters from No Borders, Stop Deportation and other groups, along with members of the detainees' families and others from the Iraqi Kurdish community, began blockading the single access road to the business park housing both Colnbrook and Harmondsworth, blocking the joint entrance to the two detention centres near Heathrow airport.

Meanwhile, the Immigration Advisory Service lawyers, representing many of the deportees, pursued a judicial review on the basis that the forced deportation to Iraq would breach deportees' human rights under international law. According to evidence collected by the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees (IFIR), many of those who have been deported to Iraq over the past few years are now living in hiding, in fear of the persecution they originally left Iraq to flee. A last-minute court injunction finally forced the Home Office to call off the attempted mass expulsion.

Earlier in the day, prisoners had been moved from other detention centres across the country to the Heathrow centres to get everyone together for the flight. These included more than 20 currently on hunger strike held in Campsfield immigration prison near Oxford.

Earlier this month, several detainees held at Campsfield went on hunger strike in protest at their planned deportation. In a statement they said: "Some of us don't have any homes or nowhere to go in Iraq. If we were returned

we would be left to survive for ourselves on the streets with nothing. Some of us don't even know if our family members are alive or dead because we haven't had any contact with them for a long time. We have family and friends here. Being parted from them at this time is very hard and stressful for both sides. Everyone has the right to be able to live in a safe country."

The last deportation blockade was at Colnbrook in May 2009. Since then mass deportation flights have become increasingly frequent and now include charter flights coordinated by the EU joint border police Frontex. There are still many hundreds of refugees held prisoner in British detention centres.

IFIR's secretary Dashty Jamal said: "The UK government is responsible for the tragedy in Iraq. They are playing politics with the lives of Iraqi refugees. They are making a deal with the despotic Iraqi regime, which the Iraqi people are currently rising up against, to send people back."

J30: Striking Out

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We are fighting here not just for the pension rights of public sector workers but against a political system that continues to reward the demands of wealthy at the expense of the rest of us.

Unlike the TUC's massive but ultimately benign march on 26th March the level of co-ordination, communication and participation between radical groups and trade unionists has been exemplary. The J30 strike website, set up by anarchists, has been main source of information about what was happening, painstakingly collating picket line activity throughout the country, promoting every demonstration, rally and action in support of the day. It acted as a rallying point for

political activists and workers alike.

And the day itself was marked with positive support from all sections of the radical community. Both Solidarity Federation and Anarchist Federation were heavily involved in picket line support in their local areas. Anti-cuts group UK Uncut organised the 'Big Society Breakfast', bringing breakfast to the striking workers and building links between local direct action groups and union members. This was after PCS gave their full backing to the tactics of UK Uncut and supporting the campaign to have the Fortnum & Mason 145 charges dropped.

This relationship between radical groups and workplace issues is now making itself

more apparent. Its origins can be traced back to when RMT's Bob Crow said publicly a year ago that we needed a "campaign of generalised strikes across both the public and private sectors and community direct action to defend public services" opening the doors for closer working links between trade unions and direct action groups. The question before 30th June was can 30th June act as a catalyst in the same way that Millbank did in igniting and expanding the struggle, providing momentum against a government in denial and an economic system on the brink of collapse? The question remains tantalisingly close to being answered.

ANALYSIS

You only love us when we strike

In the defence of trade unionism

The anarchist (broadly speaking) critique of mainstream trade unions is well known, and valid. Big unions are arbiters and enforcers of social peace, supporters of the Labour Party, which is part of the system of electoral liberal democracy, and as such a reinforcement of business as usual. They are a neo-liberal force, a partner to normalising the market, wage labour, money, and jobs. Not only that but big unions are disempowering in their bureaucracy and hierarchy, relying on workers handing over power to remote officials in disputes who will ultimately sell them out. The message is clear; 'You can't win', 'unions are corrupt', 'don't join a union'. And so the big unions continue to crumble. Great, we'll build something better some might say – but who is the 'we' and where do we work and under what conditions and with who? It's not going to be that simple.

Is there a structure and scale at which unions are no longer representative and participatory? Is it a question of keeping small and grassroots, as if this is the only way to be worker-lead and radical? A series of branches, conveners, reps, a wider regional council? Doesn't this exist already? In many ways, the criticisms of big unions are self-contradictory.

It isn't a cliché to say that the members are the union. There is a recent history, without citing examples, of union officials supporting, facilitating and covering for strikes that would be considered 'unofficial action' or wildcat and illegal under union laws (threatening the budget of unions – which is built on and by union dues – and aside from paying officials' salaries also pays for tribunals and campaigning). But behind the scenes there are continuous attempts to undermine and break out from these repressive laws.

Officers are also not the union. If an officer is selling out, then the membership can kick him or her out – these people may not be elected, but they can be recalled, they are accountable to members. As much as unions cannot be reduced to officers/reps, unions members are also not a homogeneous blob – there are right-wing, left-wing, anarchist tendencies within at every level, with internal struggles being waged against leaders who attempt to swerve workers into deals that they do not want. Bad deals are not passively accepted, there is democratic accountability – through mass meetings such as those at the BA strike of 4,000 members voicing and voting in stadiums – and negotiation between not just the boss but the union official too.

The point is that workers in mainstream unions are not permissive or acquiescent to whatever the leadership decide especially if the democratic feeling is against it. And they



Photo: Guy Smallman

Mainstream unions in many parts of the country are the most accessible vehicles of organisation and resistance. The TUC March for the Alternative on 26th March saw over half a million people protest against government spending cuts.

also do not leave their politics or activism at the union office door, but can be active in a wide range of movements and struggles not limited to their own workplace. Membership can support other members in struggle and build confidence and frankly a degree of protection – threats to the employer of industrial or media action – that smaller unions cannot. This is particularly the case for insecure casualised and migrant workers who are extremely vulnerable to summary dismissal for any resistance. Big unions have the resources to put organisers into whole sectors across the country and build combines and structures of representation that resemble a shop stewards movement and not a lumbering bureaucracy.

This is a time of flux, a time of anti-union repression, lay-offs, an intensification of casualisation and precarity, and counteracted by a growing consciousness of the need to unite, to get organised and fight back. In this climate, mainstream unions in many parts of the country are the most accessible and for many, culturally identifiable vehicles of organisation and resistance. To pursue a blanket critique of mainstream union membership – I make a distinction between that and leadership and structure but sometimes these can be decisively positive – can undermine workers in struggle, and create a stereotype of the 'duped worker', the 'sleepwalking, unconscious worker' that the intellectual activist can 'wake up' with 'more radical ideas and approaches'. For many, joining a union and taking collective action is an awakening and an escalation of a worker's own sense of power, reclaimed and generalised at a grass-

roots level, making meaningful change in daily work and life that is invisible to many activists and may seem 'reformist' but is effective, generates relief and creates the conditions for more confidence and participation in a workplace.

The idea of 'we always support workers in struggle' but not unions seems to fetishise strike-time when the painstaking, knock-back and victimisation-battling, as well as the small wins that build the conditions for lasting changes are cast into the space or void of 'social peace'. Invisible struggles and organising that build up the confidence for confrontation and bigger wins, as well as the external conditions that can generalise struggles cannot just benefit from, but are often guided through, union membership and action. As casualisation, crisis and attacks on workers resistance continue to cripple unions, it's important for anarchists to open up to these forms and spaces of organisation and be part of them, and influence struggle within and through them, not just when it's 'hot' to do so, and not without critique either. Unions can be fertile places and authentic places of alternative power at a grassroots and wider level. What we can learn and do through their political diversity and potential should not be underestimated.

Ewa Jasiewicz

Ewa Jasiewicz is a freelance journalist and union organiser with Unite the Union (since 2005, with a break of a few years in between), working with many migrant and casualised workers and also active in anti-capitalist, climate justice and anti-colonial solidarity (Palestine, Iraq) struggles.

NEWS IN BRIEF

ANTI-FASCISM: An all day anti-racism festival in Leeds was attacked by a mob claiming to be the EDL. The concert was to raise money for Leeds and Cardiff Anti-Fascist Action along with local youth projects and featured the legendary anti-fascist group the Oppressed. According to our Sabcat comrades around 15 EDL attempted to storm the venue early in the day and were repelled by four people on the door. The EDL then threw missiles at the building, breaking some windows – one missile hit a person in the face. A number of the EDL were subsequently arrested and the event went ahead as planned.

ANTI-WAR: Veteran anti-war campaigner Brian Haw, who set up a one-man protest camp opposite the House of Commons, has died of cancer. Haw had spent the past ten years camped in Parliament Square, becoming a symbol for the anti-war movement against the UK government's invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite many attempts to have him removed his camp remained a permanent reminder to those in power of the bloodshed they were complicit in authorising.

SCHOOLS: About 100 children from Basildon Lower Academy, Essex organised a protest against plans to axe 30 jobs at their school and Basildon Upper Academy because of funding cuts. They gathered in the school yard before lessons and started chanting, 'we're on strike' and 'we shall not be moved'. They were eventually dispersed by staff, but some ran on to the school fields to continue the protest, saying, "we won't give up that easily".

SURVEILLANCE: The Police National Database (PND) is being rolled out, containing the names and personal information of 15 million people who will have their details logged on a central computer – that's one in four people in the UK. The PND will, for the first time, provide a single view of data held in police intelligence, custody and crime systems across the whole of the UK. The National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA), the body in charge of the database, estimated the new database will hold information about up to six million people who have not committed an offence.

