

FREEDOM

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MILITANTS TARGETED

Bosses at Halesowen College conspire to dismiss teachers

Discontent has been brewing at Halesowen College, Birmingham, following the summary dismissal of no fewer than four Maths teachers in the last month, including Dave Muritu, the College's UCU Branch Secretary. The College has seen pickets, lobbies and widespread condemnation for its persecution of teachers, seemingly solely for raising issues of genuine concern to do with their students' educations.

The College management's reasons for the sudden firings remain unclear. They point to the apparently poor performance of the lecturers, despite the fact that their performances were above the national average, and the College itself rated all four as 'good' teachers in its own internal observation system. Management also accepts that there is no case for gross misconduct for any of the Halesowen Four, and they also failed to follow both their own disciplinary procedure and that of ACAS, the work disputes mediations body.

The sacked teachers themselves speculate as to their role in highlighting a number of issues which had made their work increasingly difficult, such as "refusal to pay for specialist
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LENS CAP ATHENS



Activists from the Anarchist Black Cross in Greece conduct a 'noise demonstration' outside an Athens prison on New Year's Eve in solidarity with all those imprisoned. Other demonstrations also took place at prisons and Immigration centres throughout the world.

WORKFARE RESOLUTIONS FOR 2013

Christmas has temporarily slowed the anti-Workfare campaign but rumblings from both Boycott Workfare (BW) and Solidarity Federation (SolFed) suggest that things are set to pick up again as the holidays end.

The heavily-criticised government programme, which has forced huge numbers of primarily younger unemployed people to do jobs for free or risk benefit sanctions, is teetering on the edge as charities pull out and public opinion hits the floor, BW say: "In August 2012, the Information Commissioner ruled that the names of all organisations involved in Mandatory Work Activity (MWA) should be released. The DWP has appealed this decision, revealing in its papers that it considers protests could make the scheme collapse.

"Your success in 2012 in campaigning against workfare shows what we can achieve

when we all do what we can to challenge injustice. The government fears that workfare could collapse because of public pressure – let's make sure it happens!"

And early in January, Debenhams made the mistake of talking up its own involvement in Workfare, noting that "just under half" of its 164 participants had received jobs at the end of their "work experience."

The admission prompted a wide variety of ridicule online, including from SolFed sources who attacked the company for grabbing – at minimum - 13,200 hours of unpaid labour for jobs that should have been paid from the start. SolFed is also currently conducting a campaign against Workfare stalwart Poundland which is likely to ramp up over the next couple of months.

Rob Ray

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LENS CAP LONDON



Scores of blacklisted construction workers and activists launched a flash mob blockade in the Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road area. They were protesting against the blacklisting and victimisation of workers on the Crossrail project.

A spook or a spiv?

When Tommy Robinson of the EDL was found guilty of entering America using false documentation the judge said "I am going to sentence you under the name of Stephen Lennon, although I suspect that is not your real name", which set flocks of conspiracy birds twittering away over his 'real' identity.

Tommy 'borrowed' a passport in the name of 'Andrew McMasters' and got 10 months, which he claimed was "a result", so was clearly expecting worse. His real name is supposedly Stephen Yaxley Lennon ('Tommy Robinson' is an homage to a Luton football hooligan). A passport in the name of 'Paul Harris' with his photo on was also discovered.

Tommy was also supposed to hand in his passport to plod to prevent him travelling during Euro 2012 (he is a convicted hooligan) but didn't, and he was later charged over this. Why so many names? Why more than one passport? Who is he?

Some claim he is 'state' and that the EDL has been used to monitor fascists. This idea is hardly far fetched: the leader of neo-nazi group Combat 18 was exposed as a state asset in an internecine murder trial, and the eco-activist 'Mark Stone' case shows how far the state will go.

That Tommy could have been compromised is fairly credible given his criminal record. In 2010 Tommy was arrested on the way to Scotland and taken to Sheffield for questioning. The next EDL demo was Bolton and plod went heavy on anti-fascists. Was this in return for Tommy identifying potential hooligans before the 2010 World Cup? Around the same time several fascists were

jailed over internet threats, at least one of whom was an EDL activist.

Tommy is a spiv and has made lots of (unaccounted for) money out of the EDL, but at what cost? In jail, family ruined, no job and his tanning business closed down, although he always has a flash car and clothes.

The EDL is in serious trouble: co-leader Kev Carroll has left for British Freedom, many members and divisions are gone and there is an unbridgeable North/South divide. The EDL's next demo is in Manchester in March which will show how many supporters are left. Anti-fascists must turn up *en masse* and use the swamping tactics successfully used in Brighton, Bristol and Walthamstow last year.

So is Tommy no longer useful to plod? Has he gone off the rails with too much money, publicity and ego? Is he just a spiv or a spook with a more sinister agenda? If he is a spook then his supporters better get their EDL tattoos lasered off quick sharp!

Malatesta





The pandemic of shootings

An alternative perspective on recent school shootings

Let's assume there is nothing that hasn't been done before. Including multiple homicide. But that seems to be a modern phenomenon and one that is now common.

1966 was a banner year for murder sprees, a break-out year ahead of its time. Although Charles Starkweather killed eleven people in Nebraska and Wyoming in 1958, it was '66 that introduced things to come.