TECHNOLOGY: Internet hackers Lulzsec who specialise in hacking government and state computer systems have added the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) to their list of targets. SOCA was subject to a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack and was forced to take down its website, admitting their security had been breached. LulzSec launched a campaign urging hackers to "open fire on any government or agency that crosses their path" adding "prime targets are banks and other high-ranking establishments."

We can win!

Nearly a million workers will be striking and demonstrating on 30th June – workers in education, the civil service and the London underground. This is a further sign of widespread anger within the working class at the package of austerity measures unleashed by the government. We have already had the student demonstration which ended with the Millbank occupation, the huge turnout on 26th March as well as many local actions including strikes, blockades, marches.

It seems exciting that so many workers are coming out at the same time. However, union leaders will not go far enough, and will seek to channel our anger and dissent into weak and tokenistic forms of protest. Those of us in the striking unions have been balloted for discontinuous action – giving us the option to stage multiple strikes. We need to make sure this happens, and that these strikes are as far reaching and militant as possible, including further strike action in October. But not all public sector workers are striking, and the private sector is out of the equation.

This should not be an occasion to let this go by passively. The day of action can be made more effective by:

- Strengthening the strike pickets as much as possible. Everyone should support these by going to their nearest picket.
- Refusing to cross picket lines.
- Joining the strike even if you are not a paid up member of a union.
- Organising meetings in the workplaces in the run up to 30th June to get maximum support for the strike.
- School students and further education students should turn out to support teachers and lecturers and organise their own actions.

- Encourage those who feel they cannot take part in supporting the strike including workers in other sectors to phone in sick on the day.
 - On 30th June delegations from picket lines to visit other workplaces to encourage solidarity action. The organisation of local marches and assemblies where possible.
- June 30th has the potential to be a huge display of anger at the cuts that are being imposed. The more successful, the more who turn out to strike and to support, the greater the encouragement to carry on ongoing actions that don't just involve one token day.

We have no faith in the trade union leaders to successfully 'lead' the fight against these austerity measures. Neither should we place trust in the Labour Party. They were the ones who started many of the measures that this government has carried on. Where Labour runs local councils it implements the cuts packages. Labour tells us that cuts are necessary, it's just that they will do it in a 'kinder' way. How many Labour MPs have you heard justifying austerity measures?

No, we have to rely on ourselves, on our own organisation. We can carry on the fight through mass assemblies where everyone can put over their view, where any delegates are mandated and subject to recall. We can win this fight against these austerity measures. All over the world we have the example of ordinary working people suddenly discovering their own self confidence and their own ability to organise and to resist, no matter what the odds.

Anarchist Federation

Anarchist Federation statement on the 30th June strikes.



INTERNATIONAL

NEWS IN BRIEF

CANADA (1): Steel City Solidarity, a workers action centre for precarious workers in the City of Hamilton, lived up to their name when they came together to pressure an errant landlord to pay up outstanding wages and a deposit owed to one of his tenants. The tenant, who also worked for the landlord had been denied back pay and a security deposit on his tenancy amounting to \$365. After some back and forth negotiations, and a little persuasion from the group, the bullying landlord finally caved in, drove to a bank machine, and returned with the outstanding amount in cash.

CANADA (2): City authorities were quick to blame 'the anarchists' as ice hockey fans rioted after local team Vancouver Canucks lost the Stanley Cup final, smashing shop windows, burning cars and attacking police, only to backpedal a week later when not one black hooded top was found at the scene.

INDIA: The worldwide phenomenon 'SlutWalk' is set to come to Delhi and has triggered fierce debate about women's status in the socially conservative society. Millions of women are working in most sectors of the booming Indian economy but social attitudes have been slow to change and women face a daily barrage of sexual harassment. India has a high incidence of rapes and sexual attacks on women and a United Nations survey found that about 85% of women in Delhi are afraid of being sexually harassed while outside their homes for work or study.

LUXEMBOURG: Thousands of European workers descended on Luxembourg City in a day of action against austerity and the imposition of new policy directives from the European Union. Organised by the European Trade Union Confederation, which represents 60 million workers from 36 countries, the demonstration was against the Euro Plus Pact set to be validated by the European Parliament. The Pact will compel member states to sign up to collectively agreed policies on labour salaries, collective bargaining and pensions ignoring previously negotiated agreements between workers and their respective governments.

SAUDI ARABIA: Women are defying Saudi Arabia's strict Islamic laws that ban women from driving, the only country in the world to do so, by getting behind the wheel. Activists are urging Saudi women to challenge the male-only driving rules imposed by the ultra-conservative kingdom and enforced by powerful morality squads. Calls for an ongoing road rebellion – inspired in part by the uprisings around the Arab world – is seen as the first step in the liberation of Saudi women who are not allowed to vote and must obtain permission from a male guardian to travel or take a job.

LENS CAP TOMA LA PLAZA! TOMA LAS CALLES!



Over 250,000 Spaniards protested against Euro Plus Pact on '19J' (19th June), marking the movement's largest mobilisation since the anti-austerity demonstrations of 15th May morphed into the historic occupation of cities squares across the country. The indignados turned their anger towards the EU and the widening economic crisis with 30 cities holding mass protests across the country.

Chilean student uprising

On Thursday 16th June tens of thousands of Chilean students took to the streets of the capital Santiago to demand education reforms in what was described as the biggest demonstration since the return of democracy in 1990. Called by Chile's University Students Federation amongst others, an estimated 70,000 young people across the country participated in the mass protest demanding the end to the privatisation and profiteering of education, more scholarships, and increased public support for secondary schools and universities.

About 80% of the one million university students attend private, for-profit universities created under Pinochet's military dictatorship in the 1980s. In contrast the state-run schools are underfunded and neglected. During the demonstration there were violent clashes with police who used tear gas and water cannons

on the crowd and at least ten students were arrested by police.

On the same day, high school students reportedly seized 250 public schools across the country, calling for an end to all private schools and greater government support to low-income family students, and an increase in the budget for public colleges and universities. There were also student protests in Arica, Iquique, Valparaiso and other cities across Chile.

Many of these same high schools helped lead the famous 2006 'Penguin Revolution' (so called because of the penguin-like appearance of high school uniforms), in which a nationwide high school student movement united up to one million students in a protest for educational reform under the government of former Chilean President Michelle Bachelet. Many of the current demands echo those made in 2006.

Notes from the US

News of a variety of groups and individuals fighting back this time

Foreign

First, a bipartisan group of lawmakers has filed a lawsuit against the Obama administration for waging unconstitutional military action in Libya: Obama has violated the War Powers Act; he did not get congressional approval for his attack on Libya within 60 days. Then, the United States Conference of Mayors passed an anti-war resolution in late June calling "on the US Congress to bring

these war dollars home to meet vital human needs, promote job creation, rebuild our infrastructure, aid municipal and state governments, and develop a new economy based upon renewable, sustainable energy."

Economy

Protests in New York against austerity measures outlined in Mayor Michael Bloomberg's latest punitive and impoverishing budget are growing. Throughout June, thousands of New York City union members demonstrated at City Hall demanding an end to layoffs and

Destination Gaza

In defiance of US, and Israeli military the Freedom Flotilla sails on

The second flotilla of ships carrying humanitarian aid has once again set sail for Palestine from Europe. The Freedom Flotilla 2 is made up of ten passenger vessels and three cargo ships carrying as many as 1,500 political activists, peace campaigners and solidarity workers from 20 different countries headed for Gaza with vital materials including medical supplies, school equipment and essential food stuffs.

It was just over a year ago that the first Freedom Flotilla was attacked in international waters by the Israeli military who, in contravention of recognised international law, boarded the flagship, the Mavi Marmara, killing nine Turkish peace activists and injuring 54 others. Those aboard the remaining five ships were held hostage by the Israeli government for attempting to break the siege of Gaza and later deported back to their respective countries.

The blockade was originally imposed by the Israeli government in 2007 after the people of Gaza elected Hamas as the majority party on the Palestinian Legislative Council. Hamas, who are classified as part of the Islamic resistance movement went on to seize complete control of the Gaza strip in a series of violent clashes with the other ruling political party Fatah. In response Israel enforced a strict blockade around the region denying the importation of essential goods. The blockade has been described as “collective punishment” on the people of Gaza resulting in a continued humanitarian crisis. UN officials have described the situation as “grim”, “deteriorating” and



The Mavi Marmara leaving Antalya for Gaza on 22nd May 2010 – it would be later attacked by the Israeli military, killing nine Turkish peace activists on board.

a “medieval siege” effectively turning Gaza into an ‘open prison’ of 1.5m people.

The second Freedom Flotilla includes three new ships which left from France, Italy and Germany carrying representatives from several European countries including Sweden, Belgium, Greece, Spain, the UK and Ireland. A press release stated that, “The European Campaign to End the Siege of Gaza (ECESG), one of the flotilla’s sponsors, said the ships will carry members of the European Parliament among their passengers.”

Using the slogan ‘Stay Human’ in honour of Vittorio Arrigoni, an Italian peace activist

killed in Gaza earlier this year, ships have now departed from ports throughout the Mediterranean. Elsewhere, ships are being sent by delegations from the United States, Canada, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Previously aid ships have attempted sail to Gaza breaking Israel’s illegal stranglehold on the region, three of which have been co-sponsored by the ECESG. Five of those flotillas were successful in entering Gaza – however, the past four voyages have been prevented from reaching their destination by violent attacks from the Israeli military.

Notes from the US

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cuts to social spending. Over 100 members of the group, New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts, built a tent camp next to City Hall and vowed to remain until Bloomberg reverses his proposals. Activists have dubbed the encampment ‘Bloombergville’, redolent of ‘Hooverville’ which during the Great Depression was the popular name for the shanty towns for the homeless.

Typical of those protesting is Sam Coleman, a junior school teacher in Brooklyn: “I’m here today to let the city council know, to let the mayor know, that these budget cuts and the layoffs that they’re proposing are totally unacceptable. I teach in a low-income neighbourhood, mostly immigrants, and my school is going to lose funding.”

The Wisconsin Supreme Court reinstated governor Scott Walker’s anti union law (on

which we’ve also reported before). The law strongly restricts nearly all collective bargaining rights of state employees. In this latest decision, the court ruled that the lower court in the person of Judge Maryann Sumi of the Dane County Circuit had overstepped her authority. A legal challenge is expected and thousands of protesters were back at the State Capitol in Madison on 14th June as the full legislature began debating Walker’s budget. It’s not clear whether the dismissal of a major discrimination ‘class action’ law suit against Walmart announced towards the end of the month can or will be challenged as well. But it’s a big blow for the very reasons cited in the ruling to disallow it: it affects too many people. That, of course, is precisely the point of ‘class actions’.

About the same time in Florida a total of

21 activists from the group Food Not Bombs were arrested for feeding the homeless in the city of Orlando. But it’s okay if you have money: earlier in the month a millionaire from Chicago bought his way out of jail despite being found guilty of killing two British citizens in a hit-and-run accident in Florida. Ryan Levin, 36, was facing up to 30 years in jail. He drives a Porsche costing US\$120,000 (£74,391) and has avoided the sentence by paying an undisclosed amount to the widows of his victims. This was not Levin’s first offence – in 2006 he ran over a Chicago police officer.

Louis Further

- Food Not Bombs <http://www.foodnotbombs.net/>
- New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts <http://nocutsny.wordpress.com/>

Millbank, protests, occupations, solidarity, strikes

Interview with an EAN radical on the student movement

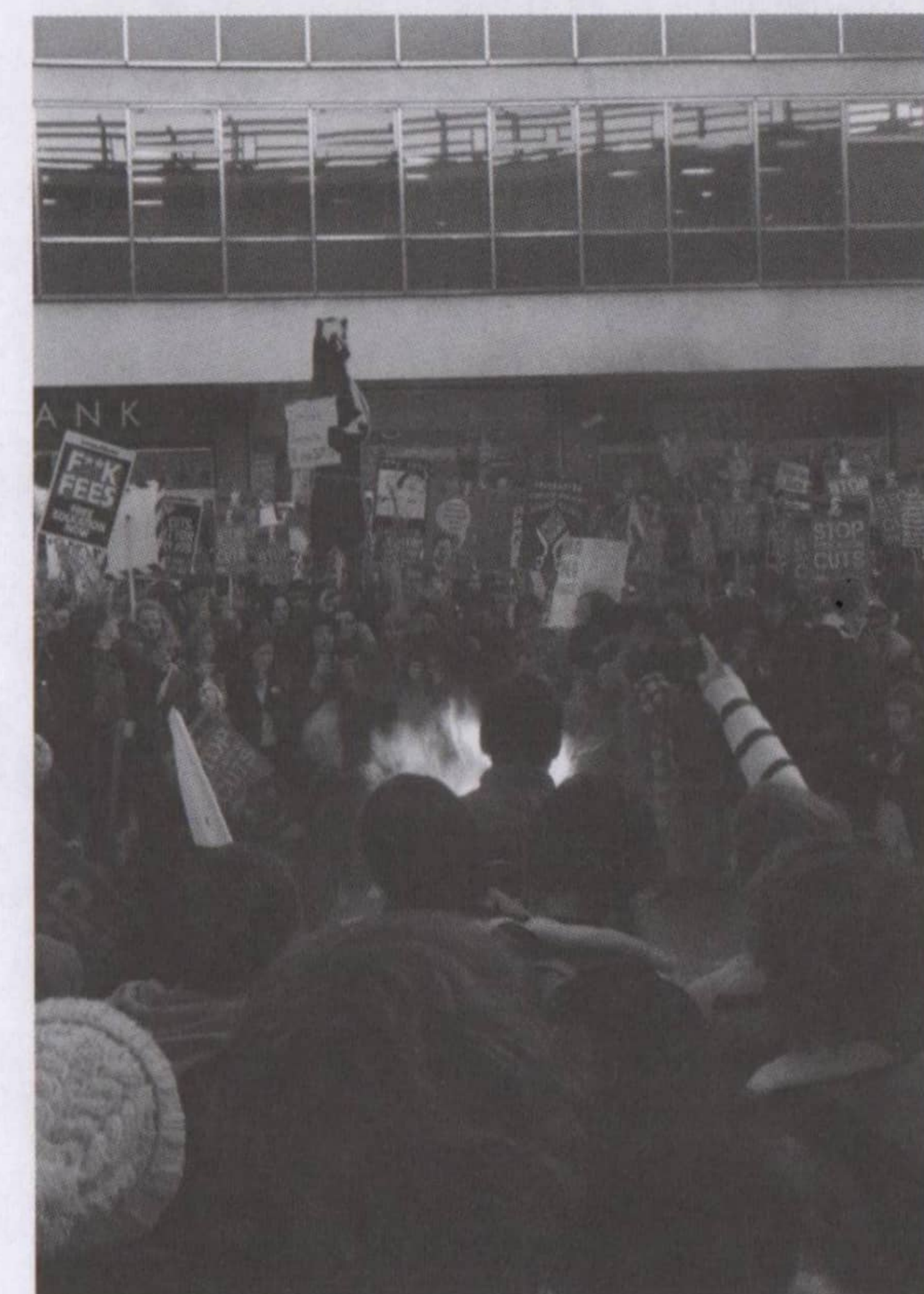
Mark Bergfeld is an education activist who has played a vital part in mobilising – and being a part of – the student movement in London, which took every political radical by surprise last November, and ignited the anti-cuts movement here in general. In this interview Mark shares with *Freedom* his thoughts on the subject, the current state of the movement, as well as the coming big action on J30.

Can you speak about the inception of the Education Activist Network (EAN) and your involvement in it?

In early 2010, we saw a small yet significant number of campus struggles. At Kings College London, UCU members were at the forefront of fighting against redundancies. At Sussex, the students took the lead on fighting against cuts to courses and jobs. In Leeds, as many as 700 jobs were at threat.

The particularities in these struggles had to be addressed. At KCL, lecturers were battling a vicious management. They understood that they needed the students' solidarity and thus linked up in weekly joint-organising meetings. At Sussex, the students had mass demonstrations of a thousand plus. Yet, the lecturers lacked the confidence to take strike action. Thus, students started building a strike fund and actually managed to convince the UCU branch to go on strike. In Leeds, lecturers voted for strike action but the Students' Union ran a horrible 'scab' campaign.

Thus, a number of lecturers and students decided that we needed a national network



to address the 'unevenness' by facilitating, sharing ones experiences, co-ordinating days of action and building concrete solidarity to those fighting.

I have been involved on many levels in the network. At this moment, we are building for the court hearings of students, 30th June and are starting to build for the demonstration at the Tory Party Conference in October.

EAN has done some good job in providing a forum for students of all stripes to come together by creating almost weekly assemblies. What was the idea behind these assemblies?

Whilst the movement was at its highpoint, there were many questions that we had to tackle head-on. The question of police violence and repression became a central feature of our assemblies and forums. Now, that the street mobilisations have receded we also have to re-orient the network as well as win an argument in the students' movement that we cannot simply call for a re-run of the events of last November/December but must re-define what student-worker solidarity means.

The Education Activist Network is not a formal organisation but a network. Many different organisations, campaigning groups and workers and students need to be linked up in the struggle for education. We provide such a forum to people with our meetings.

Do you think EAN has done enough to physically reach out to all students, especially outside the University of London-UCL-LSE circle?

There are EAN groups at different colleges and universities across the country. Essex, Sussex, Teesside University, Kingston Uni, Sheffield are just some examples where we have managed to provide the same kind of level of activity but also debate about the movement.

At Teesside university EAN activists have been bringing out a fanzine. At Essex Uni, there have been American-style rolling teach-ins of 200-plus and at Kingston University EAN activists have played a crucial role in organising 2,000-strong school student walk-outs.

Let's talk about the general student movement as such. When it all exploded in November were you expecting that to happen, especially in the way it did? Did your involvement in the NUS and in radical Left politics provide you with a special insight as to the storm that was brewing? Surely, a lot must have happened before it all kicked off?

It became very clear that NUS was investing a lot of their resources into mobilising for the 10th November demonstration. On behalf of NUS, I was travelling across the country mobilising students from



September onwards. However at many campuses the mood only changed two weeks before the actual demonstration took place.

I did expect a large demonstration, but never would I have thought that students would storm Millbank tower and display such a high level of militancy. We saw a huge number of demonstrations in the run-up to 10th November. In Oxford we saw 3,000-plus demonstrating at Vince Cable's visit. In Birmingham, students built cardboard barricades and had similar numbers. There also were some flash occupations of finance offices and other management offices.