In that year Richard Speck stabbed eight student nurses to death in their Chicago apartment; and Charles Whitman left a suicide note, climbed a tower at the University of Texas, and shot fourteen people to death.

After a few years' relative lull, in 1983 multiple shootings by post office workers engendered the term 'going postal'. Since that year there have been 35 homicides in eleven incidents involving postal employees. A slowly rising number of workplace killings included, for example, an Atlanta office

shooting in 1999 – thirteen dead.

It was in the late 1990s that the term 'school shootings' entered common usage.

In Springfield, Oregon, in 1998, Kip Kinkel gunned down his parents, then shot 24 fellow Thurston High School students, two of them fatally. More famously, in 1999 two boys at Columbine High near Denver achieved a death toll of fifteen.

Several more school rampages followed, along with shootings at shopping malls, such as the nine fatalities at an Omaha mall in 2007. There were 33 killed at Virginia Tech in 2007, and twelve dead at the Fort Hood army base in Texas in 2009, on and on, including the 'Batman movie' horror at a Denver suburb this summer and now the CT elementary school body count.

An even more horrific trend in very recent years involves family slaughters by a parent.

And the silence about the now-chronic death sprees speaks loudly. The pathology is too close to the question of the very nature of modern mass society. US data, by the way, is increasingly duplicated in other developed and developing countries. Evidently, the more

technological the society, the more likely carnage will occur. And this cuts across cultural differences by and large, under-lining the importance of the technological factor.

Technology can't be said to be the only factor, but it is very much related to what I think is the bottom-line reality behind these near-daily rampages: the disappearance of community – face-to-face community. When community is gone, or nearly so, anything can happen – and anything does happen. As community heads to a vanishing point, social ties and human solidarity are lost, of course. Nihilistic acts, including shootings, are symptoms of the isolating emptiness of mass society. How could it be otherwise?

The antidote lies in finding a basis for a renewal of community: moving away from the technified wasteland of ever more massified and dispersed society. We must not stumble on with what passes for political dialog, a discourse that addresses almost nothing of real consequence. The shocking scandal mounts and it is past time to look at what society is fast becoming and why.

John Zerzan

Militants targeted

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cover (in spite of a huge surplus) for times of long-term sickness and paternity leave, teaching in two different classes in two different rooms at the same time [and] groups being pushed together into one room even though they are supposed to be covering different material".

It certainly seems unlikely that the four teachers – having received Grade 2 ratings when observed, in a system that has been criticised for its readiness to give Grade 3 ratings (average) – were targeted for being exceptionally poor, or indeed that removing them from their posts midway through the academic year (mid-term in the case of three of the four) will actually assist in the education of their students.

Indeed, as well as attending the lively pickets outside the College gates on cold and wet Monday mornings and joining the almost 10,000 signatures on the petition for the Halesowen Four's reinstatement, many former students of Muritu *et al* in the Maths Department have emerged on Facebook to emphasise the quality of Muritu's classes. This one, for example, from Claire Davies-Thompson, presents a very different picture to that of the College, which claimed that the students in the classes of the four teachers weren't "reaching their potential":

"My son who is a diagnosed epileptic & also has slight autism gets very stressed & struggles with sudden change! He took to

Dave immediately as they both have such a shared passion for Maths! He was on line for an A/A* in the coming exams but now due to this we really worry this may not be achieved bearing in mind it is Dave's excellent teaching skills who have bought Ben to that stage! He needs to be reinstated immediately it is ludicrous that kids are going to suffer due to this as are exam results!"

The Halesowen Four case is another example of a growing tendency in education to use internal observation as a disciplinary tool – a means of breaking union branches and removing critical and principled staff.

Solidarity Federation

THE BIG PICTURE

Ten thousand activists and locals march through Athens, Greece, in solidarity with the evicted Villa Amalias squatters. Further demonstrations in solidarity with the squatters took place in Thessaloniki, Chania, Mitilini, Patra, Heracleon and other cities.

Adventure playground occupied

The defenders of Battersea adventure playground have been told that demolition will begin on Monday 14th January. Occupiers remain in situ – a small camp (up to 15 residents) has been set up inside the playground, with supporters visiting during the day.

On Monday 7th January the police were reported to be chaining closed the entrances to the playground while stating that anyone who left the Occupy camp would not be able to return. Those inside the playground were concerned that access to toilets and food supplies was being cut off and reminded officers that they were engaged in lawful protest. According to protesters, the police then “backed off” and occupiers were able to come and go from the playground once more.

Officers did, however, close the neighbouring young children’s playground, stating that the protesters’ banners – some of which the children themselves had made – would frighten playground users. A small cooking fire inside the adventure playground was cited as a hazard, as was an information table set up by Wandsworth Against Cuts.

K, an Occupy supporter who witnessed the police actions this evening, asked: “Is this Wandsworth council trying to quash popular support? I saw these tactics used in the Goldsmiths’ occupation a couple of years ago. The university shut the library during an exam period, claiming that we made such a mess the place was unusable – essentially turning people against us.”