At one NUS mobilisation meeting I said: "Perhaps we should learn Greek". I never thought we would learn it that quickly. Without NUS though having mobilised 50,000 we wouldn't have had 5,000 lay siege on Millbank. For many people it was the best day of their lives. It was liberating. The events at Millbank changed my life as well – only for the better.

Where is the NUS in all this? We all know about the infamous Aaron Porter and his double-dealing. The NUS has a new President now. Is it getting any better? Do you think that institution can be redeemed politically? At this year's NUS Conference, we polled our best election results in living memory. However, I was still far from coming anywhere close to winning Presidency.

At some of the previous EAN assemblies there was some talk about taking co-ordinated international action. With the current social upheavals in Spain, Greece, etc., do you think that kind of action is a possibility now or sometime in the near future?

We are currently in discussions with UNICOMMON, a group from Italy. We also have made some links with some Spanish organisations such as Juventud Sin Futuro. There is some talk about having a co-ordination in December.

I can't really say what is happening in detail as the international meeting in Italy ended up not being able to really take a decision. But I definitely think that we will see an international or at least European-wide day at some point in the near future.

Thankfully, 30th June is coming up. With the whole 'generalise the strike' action being undertaken, do you think it can reignite the student rebellion? What form do you think it will take? Because even though student-worker solidarity is essential, the one place where students can make a real difference is within the educational system which is a huge battleground in itself.

The Education Activist Network has been crucial in pushing an argument around 30th June, and at the same time involved itself in the J30 assemblies as well as built joint co-ordinating meetings with trade unionists.

It is very possible a date that could reignite the student struggle. I have heard from several FE colleges across the country that there will be walk-outs the day before, as well as different actions on the day. It is problematic however that the universities are on summer holidays. Thus, a lot of students feel atomised and don't have their usual networks.

J30 can both deepen and broaden the resistance across the country and create a mosaic of resistance with students delivering solidarity at picket lines, trade unionists on strike taking direct action and everyone affected by the cuts making sure that they do whatever they can to turn this into a day of rage against the Con-Dem government.

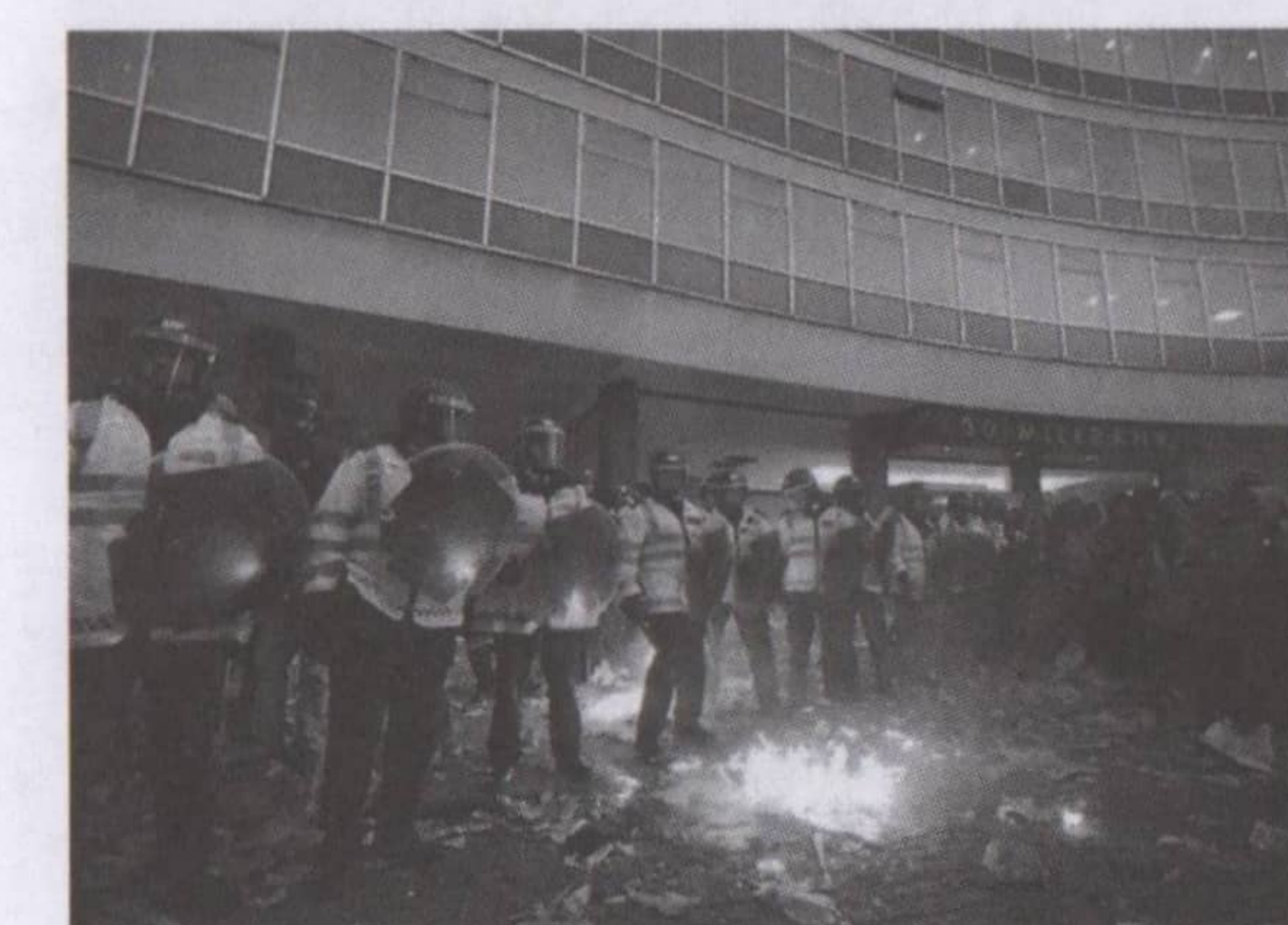
For more information on up and coming student activities check out the EAN website at <http://educationactivistnetwork.wordpress.com/>



Unfortunately, we also lost crucial votes on another national demonstration and free education. It is in that context, that Liam Burns the new NUS President 'triangulated' by calling for strikes and occupations on the one side, and appealing to right-wing students on the other side by labelling me a 'violent thug who wants to bring down the government'.

Someone once said to me: "A right-wing bureaucrat will sell you out at breakfast. A left-wing bureaucrat will sell you out after lunch. It's only a question of time." I don't know what Liam Burns is going to do, but he – in as much as me winning Presidency would have been – is not the solution to the structural problems we have mobilising.

Since the actual introduction of tuition fees this year the student movement seems to



have died down here in London. Why do you think that is? And what can be done to change the situation?

Firstly, in November/December, there was a clear national focus: the parliamentary vote. Once that vote was lost, students did try to mobilise but the defeat weighed upon them. Secondly, the level of police repression and brutality on the demonstrations is unheard of and scared a lot of students who were first-time protesters. Also, the number of students being charged with 'violent disorder' or 'aggravated trespass' has forced a retreat upon us. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, we did not have a generalisation across the trade union movement until 26th March. If the TUC had called a demonstration before Christmas, things would have been very different.

The EAN has sort of gone out of the picture as well. There are no more assemblies. Is it going to make a comeback? It seems crucial to me that at a time like this students need some common ground on which to meet, exchange ideas, gain confidence and support each other, and EAN was that kind of forum.

For some time, it was very difficult to get people into meetings and assemblies. We have started to put forums on again, and are planning to have one after the 30th June strike as well.

COMMENT

ABOUT FREEDOM

ANGEL ALLEY

Freedom newspaper was founded in 1886 by Charlotte Wilson as a “journal of Anarchist Socialism”. Since then there have been short breaks, but in spite of many police raids over the years, editors jailed and a fascist fire-bomb attack, *Freedom* is today not only the oldest but also most frequent anarchist paper in these islands.

We have been based in Angel Alley since 1968. The building used to also house independent printing cooperative Aldgate Press, but in 1994 they set up next door in Gunthorpe Street. This enabled us to have a bigger bookshop on the ground floor, while upstairs is our office and a meeting room used by all sorts of radical groups. Also in the building are the offices of the Advisory Service for Squatters, Corporate Watch and the London Coalition Against Poverty.

Freedom Press is run by a small collective that reflects the spectrum of anarchist organisations. We do not set out to recruit people, but rather we are a coalition of activists in various anarchist groups working on a joint project. Wherever possible we try to adopt a non-sectarian position and to promote co-operation among anarchists.

While diverse in views, *Freedom* remains within the same tradition of class struggle anarchism as when the paper was founded.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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NEXT ISSUE

The next issue will be dated 16th July 2011 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Thursday 7th July. 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

Hopefully this issue of *Freedom* will be hitting the streets at the same time as hundreds of thousands of public sector workers strike in defence of their pensions. Most anarchists would see this as something wider, an opportunity to express general anger among public sector workers at the cuts and the government's privatisation agenda. It's worth looking at the pensions issue on its own though.