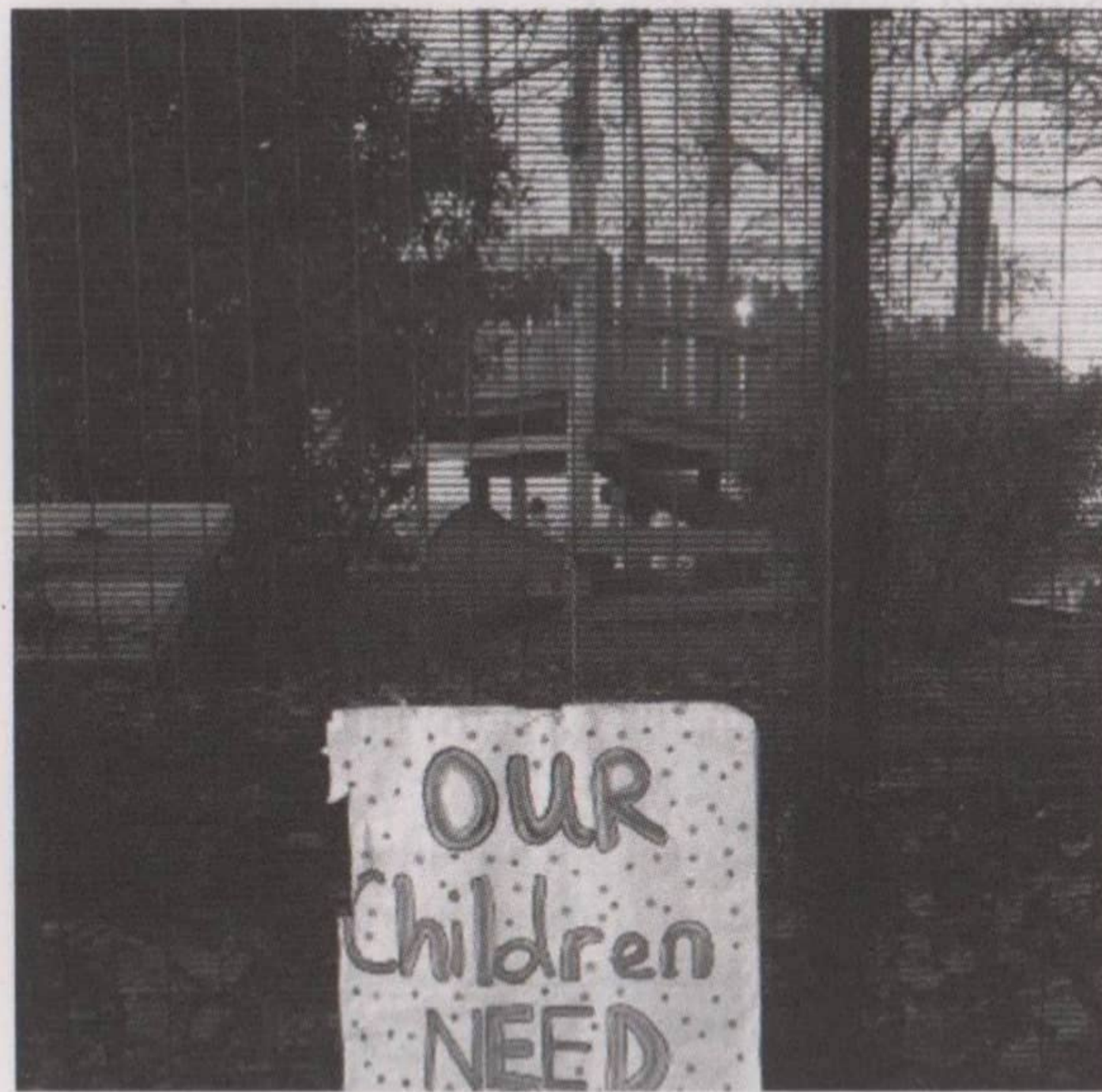
It seems that as yet local people are behind the occupation as they want to save the playground and have run out of other ways to convince Wandsworth council to rethink. According to one occupier at the site: “Parents have ignored the chains on the little kids’ play area, lifting their children over to let them play. As for our cooking fire

being against the bylaws, that’s not the case – barbecues are allowed here, it’s part of what makes this place adventurous.”

With the expected demolition of Battersea Park Adventure Playground due to begin on Monday 7th January, local anti-cuts activists Wandsworth Against Cuts and Occupy London supporters have occupied the playground in protest at Wandsworth Council’s decision to destroy the unique children’s facility and replace it with an unstaffed ‘safe’ facility.

The occupation follows ongoing opposition from local residents and groups for months and can be located at: Battersea Park, South West corner near junction of Albert Bridge Road and Prince of Wales Drive, SW11 4SF.

Those occupying the play area call on Wandsworth Council to reverse the decisions



to get rid of play staff and to destroy the adventure playground. They say: “We share a common aim: that Battersea Park Adventure Playground should be re-opened by Wandsworth Council as a public service, with the existing structures and the staffing levels required for safe, adventurous play, especially



for the 13 to 16 year age group. We believe the council should reconsider the destruction of this unique and popular facility and respond positively and democratically to the thousands of residents who have expressed their support for free, staffed, adventurous playgrounds.”