The last two decades have seen an attack on workers pensions. It began with particularly unscrupulous employers like Robert Maxwell stealing their employees pension funds. Changes to pension rules meant that private companies began to close their final salary pension schemes, first to new joiners and ultimately to everyone. A final salary scheme is a defined benefit scheme, paying a pension based on what you earn. Where private sector workers now still have a pension, they are money-purchase ones based on shares that buy an annuity. What you get is based on what is put in (by you and your employer) but also it depends on stock market performance. If a final salary scheme performs badly in its investments, then the scheme owner has to make it up. Likewise, if it performs well, the employer can take a holiday from paying contributions. This happened in the 1980s and early 90s a lot. I can remember seeing budgets where I worked and the employer contribution went down.

I think that the employers want things both ways – a holiday from contributions in the good times and getting workers to pay more in the bad times. In the private sector they have succeeded.

There are different public sector pensions. The local government scheme for example, is fully funded, meaning it pays for itself from the money paid in by workers and local authorities. The civil service one is paid for

out of general government revenue, meaning there are liabilities, depending on how long retired civil servants live. Interestingly, the police and armed forces pensions are paid for out of general taxation, but there is no proposal to cut them.

The government and their media allies talk about fat cat pensions, and making it fairer by making it a career average – if this was really such a good deal MPs (or indeed newspaper executives) would also be getting it. They are keeping final salary pensions (and will get a hell of a lot more than the current £4,000 a year average that public sector workers get).

If public sector pensions are unaffordable, and the pensions are cut or contributions are increased, two things could happen. If the pension is cut, it just means the general taxpayer pays rather than the specific government department, through topping up the state pension. If the contributions are increased it is likely to deter many from remaining in the scheme, thus threatening their viability.

What is really behind these plans is so transparent, even Unison, tamest of the TUC kittens, has spotted it. Private sector providers do not want to pay pension contributions when they take over services in a race to the bottom on price. This has already happened in many manual and technical services that have been privatised. Most low-paid public sector manual and technical workers have been privatised and the companies that now employ them have massively increased the number of temps and contractors, none of whom get a pension. The model for future public service provision is Southern Cross, sharp-suited spivs raking in the money while workers terms and conditions and pay is slashed.

It's easy to get excited about the strikes; taking strike action is one of the few ways we can collectively exercise any power. Unfortunately, doing it for just one day is not really exercising much of that power.

On the plus side, the fact that so many unions are likely to have strikes on the same day is a positive thing, it will reinforce the strikers sense of solidarity and make members of other public sector unions that are doing bugger all keen to join in. The closure of schools and probably some transport will also mean wider disruption and there is also plenty of agitation for people to throw a sickie on the day, and for schools and colleges to walk out in support. Throwing a sickie is interesting because it points to what may happen in future: lots of workers, particularly in casual and transient areas of the economy, have little opportunity to take action. But, we can be sure they have plenty of grievances. Their options at the moment can be expressed as 'like it or lump it'.

With less mobility between jobs in a tight economy, maybe the third choice, organising, will start to play a bigger role. I hope so, as there are so many other things beyond pensions to fight for.

DONATE YOUR OLD BOOKS

The ravaging wolves of capitalist depredation are constantly howling around Angel Alley seeking the destruction of our noble bookshop.

You can help keep these fey hounds at bay by donating books that you no longer want so that we may sell them on to knowledge-hungry proletarians for a pound a piece (more to rich arty types who only came in 'cos they got lost on the way to the Whitechapel Art Gallery).

Bob Miller, RIP

The UK anarchist movement has lost one of its most respected and committed political activists. Bob, who was a member of Manchester Anarchist Federation and a teacher, passed away on 17th June having spent a lifetime immersed in radical politics. We wish his family our sincerest condolences and recognise they have lost a great man, as we have lost a great comrade. Below are just a few comments about Bob from those who knew him and the pupils he used to teach:

My friend and comrade Bob died on Friday night. He'd been ill for a while, but when he was finally diagnosed with cancer a month ago it was incurable. Politics was not just a hobby to him, but something he took seriously, and I find that sort of personal responsibility inspiring. The Afed has lost one of our 'parents'. Bob – I respect, love and miss you. I'm glad to have known and learned from you. I will carry something of you with me, and will always remember your integrity, responsibility and commitment to make the world a better place.

'Don't mourn, organise'

Alice
Anarchist Federation

The awesomeness of Bob is hard to put in words but I'd say the precision of his politics and his brilliant ability to succinctly articulate an argument was one key aspect. Bob's fearlessness in putting his political opinions in an honest and forthright manner was also refreshing. Bob's finest quality was being able to argue his corner in a cool-headed and non-sectarian fashion. I am lost for words and heartbroken at the passing of cde Bob. The workers movement has lost one of its finest champions.

T
IWW

When I broke from Trotskyism in 2003, Bob was the first person I had the fortunate pleasure to correspond with and his insight and patience have helped me greatly and, although I declined to join the AF, he single-handedly contributed massively to why I think highly of the group.

Having known the fellow to talk to face-to-face, I can say that he was a genuinely lovely and hospitable guy, motivated by the best of intentions... the revolutionary movement has no doubt lost a stalwart.

Joe Maguire
Solfed

RIP Mr Miller. The best teacher in the world and an all around great guy, You will be missed by the hundreds you taught and never forgotten. After not being at Breeze hill for the best part of 18 years you still remembered me, I wasn't the best student in the world but you still treated me like one of them. Thank you Sir, Rest In Peace.

Tony

Mr Miller you were a brilliant brilliant teacher, never to be forgotten, you had a huge impact on my life and you didn't even know it, year 2000 you made a difference to me. All the best to the family who were lucky to know him as more than a teacher, he will always remain in my heart as someone special. You have no idea how many lives you touched

Samera

One of the best teachers at school, always gave time and support to his students, never was fully appreciated u were the best teacher around by a mile, taught me never to give in and always supported everyone, he was the few teachers that really connected to his students... U MAY HAVE GONE BUT NOT FROM OUR HEARTS – RIP BOSS...!!

Mohammed

Catalyst

What does it take to stop the cuts? June 30th represents the first co-ordinated strike action against austerity, under the pretext of defending pensions, due to the legal restrictions on joint strikes. But how do hundreds of thousands of people stopping work help stop the government?

At first glance, it might not seem to make sense. Cuts, we are told, are a response to a struggling economy. So why try and harm the economy by shutting large parts of it down for the day? But turn the question around, and what other option do we have?

Millions marched peacefully against the Iraq war and were completely ignored. We could wait four or five years and vote for Labour, but by then it's too late. And anyway, Labour are committed to a cuts programme too. So striking is one of the only weapons ordinary people possess to go toe-to-toe with a state determined to force the costs of the financial crisis onto us.

This is not a question of there not being enough money anymore; it is a question of power. If ordinary people stand together, we can beat the government. They know this, and will try and divide and rule with stories of 'greedy' public sector workers with 'gold-plated' conditions. Such words from the mouths of millionaires deserve nothing but contempt.

It will take more than one day strikes to defeat austerity. One need only look to the sustained strikes, non-payment campaigns and social resistance in Greece to see how far we may need to go. But by standing together and saying 'no', refusing austerity by refusing to work, we can beat the government by making the country ungovernable.

The current issue of *Catalyst* #27, the newspaper of the Solidarity Federation, is now available. It can be picked up at Freedom Bookshop or downloaded from their website at <http://www.solfed.org.uk>



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- Greg Muttitt (activist and author of 'Fuel on the Fire') on oil and politics in occupied Iraq
- Milan Rai (author, activist and co-editor of Peace News) on 'Chomsky's Politics'
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GETTING ACTIVE

PRISON NEWS

It has been another interesting fortnight in the weird and wacky world of prisons: the wheels continue to come off the current government's criminal justice policy with David Cameron wresting control of the 'Rehabilitation Revolution' from Ken Clarke's nicotine-stained hands and announcing new 'tough on crime' policies to appease his right-wing critics, policies that threaten to negate all Clarke's attempts to cut the prison population; another al-Qaeda prison escape tunnelling escapade, this time in Yemen; and the release of a report squarely blaming the Prison Service for causing the riot at the new Littlehey youth prison in February because they opened it too soon and with too few staff, to name just three. However, the major story has to be the El Rodeo prison siege currently unfolding in Venezuela as I write.

As noted in previous columns, Venezuela's prisons are the most violent in Latin America – 476 prisoners died in violent incidents last year, 3.3% of the total prison population. That is 160 times the rate in Columbia and 400 times that in Brazil, both countries with more notorious in-prison gang cultures. A further 967 inmates injured, with the most commonly cited cause being the gross overcrowding suffered in these festering hellholes. Even though the country has a similar incarceration rate to the UK – roughly 150 per 100,000 of the population – official figures show that 44,500 prisoners (49,000 according to prisons watchdog Venezuelan Prisons Observatory) are held in a system intended to house just 14,500 inmates, with over three-quarters of them yet to stand trial.

One of the most notorious of Venezuelan prisons is the El Rodeo complex near Caracas. Originally designed for just 750, it holds more than 4,700 prisoners. On Sunday 12th June during visiting a fight broke out in El Rodeo I, the larger prison section, which authorities blamed on rival gangs. It left 19 dead and 14 injured with gunshot wounds. Over 3,500 National Guards failed to regain control of the prison, and 400 heavily armed paratroopers were drafted in. They managed to retake El Rodeo I on the 17th, leaving two soldiers dead and more than 18 injured. Attempts to search the smaller El Rodeo II for contraband weapons were resisted by the 1,300 prisoners housed there and a stand-off ensued between soldiers with assault rifles and tanks and the armed prisoners.