Norman MacLean of Wandsworth Against Cuts (WAC) said: “The highly qualified staff at this very popular and historic playground have provided a stimulating and safe environment for many thousands of children over the past sixty years. The playground staff have helped teenagers from the local area, including the large Doddington, Ethelburga and Surrey Lane Estates, to grow up free from gang and drug related pressures. They have organised cultural, social and educational activities which have helped young people develop confidence and independence. We call on Wandsworth Council to reverse their decision to get rid of play staff and destroy the adventure playground. Their plan is to extend the adjacent, conventional playground into the adventure play area. This will only be suitable for younger children who are being supervised by their parents. We call on everyone to support this occupation by visiting the playground, by bringing food and other supplies, or, if they can, by joining it.”

A local resident, Michael McCarthy, said: “I think it’s terrible what is happening to Battersea Park Adventure Playground. I brought my daughter here today to see for myself what is happening. I think it’s great someone is fighting these cuts. Where are the kids going to go? There is nowhere else.”

Another local resident, Lois, commented on the response to the occupation since it started, saying: “There has been a constant stream of local residents expressing outrage at the impending bulldozers and gratitude to campaigners for trying to stop them. Lots bringing practical support too; and young and old sending messages to the council on our ‘have your say sheet’. No attempts to shift our guardian angels so far but I fear they might just be waiting for the weekend families, to go home because they know they support the occupation.”

Occupy London



ANALYSIS

On firearm legislation

A class struggle perspective on the gun control debate

The recent shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut once again reignited the gun control debate. For US liberals, stricter gun regulations are the key to preventing future tragedies. For conservatives, responsible gun ownership and armed citizenry is the best defence. But neither position really gets to the roots of the issue.

As an anarchist, it should go without saying that I don't subscribe to the position that if only the state bans more things the problem will go away. Whether it's a social right like abortion, recreational products like drugs and alcohol or something as problematic as guns, it's generally true that prohibition doesn't work.

Taking the specific issue of guns, we might look at the UK as an example of this. Following the Dunblane Massacre, private ownership of handguns was almost entirely banned. However, parliamentary statistics still record handguns as being used in 44% of non-air weapon firearms offences in England and Wales, followed by imitation weapons in 23%. In other words, the majority of gun crime is committed with illegal weapons.

There is a rough correlation between gun ownership levels and gun deaths. However, one of the main reasons behind this is quite simply that in gun owning countries more of those who commit suicide do so using guns. The USA also remains something of a statistical anomaly.

On the other side of the coin, the right-wing argument boils down roughly to legalised gun ownership being "the only way for ordinary people to protect themselves against gun massacres". One example being that the Appalachian School of Law shooting in 2002 was brought to a premature end by armed

civilians. But this would only be a guarantee against such massacres if such armed citizenry was compulsory rather than just a right. After all, surely the US of all places should be able to offer more than one example?

The conservative argument also fails to address the deeper roots of the problem. All it says is that we should all carry guns, leaving the prospect of somebody turning up and shooting holes in everyone as a regrettable fact of life we must prepare against. But is it – or is the way to address massacres such as yesterday's not down to gun control but to social conditions?

We don't yet know enough about the shooter at Sandy Hook Elementary School to start assessing motives. However, we can look at other shootings to get a snapshot of the kind of people who would commit these kind of crimes.

The most famous such massacre, popularised by the Michael Moore film *Bowling for Columbine*, is the Columbine High School massacre. Although there was much nonsense surrounding the shootings – not least the religious right blaming Marilyn Manson – there was also some insight into the social make-up of American high schools and its effects on such events. Columbine killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were both thought to have been victims of bullying, whilst a Secret Service analysis the year after of 37 premeditated school shootings found that two-thirds of perpetrators were victims of bullying they described "in terms that approached torment". Of course, this doesn't mean that such tragedies can be boiled down to bullying, with suggestions that Harris was a clinical Psychopath, pointing to far more complex issues at work.

Nonetheless, the role that alienation plays cannot be discounted. Last January, Adam Ford looked at two US shooters who on the surface couldn't be more different. Jared Loughner and Clay Duke – Loughner, who

infamously shot US representative Gabrielle Giffords, framed his motives in terms of the reactionary right, whilst Duke, who committed suicide after a hostage situation, spoke of the class divide in America.

Over here, we might not have seen workfare participants' kids finding guns and killing friends, but we have had the self-immolation of an unemployed worker outside a job centre, just one of many recent welfare suicides. The shooting of Kayla Rolland documented in *Bowling for Columbine* is an indirect consequence of capitalist social relations, those suicides a direct one, but both are a consequence of those same social relations.

I don't know enough about class politics in the US to offer as thorough an analysis as is needed here. However, I can sketch some thoughts and theories which hopefully American comrades may be able to either expand upon or correct.

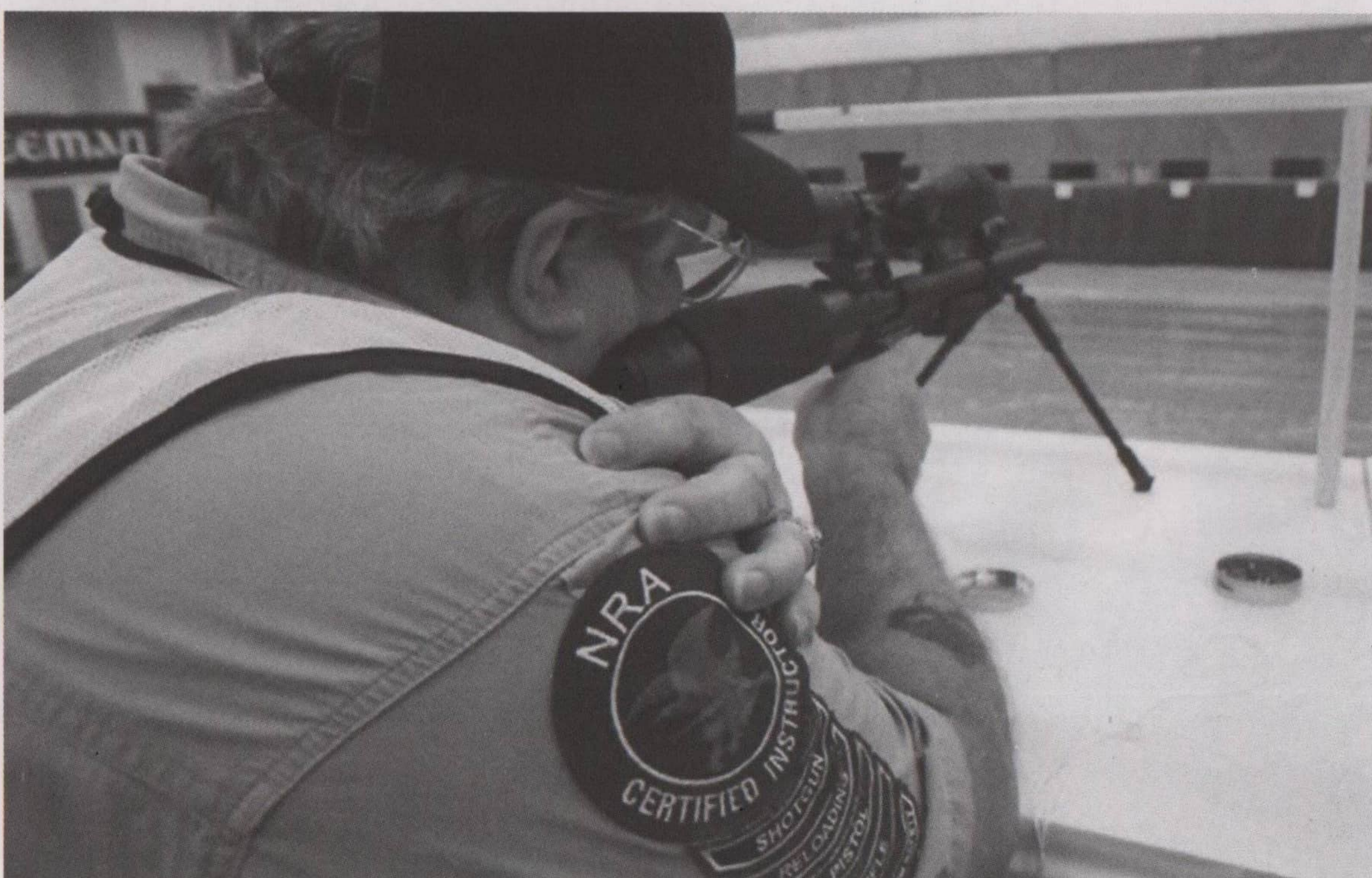
Firstly, the popular perception across the pond is that the ruling class has succeeded in atomising American society and isolating individuals to a far greater extent perhaps than anywhere else. (Hence part of the reason why the 2011 Wisconsin protests or the Wal-Mart strikes were so important.) In part, that's the mythology the country was built on – rugged individualism and the liberty of those with property – but it's also the result of an official union movement that is thoroughly institutionalised and a "left" tied to a party that doesn't even offer the hollow pretences that the UK Labour Party does.

Secondly, as already discussed above, we know where alienation and desperation lead. Many in the UK have found it hard to come to terms with the class content of last year's riots. It may be harder for Americans to associate mass murder, especially of children, with the effects of class and capitalism. But in the absence of a positive collective response, the eruption of social tensions is pretty much bound to be so uncontrolled and ugly. Throw the right to bear arms, extremely high gun ownership and any other social factors from the dynamics of high school to the rhetoric of the hard right in the mix, and you've got a recipe for far more gun homicides than anywhere else in the world and lots of high profile massacres.

But whilst America has far more instances of this type of crime than anywhere else, it holds no monopoly on them or on other forms of desperate, tragic violence. Atomisation, alienation, poverty and the complete absence of hope are the inevitable results of capitalism. The backlash against that (conscious or subconscious) may be massacres, riots or suicides, but it will be there.

The real debate isn't whether we ban guns or whether we arm everyone to defend against the madmen lurking around every corner. It's how we build a real movement against the present conditions so that people's only option isn't to kill ourselves or each other.