Six days later a thousand or so inmates continue to, as they have claimed in statements to the press, defend themselves, despite prolonged firefights, continuous teargas barrages, all utilities being cut off and attempts to negotiate their surrender. The official death toll stands at four prisoners and two National Guardsmen plus 38 wounded – 18 prisoners and 20 security force members. The prisoners claim that they have lost 17 dead during the current siege.



Above, the 2010 Durham Miners Gala; below left, the gala in 1910; below right, in 1947.

They call it the Big Meeting and after 126 years it remains the largest organised working class event in the country. The **Durham Miners Gala** held this year on 9th July regularly attracts crowds of over 100,000 people and is seen as a celebration of the history and heritage of the mining industry in the region. This is certainly the case as the magnificent banners of lodges of the National Union of Mineworkers are paraded through the town along with over 40 brass bands from many collieries.

Yet since the decimation of the mining industry the Big Meeting has more and more come to represent aspects of working class culture, the labour movement and the radical traditions of trade unionism. Despite the speechifying and party political presence, it is a genuine day out for ordinary working class people, a day that reflects their lives as miners, as the sons and daughters of miners and as a reminder that the glue that binds communities together is not so much the pits and the job and the harsh working conditions but the spirit with which they fought for their jobs, fought the harsh conditions and fought governments over the closure of their pits.

That defiant spirit is best exemplified by the story that Ed Miliband threatened to pull out of this year's historic event unless the organisers 'uninvited' RMT secretary Bob Crow, with who he didn't want to share a stage. The organisers unfazed told the Labour leader they'd rather have Bob.

Durham has always had a radical tradition and one with very distinct anarchist connections. Kropotkin spoke at the 1882 Durham miners' gala, as elsewhere in the region, and his work appeared in the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*. Kropotkin's influence was also felt in the establishment of the anarchist commune at Clousden Hill in Forest Hall, just outside Newcastle. In the 1890s, there were anarchist meetings in the pit villages of Silksworth and Stanley as well Sunderland, South Shields and Gateshead.

The most interesting example is the pit village of Chopwell in the Durham coalfield. It became a stronghold of anarchist ideas, in no small part from the influence of Will Lawther. Lawther's anarchist contacts agreed to sponsor a 'Communist Club' in Chopwell one of only three in the country. The club opened in December 1913, two weeks into a strike at the pit, and by sheer coincidence 26 coal trucks were sabotaged on the very same night as the inaugural meeting of the Chopwell Anarchist Club.

At an Anarchist conference in Newcastle only a few months later, *Freedom* remarked that "the Chopwell boys came in their dozens, each an embryo fighter, from whom more will be heard anon, we hope."

Everyone is invited to the Durham gala and they are always guaranteed a warm welcome and enjoyable day. Durham Miners' Gala, Saturday 9th July from 8am until late, central Durham DH1.



The great betrayal?

Was the General Strike of 1926 the great betrayal?

'Red Friday', July 1925

In 1925 the government threatened another vicious reduction in miners' wages, along with a lengthening of the working day. There had been a devaluation of the pound to 90% of its pre-war value and the British bosses were determined that the working class would shoulder the burden of maintaining the country's place in the world economy. Faced with this threat the Trades Union Congress re-convened the 'Triple Alliance', [the miners, dockers and railway workers] and the Transport and Railwaymen's unions again pledged to stand with the miners if the governments' threat was carried out. On this occasion the government decided to back down and the decision was hailed as a victory for the workers, a 'Red Friday' to avenge the Black one four years earlier. But why did the government decide to hold back?

The retreat was essentially tactical. The strategists of the ruling class were not confident that the cuts could be successfully imposed at this point and wished to postpone the confrontation. A nine month subsidy was given to the mining industry and a Commission to investigate the problems of the industry was set up as a smokescreen. The government began to oversee the stockpiling of coal and made preparations for a massive class confrontation. Plans were drawn up for the temporary 'nationalisation' of the road haulage industry, for the maintenance of 'order' and recruitment of volunteer strike-breakers.

The Samuel Commission came up with its 'impartial' findings in early 1926. It found that there had indeed been mismanagement of the British coalfields but wage cuts and increased hours were still inevitable in order to make the industry competitive in the world market. So, a full year in which the government was able to prepare for confrontation was lost for the workers. The TUC was forced to call a general strike, unsure of its ability to control it but afraid that by not putting itself at its head it would be by-passed. When J.R. Clynes (of the General and Municipal workers union) said that "I am not in fear of the capitalist class. The only class I fear is our own," he was being remarkably honest for a union leader!

On the 4th May 1926 the size and breadth of the General Strike took everyone by surprise, not least the TUC, who had organised very little in preparation for the action. The overwhelming organisational lead was taken at a local level, particularly through Trades Union Councils, local strike committees and quickly organised 'Councils of Action' which involved strikers and their



Mounted police escorting a solitary scab lorry during the General Strike.

supporters. In some areas, embryonic workers' militias formed and violent clashes occurred throughout the country, despite the best attempts of the TUC to maintain a blissful calm. 'Unorganised' workers in some areas were amongst the first to strike and everywhere joined their unionised comrades. Despite efforts by strike-breaking students the country was coming to a standstill and in many areas little or nothing moved without the agreement of the strikers. The state for its part, geared up for an escalation, aware of the possibility that things might get 'out of hand'. Battleships were anchored in the Clyde, the Mersey and elsewhere whilst the army and navy were put on standby, all leave being cancelled.

The betrayal?

But whilst the TUC issued demands that the workers 'stand firm', they pointedly refused to call out power and electricity supply workers and waited until a week into the strike before calling out maritime workers. By this time the TUC had already entered into secret negotiations to end the strike. None of their demands were met. But on 12th May, the General Council of the TUC called off the General Strike. The news, relayed through the *British Worker*, came as a shock to most strikers and on 13th May there were more workers out on strike than ever before. The workers were deliberately not told that the mineworkers union had opposed the ending of the strike and imagined that a victory of some description had been won. Confusion reigned and as news of the capitulation filtered through there was a general sense of bitterness and dockworkers, engineers, railway workers and others continued the strike unofficially.

Eventually though, the momentum was lost and the workers drifted back to work. The abandoned miners continued their strike officially but were isolated, slowly ground down and defeated.

Could things have turned out differently? The Trade Union leaders certainly didn't betray the workers, except in the sense that they betrayed their trust. Rather, the Trade Union leaders played their role according to their class interest – which just happened to be different to that of their members. They were forced by pressure from below to call the strike and did everything in their power to make sure that it didn't go beyond 'an industrial dispute'. They left the miners to fight on their own, facing certain defeat.

But why didn't the workers take the leadership out of their hands and extend the struggle? Certainly the creativity and organisational ability of the rank and file trade union members and, indeed, many non-unionised members, saw the strike maintained. The local initiatives were the life-blood of the struggle. Given time, the local Councils of Action may have linked-up and established a counter-power to the government. But, the fact remains that the majority of workers trusted their unions to defend their interests and did not see the need to take the struggle either out of the bureaucrats' hands or on to a higher level of struggle - the fight for power. Although workers were confused and angry that the struggle was called-off, they did not have confidence or independent organisation to carry it on.

Article courtesy of Anarchists Federation, originally printed in their magazine *Organise* no. 67.

REVIEWS

WHAT'S ON
JULY

■ **2nd** Bradford Zine Fayre from 12 noon until 4pm at Impressions Gallery, Centenary Square, Bradford, BD1 1SD, stalls/tables are free, to apply email BZF2011@lists.aktivix.org, for updates keep an eye on <http://northernindymedia.org/events/2030> and there will also be an after party at the 1in12 Club in Bradford.

■ **9th** 'Will the internet encourage the public to engage in the planning process in Waltham Forest', speaker Adrian Stannard, a News From Nowhere Club event at The Epicentre, West Street, Leytonstone, London E11 4LJ, 7.30pm buffet, 8pm talk and discussion, call 020 8555 5248 or see newsfromnowhereclub.org for details.

■ **16th** Zero Carbon Britain, Nationwide Day of Action to promote the goal of a Zero Carbon Britain by 2030. Organise in your town or region, a cycle ride, a rally, a carnival, a fair... nationwide, for details/ideas email phil.thornhill@campaigncc.org or see <http://www.campaigncc.org/zcbd>.

■ **20th** All Star Comedy Fundraiser for No Sweat, in support of workers' rights worldwide, featuring Josie Long, Stewart Lee, Shappi Khorsandi, Robin Ince, Andy Zaltzman, Simon Munnery and lots of friends at The Bloomsbury Theatre, 15 Gordon Street, London, WC1H 0AH from 7.30pm to 10.30pm, see www.nosweat.org.uk

■ **28th to 1st August** Peace News Summer Gathering, this hothouse of creativity will be at Crabapple Community, Berrington Hall, Berrington, Shropshire, SY5 6HA, for details see <http://peacenewscamp.info>.

AUGUST

■ **10 to 15th** Earth First! Summer Gathering, workshops, skill sharing and planning action, plus low-impact living without leaders, meet people, learn skills, take action. Anarchist Teapot will provide vegan food for £5 a day, location in East Anglia (to be announced, see website), price £20-30 to cover costs, for further details email efsummergathering@riseup.net or see www.earthfirstgathering.org.uk.