Phil Dickens



Workfare week of action

The Government is pushing ahead with increasingly savage workfare policies despite the fierce resistance to the scheme causing many high street names and national charities to pull out.

Unemployed people can now be sentenced to six months compulsory unpaid work as part of the Community Action Programme. On 3rd December last year – International Disabled People's Day – the DWP introduced forced work for sick and disabled claimants.

Companies such as Superdrug, Argos and McDonald's, who have all been quick to take on unpaid workers on government schemes, have seen a year of boycotts, pickets, demonstrations and occupations due to their involvement in the scheme. Many national charities have pulled out as a result of protests, but some, such as The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), Salvation Army and Sue Ryder Foundation are unrepentant about their army of government subsidised unpaid workers. Many of the new workfare programmes depend on charities like these to provide placements.

Workfare can be broken by showing these organisations that the public have clearly rejected unpaid work. Evidence has shown that mandatory work has no impact in actually helping someone find a job, the stated aim of the scheme. Instead workfare is used to replace real jobs, with some companies even caught taking on unpaid workers to fill temporary Christmas positions.

Join Boycott Workfare on 18–24th March for a week of action against workfare exploiters everywhere. Take action in a town or city near you, join in online and show all those who profit from forced labour that we mean it when we say "if you exploit us, we will shut you down".

Boycott Workfare

Combe Haven camp evicted

Decoy Pond camp – the third of three camps that had been erected on the path of the planned Bexhill-Hastings Link Road (BHLR) – was finally on the 30th January.

In the end it took scores of security, bailiffs and police three days to evict all of the climbers – not to mention tunnelers, people in tripods and folk locked-on on the ground! Denied food, water and medicine by East Sussex County Council, the activists in the trees also had to contend with torrential rain and gusts of wind of up to 54mph (Met Office figure for nearby Battle)! In total, nine people were arrested, and the CHD is now helping to assist those charged, as they go through the court process.

After 48 days of continuous protest (with 28 arrests) some of those involved will probably now be taking a short but much needed rest. Nonetheless, the Campaign continues.

Combe Haven Defenders

Rape is a global problem

We all need to be active in the fight against rape culture

In the early morning of 29th December, a 23 year old woman died in a hospital in Singapore surrounded by her family. Thirteen days earlier she had been brutally gang raped by six men whilst travelling on a bus in Delhi with a male friend.

Since the attack on 16th December, protests have erupted in Delhi and other cities in India such as Mumbai and Calcutta. Women, men and children have joined together, furious at the police and government constantly turning a blind eye to attacks and a systematic bias towards rapists and abusers. Evidence of the police's complete inability to handle cases of rape came when, devastatingly, a 17 year old girl committed suicide after police in the Patiala region of the Punjab tried to get her to drop rape charges and marry one of her attackers. Violence remains a problem for women in India – of 256,329 violent crimes recorded in India last year, 228,650 were towards women.

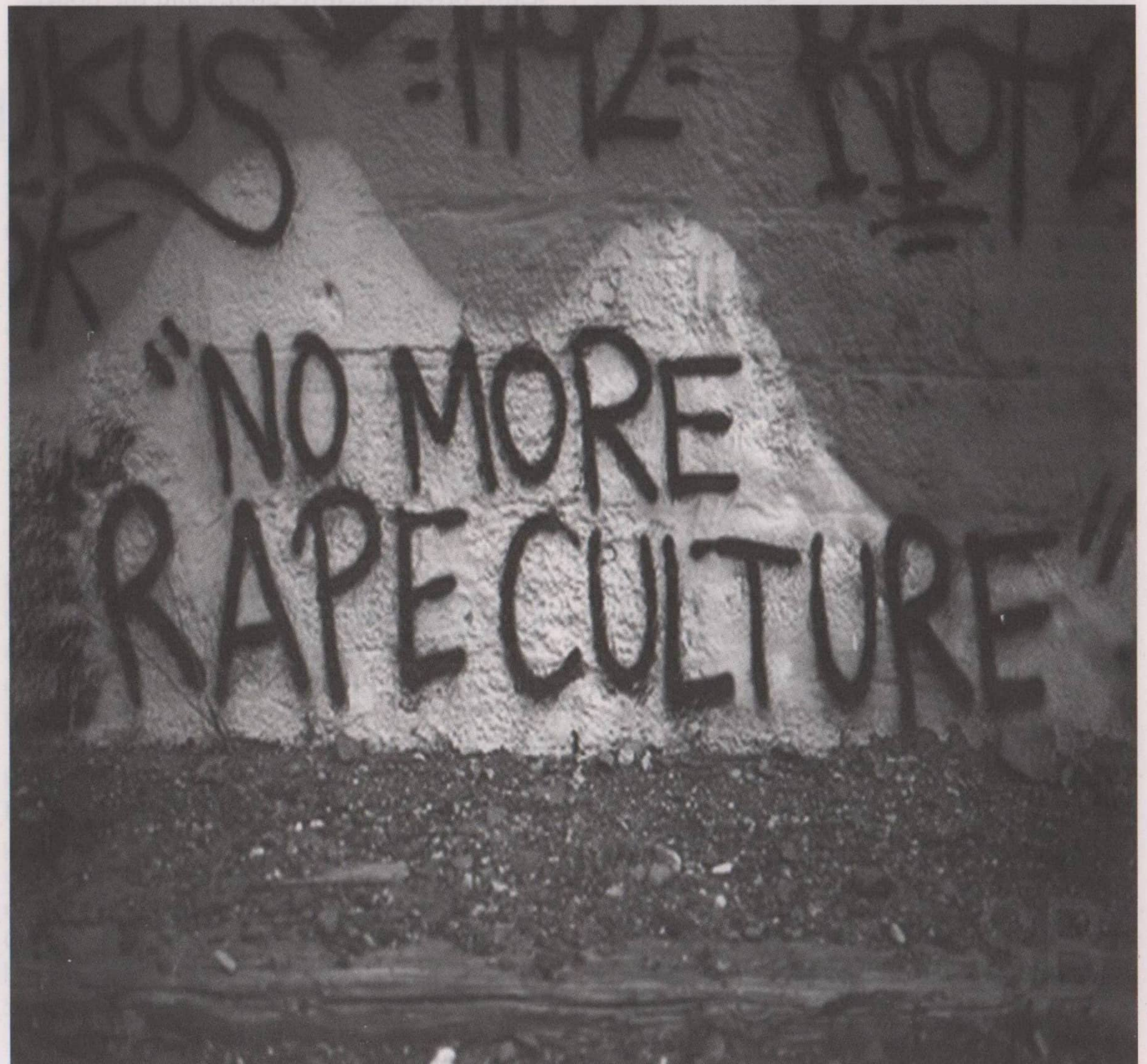
The majority of the protests in India have focused on both the attitude of the authorities and also the cultural attitude to rape and violence towards women. Placards have called for people to allow their daughters to go out and to educate their sons on sexual violence, others for rapists and attackers to

be killed. Police have attempted to crack down on protests, closing metro stations, banning gatherings of more than five people in Delhi and using water cannons, batons and tear gases against the protestors, but people are still demonstrating, pulling down barricades that the police have erected to keep crowds back.

It is clear that there is a deeply ingrained problem in India, but rape culture is not an Indian problem, it is a global problem. It is dangerous and insulting to women to say it is a problem 'over there' and not something we have to worry about here. There is a reason that in the UK, around 400,000 women are sexually assaulted and 80,000 are raped each year, and there is a reason that the conviction rate in the UK is only roughly 6% – women are scared to report, women are blamed and accused of lying when they do choose to tell people about their assault and, as a society, we find it easier to look away from abuse and rape rather than tackle the problem head on.

As a group trying to tackle rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment in our own community, Liverpool Solidarity Federation expresses solidarity with feminists and feminist allies in India and worldwide who are taking direct action against assault and deep-rooted attitudes of victim blaming, slut shaming and denial of a problem that is so clearly existing.

Liverpool Solidarity Federation



INTERNATIONAL

NEWS IN BRIEF

ARGENTINA: Looting broke out in parts of Argentina, leading to the deployment of troops, over 100 arrests and two deaths. At least 25 supermarkets were emptied in cities including Buenos Aires, Santa-Fe and Campana. Despite the high levels of poverty in these areas, a government minister said the looting had “nothing to do with social problems”.

IRAN: Hundreds of precarious chemical workers have gone on strike in Iran. The workers, who are employed at the Fajr Petrochemical Plant, have taken the action over issues including unpaid salaries dating back 22 months, safety concerns and a lack of job security. Trade union activist Abbas Rezai said, “there is very little hope of resolving the dispute in view of the fact that the workers previously have gone on similar strikes without any results”. Last year, the Iranian state crushed anti-government protests in Tehran held in response to the collapse of the country’s currency.

KENYA: Police have murdered four people and injured ten others during the eviction of a community of squatters. The squat, at the Twiga Estate farm, has been in existence since 1952 and consisted of around 4,000 people. During the eviction attempt, armed police officers were successfully repelled with stones, as well as bows and arrows.

SPAIN/ITALY: Trade unionists in the region of Catalunya took indefinite strike action to try and stop redundancies. The workers, who are members of the radical Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) and the anarcho-sindicalist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT-AIT) unions, also occupied their workplace, the IMESAPI lighting plant in Granollers. The strike ended after a negotiated deal between the unions, the company and the local council. Members of the CNT’s Italian sister section, USI-AIT, have also gone on strike at a hospital in Florence and occupied an administrative building. They are opposed to an agreement reached between the management and mainstream unions that adversely affects working hours and conditions.

UNITED STATES: A woman in Oregon has found a letter from a Chinese prisoner hidden in a product she bought at the American discount store, K-mart. The letter, written by an inmate of the Masanjia labour camp in Shenyang, reads: “Sir, If you occasionally buy this product, please kindly re-send this letter to the World Human Right Organization. Thousands people here who are under the persecution of the Chinese Communist Party Government will thank and remember you forever.” Most of those incarcerated in the labour camp – officially known as the Ideology Education School of Liaoning Province – are reported to be members of the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

LENS CAP TUNISIA



Tunisian anarchists remain a visible part of street demonstrations, despite the increasing persecution of political dissidents in the country that first sparked the Arab Spring.