■ **21st** London Vegan Festival, with many stallholders, nutrition information and an array of interesting talks and workshops, Kensington Town Hall, London, W8 7NX from 11am until 8pm, adm £2, email robandal55@googlemail.com or see www.vegancampaigns.org.uk/festival for more info.

■ **20th** Little London Fields free green festival from 12 noon until 9pm at London Fields, Hackney E8 3RH, for further details see www.littlelondonfields.co.uk.

SEPTEMBER

■ **13th** Disarm DSEi Day of Action, the world's largest arms fair, taking place at the ExCeL exhibition centre in London's Docklands from 13th to 16th, exists so that arms buyers and sellers can come together, network and make deals, see www.dsei.org for details of action.

TELEVISION

Nurse Jackie, series 2

by Liz Brixius, Evan Dunsky and Linda Wallem

This unique hospital drama from American cable channel Showtime revolves around the complex, conflict-strewn life of an A&E head nurse (the incomparable Edie Falco). Jackie Peyton manages tenuously to juggle the impossible emotional, social, physical and professional demands made on her thanks to an addiction originating from medicating crippling backache. Drug dependence inevitably impinges on all aspects of getting through the day – and affords the show's producers (themselves recovering addicts) ample opportunities to interject surreal plot devices and sequences musing on the combined madneses of modern institutional operations infecting those charged with their smooth running. In twelve very short, alternately witty, warm, gritty, grotesque, caustic and cruel episodes per series, practically every hackneyed convention of health service soap operas is ridiculed and subverted – yielding a rich composite portrait of contemporary service industry labour and love featuring a strong, independent, intelligent, socially-conscious woman, colleague, mother, wife and lover. How rare is that?

Jackie is no simplistic, romantic, wish-fulfilling, bleeding-heart heroine, however, and the writers take pains to intimately weave her many admirable qualities into equally serious flaws. So blue-collar empathy with patients or staff suffering prejudicial treatment at the hands of a system only pretending to care means comprehensively circumventing explicit rules, norms and pretensions in order to achieve any half-decent results – effectively constituting generalised sabotage from management's perspective. But, in the absence of collective checks and balances, official and unofficial skills and powers also serve dishonest, selfish, malicious and spiteful gratifications, with unpredictable consequences likely damaging herself and those close to her as well as the occasionally acceptable functioning of this social microcosm. The second series (on BBC2 between January-April) continues these tightrope walks over intermingling personal and public precipices – now emphasising the toll on Jackie's husband and young daughters and correspondingly irreconcilable tensions with allies and adversaries on the ward.

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. It comes from the US slave trade. Slaves sold down the Mississippi river from centres like Louisville would be separated from families and would endure much harsher conditions in the southern states.
2. With mockery and fury. The ad tried to take credit by implication, but activists remembered how Vodafone had shut down networks at the behest of the regime. The



Angel of Ambivalent Mercy

A chief pleasure here, along with unusually sophisticated emotional realism, is the unknowability of outcomes – every small righteous victory tinged with nihilism; each poignant setback charged with possibility; epic high comedy and tragedy infusing all mundane satisfactions. Although with limited appeal among those seeking infantile, narcissistic or cynical closure, this is some achievement in a genre traditionally trading rhetorics of complacent conformity surrounding sickness and mortality and how society organises itself to deal with such ineffable, universal, helpless agonies. Recent British efforts comparably question tired bourgeois fetishes for superior altruism among experts battling recalcitrant bodies, but all eventually surrender critique and imply the necessity of authoritarian rule over the chaos of humble lower orders. Channel 4's *No Angels* and *Green Wing* (2004–06) overturned self-important middle-class rationalism, but respectively reinforced stereotypical working-class femininity or obliterated the experiences of other strata altogether. Whereas BBC4's mordant geriatric unit mockumentary *Getting On* (2009–10) hilariously deconstructed New Public Management, finding irredeemable hopelessness everywhere. Unfortunately, despite venomously pinpointing neoliberal governance's poisoning of public services, the unconscious logic of *The Thick Of It* prevails – that they, and their clients, should be allowed to die. Give me a 'Nurse Junkie' any day.

www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

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

Series 1 and 2 of *Nurse Jackie* are available now on DVD.

- firm took the film down and have since claimed "it was for internal use only". Good to know that all that tax they never paid is being put to good use.
3. The *Fulham & Hammersmith Chronicle* censored it.
4. They are a refusal to do work for environmental reasons, originated by the Builders Laborers Federation of New South Wales.

So why call it anarchism?

“Anyone for Tory anarchism?”

“Say that again...”

“Tory anarchism, anyone?”

“I thought that’s what you said... But... Er... No, sorry, one more time: did you say **TORY** anarchism?” Iain McKay despairs

What have we done to deserve this? Really, what is it about anarchism which makes non-anarchists think they can appropriate our name and attach it to the ideologies and systems anarchism developed in protest against? Thus we have an oxymoron like ‘anarcho-capitalism’ inflicted upon us, despite anarchism’s well-known *socialist* credentials.

Now Peter Wilkin has produced a book on ‘Tory anarchism’. All that really needs to be said of this book is quote Wilkin himself: “It needs to be stressed that Tory anarchists are not anarchists in the traditional sense of the term” (32). So why call them anarchists? After all, George Orwell “aside” (perhaps because he was a socialist?), Tory anarchists “tend not to share the ideals of anarcho-syndicalists, anarcho-communists and so on, to put it mildly” (33). So why call it anarchism?

The term ‘Tory anarchism’ is associated with Orwell who used it to describe Jonathan Swift in his essay *Politics vs. Literature*. Swift was “a Tory anarchist, despising authority while disbelieving in liberty, and preserving the aristocratic outlook while seeing clearly that the existing aristocracy is degenerate and contemptible.” A slim basis to produce a book from, as any sensible person would realise: Orwell was pointing to the contradictory nature of Swift’s politics rather than suggesting that such a theory could exist.

While Phillip Blond, director of British think tank ResPublica, has suggested the so-called Red Tory thesis no one would write a book called ‘Tory socialism’ or ‘Tory communism’. So why does anarchism get this treatment? Partly because there are not many of us and, as a consequence, our protestations can be ignored. Partly because anarchism is not well known and people prefer to rely on the dictionary definition (purely opposition to government) rather than discover what it actually stands for.

Thus we see people combine a whole series of contradictory notions under ‘anarchism’ because someone proclaims themselves ‘anarchist’ or ‘against the state’. This fits into the dictionary definition and so what



Detail from cover of Peter Wilkin's book *The Strange Case of Tory Anarchism*

anarchism as a social movement means by the term can be forgotten.

This can be seen from Wilkin’s book when he proclaims that anarchism’s “central aim is the elimination of the state and government in favour of a society of freely cooperating people” (32). Yes, *people* and so *not* a class society. We have always aimed to abolish classes, to end the situation (to use Proudhon’s words) where “the class that obeys and suffers” (the proletariat) has “parted with their liberty” and “have sold their arms” to “the class that commands and enjoys” (the capitalists and landlords). Yet we discover that ‘Tory anarchists’ celebrate Britain’s class system! Still, they *at times* condemn all classes for their role in Britain’s decline – but not class systems *as such*.

For the traditionalist, in the past people in all classes knew their place and their role and members of all classes are to be condemned for adjusting to a changing reality. For the anarchist, this changing reality points to a classless society and we denounce (to again quote Proudhon) the “affirming as a definitive state a transitory condition, – namely, the division of society into patricians and proletarians.”

Significantly, Wilkin suggests that Tory anarchists think capitalism is the least bad kind of economy. Except Orwell I assume, since he was (like ‘traditional’ anarchists) a socialist. But, as Wilkin states, Tory anarchism is not anarchism “in the traditional sense.” For anarchism in the “traditional sense” has always combined a critique of the state with a critique of property/capitalism. Surely the title of the first book by the first self-proclaimed anarchist should show that anarchism has never been purely concerned with the state? Answering “Property is Theft!” to *What is Property?* should be clear enough.

No, apparently. Thus we get the term ‘Tory anarchist’ to describe someone who is both a radical and a traditionalist, just as we see ‘anarcho-capitalism’ invented by Murray Rothbard to describe an ideology diametrically opposed to what anarchism actually stands for based on, significantly, an inversion of *why* we oppose the state.

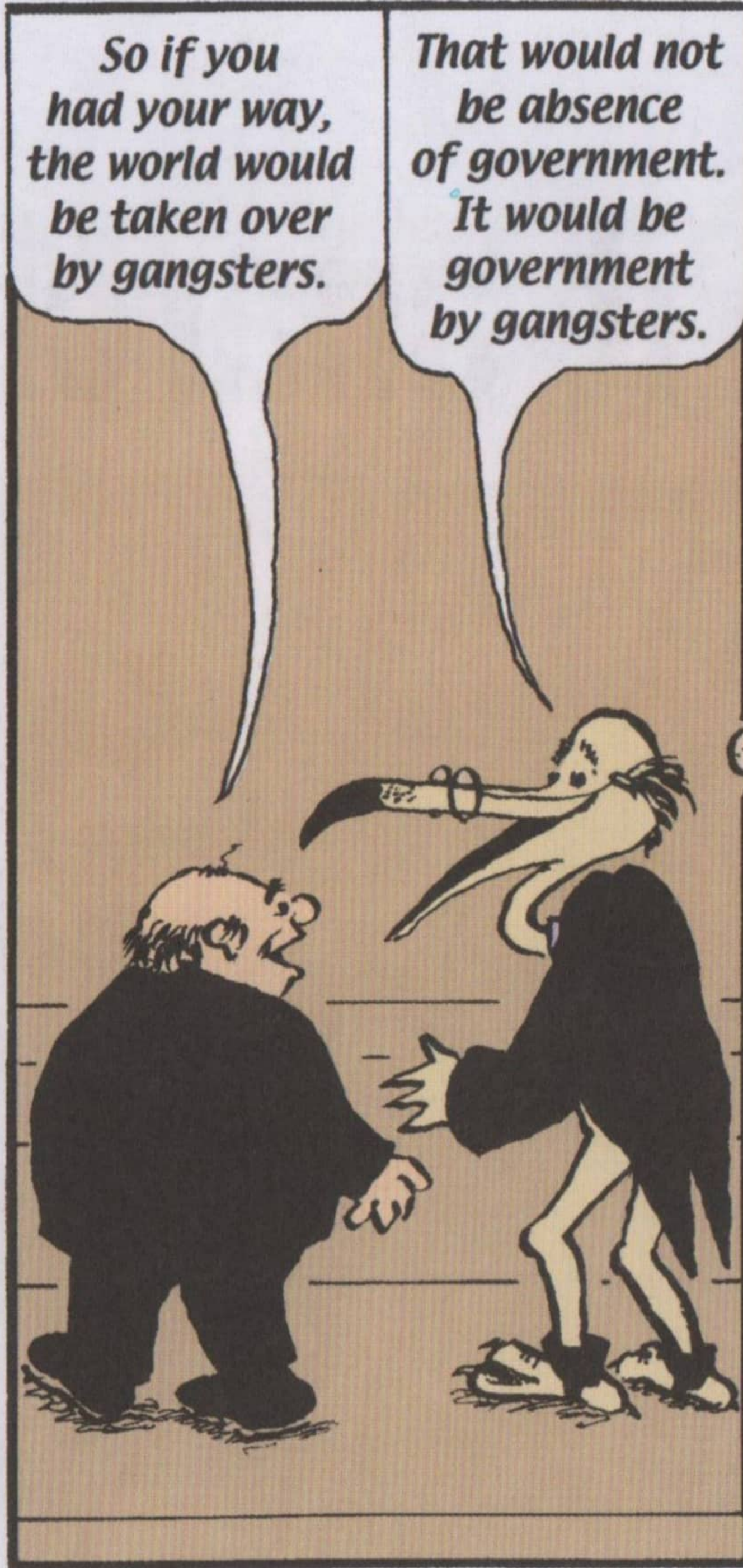
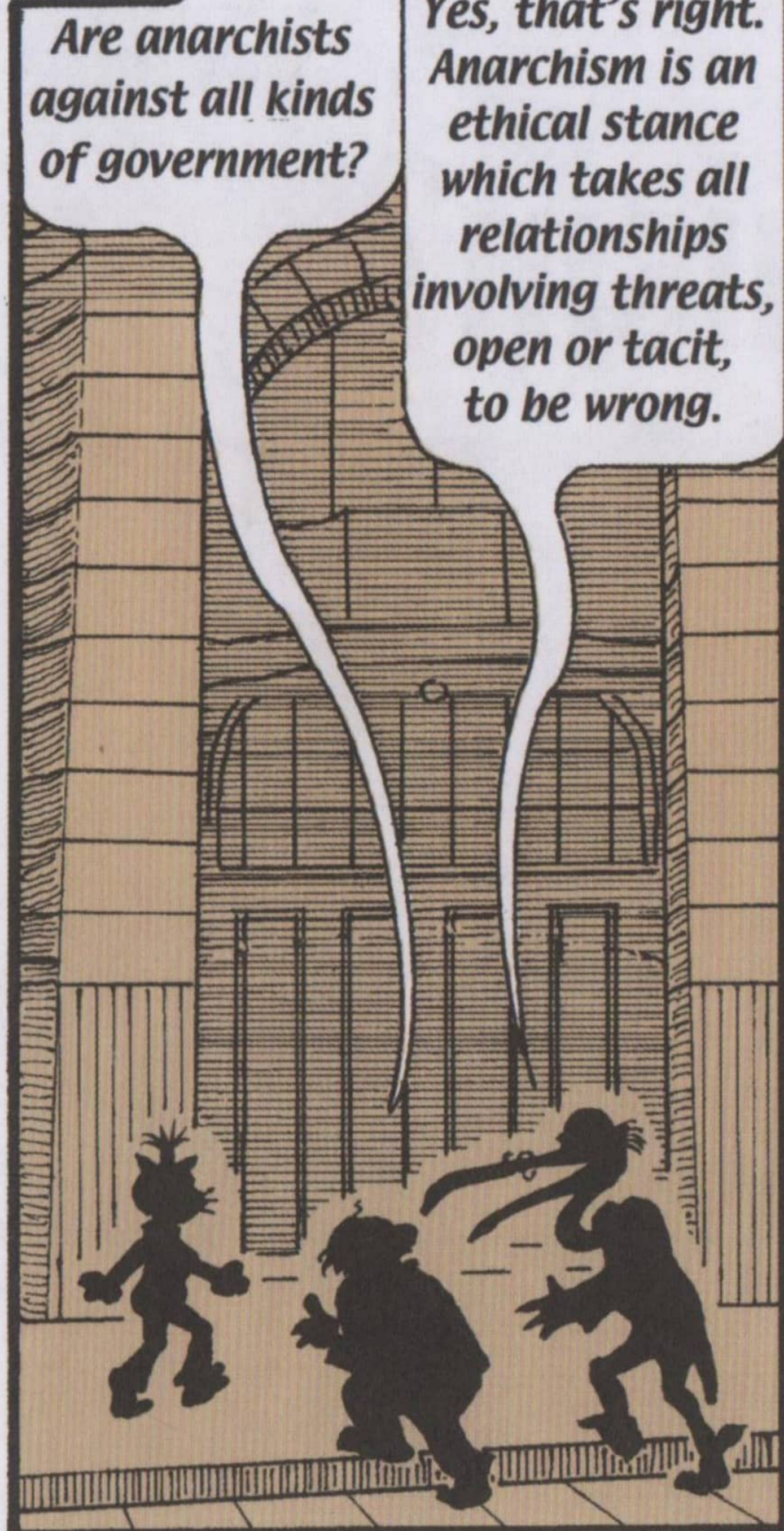
And this shows why we should bother, why I even mention a book which, despite its title, has nothing to do with anarchism. For if we do not protest against these appropriations of our terms then we will lose them. This can be seen in America, where libertarian now means the exact opposite of what it did/should do. It was stolen by the *laissez-faire* capitalist right in the late 1950s and knowingly so:

“One gratifying aspect of our rise to some prominence is that, for the first time in my memory, we, ‘our side’, had captured a crucial word from the enemy ... ‘Libertarians’ ... had long been simply a polite word for left-wing [sic!] anarchists, that is for anti-private property anarchists, either of the communist or syndicalist variety. But now we had taken it over...” (Rothbard, *The Betrayal of the American Right*, page 83).

The proprietarian usage is creeping into British discourse. So we see the *Guardian* using ‘libertarian’ in the American sense to describe the 14th May pathetically tiny protests (sorry, anti-debt) get-together (sorry, demonstration): “The protest will be attended by an alliance of right-wing and libertarian activists including ... the Freedom Association, a libertarian pressure group.” No *genuine* libertarian would be siding with the state against its subjects as these *propertarians* so enthusiastically are.

Tory anarchism can be seen as part of this
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WILDCAT



Review

◀ page 15

debasement of what anarchism actually stands for. And we should not tolerate it, for if we do then we will wake up one day to discover *libertarian* means its exact opposite in mainstream politics.

In short, when someone talks of the 'anarchic humour' of, to show my age, *The Young Ones* they are not using the term anarchy in its sense of a socio-economic theory which has inspired a social movement. Much the same can be said of this book and its attempts to draw mileage from Orwell's passing comment on Swift. Still, if you are interested in the likes of George Orwell, Evelyn Waugh, Peter Cook and Chris Morris then this book may be of interest.

Just remember that it has nothing to do with anarchism or anarchists.

Postscript

It would be remiss of me not to mention the 1998 Freedom Press book *George Orwell at Home (and among the Anarchists): Essays and Photographs*. This contains two excellent articles on Orwell and anarchism by Colin Ward and Nicolas Walter as well as Freedom's obituary of Orwell by Vernon Richards. As is clear from *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell was impressed by the social revolution in Spain led by the anarchists of the CNT-FAI.

The Strange Case of Tory Anarchism by Peter Wilkin, Libri Publishing, £12.00.

THE QUIZ

1. What is the origin of the term 'sold down the river'?
2. How did Egyptians respond to an ad campaign from Vodafone that played up its part in the uprising that overthrew Mubarak?
3. Tory Hammersmith and Fulham council in West London have given £75,000 to local rag *Fulham & Hammersmith Chronicle* to print their PR. What happened when local Labour MP Andrew Slaughter questioned their impartiality in his regular column?
4. What are green bans and which Australian union first used them?

Answers on page 14

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