Vineyards erupt

For the second time in the last few months vineyard workers in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, have clashed with bosses, scabs, private security goons and the police.

They are demanding that their paltry wages are doubled, and an improvement in their working conditions. Countless injuries have been reported and at least 50 people have been arrested.

Wildcat strikes have been reported across the Cape region, which is of huge financial importance to the South African state – both in terms of wine production, and the tourist industry. The government are worried about ‘business confidence’.

The town of Grabouw has been a focal point for the latest unrest, where protesters have armed themselves with clubs and have been fighting running battles with the cops.

The workers are demanding R150 per day as opposed to the current wage of R65. One of the workers claimed that when he started working in the wine industry in the 1970s, he earned R45.

A spokesperson for the bosses’ wine association, Agri Wes-Cape, said that “eighty per cent of permanently employed farm-workers in the fruit growing area turned up for work on Wednesday. Most of those who failed to did not live on the farms. Those that didn’t had been coerced into staying away from work.”

There is no evidence that 80% of workers attended work – and what about the coercion that workers face from the bosses, especially those who do actually live on the farms, whose homes depend on them working?

Luther Blissett

Notes from the US

Racism

Figures from the federal government released at the end of last year show that the Obama administration deported more than 200,000 parents with children who are US citizens in the 27 month period from 1st July 2010.

This is despite guidelines issued for deportations in 2011 which promised to slow down the separation of families by US Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE); these specifically instruct ICE agents to focus on certain immigrants... those with criminal

convictions in particular; and to consider a person’s ties to the country; and – pointedly – “whether the person has a US citizen or permanent resident spouse, child, or parent”.

Of parallel concern, a group of residents from New Jersey who were subjected to surprise pre-dawn home immigration raids reached a settlement with the federal government in December. They were awarded a total of US\$295,000 (£182,000) after filing their case in 2008. Most of the plaintiffs

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Rebels re-emerge

Silent march heralds the re-emergence of the Zapatistas

It's been all quiet on the Chiapas front for some time now, with many observers on the anti-capitalist left wondering whatever happened to the Zapatistas.

Since their insurrection against the Mexican state in 1994 and the establishment of several autonomous territories, the masked Mayan rebels have become symbolic of the indigenous resistance to neo-liberalism and globalisation.

The communiqués of Subcomandante Marcos, aka "Delegate Zero" – the movement's pipe-smoking spokesperson, figurehead and resident poet – were eagerly anticipated, particularly by those seeking the revolutionary romanticism of a heroic, modern-day Guevara-style icon.

Recently, however, the Zapatistas seemed to have disappeared off the radar until last month when over 40,000 of them began a silent march through the cities of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Ocosingo, Altamirano, Las Margaritas and Palenque. It is the most high profile mobilisation of the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) since thousands gathered in San Cristóbal de



las Casas to protest against the Mexican government's 'War on Drugs'.

Previous initiatives have included The Other Campaign – an attempt to engage with various groups, including trade union activists, environmentalists and gay rights organisations – and the Intercontinental Indigenous Encounter which aimed to mark "the invasion of ancient Indigenous territories and the onslaught of the war of conquest, spoils and capitalist exploitation".

Following the silent demonstration, a statement signed by Marcos was released, which read: "Did you hear? It is the sound of your world collapsing/it is our world coming back." In a subsequent declaration he called on President Enrique Peña Nieto, whose inauguration in December was greeted with riots blamed on anarchist groups, to grant constitution rights to indigenous groups.

Michael Sean Gonzo

Indian tea plantation boss feels the heat

A tea plantation owner has been killed and his home set on fire following the escalation of a labour dispute in the Indian state of Assam.

Mridul Bhattacharya, the plantation owner, had a history of mistreating his employees, allegedly having had some of them murdered,

and he had ordered several workers to leave their homes. Up to a thousand workers took part in the action.

A female tea worker told the local television channel News Live: "We all came and attacked the bungalow and set it on fire. They deserved to be killed as the planter has

exploited us for a long time and tortured us for petty things."

In 2006, unpaid wages and a lock-out of workers at another tea estate in South Assam led to several people dying as a result of starvation.

Michael Sean Gonzo

Notes from the US

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were either citizens or lawful residents in the US. But armed ICE agents entered their homes without warrants or consent.

One permanent resident, for instance, reported an agent as demanding to know where the (nonexistent) "illegals" were hiding in her home and pointing a gun at her nine-year-old boy.

The raids were apparently the result of a policy implemented in 2006 called 'Operation Return to Sender' (now abandoned) under which teams of agents were ordered to increase their arrest quotas by 800% over the course of a year.

Almost a month later residents in New York were told that their case to stop routine

harassment by the police ('stop and frisk') has been successful: a federal judge has ruled that New York City police cannot stop pedestrians outside private residential buildings in the Bronx.

Environment

In mid-December last year, the federal government held an auction. Up for grabs were the rights to drill and 'frack' for oil on nearly 20,000 acres of public land in Central California, which contains some of the largest deposits of shale oil in the United States.

The Bureau of Land Management confirmed that at least eight companies in

the state capital, Sacramento, had bid for contracts.

The auction, however, was greeted by dozens of protesters in 'hazmat' suits.

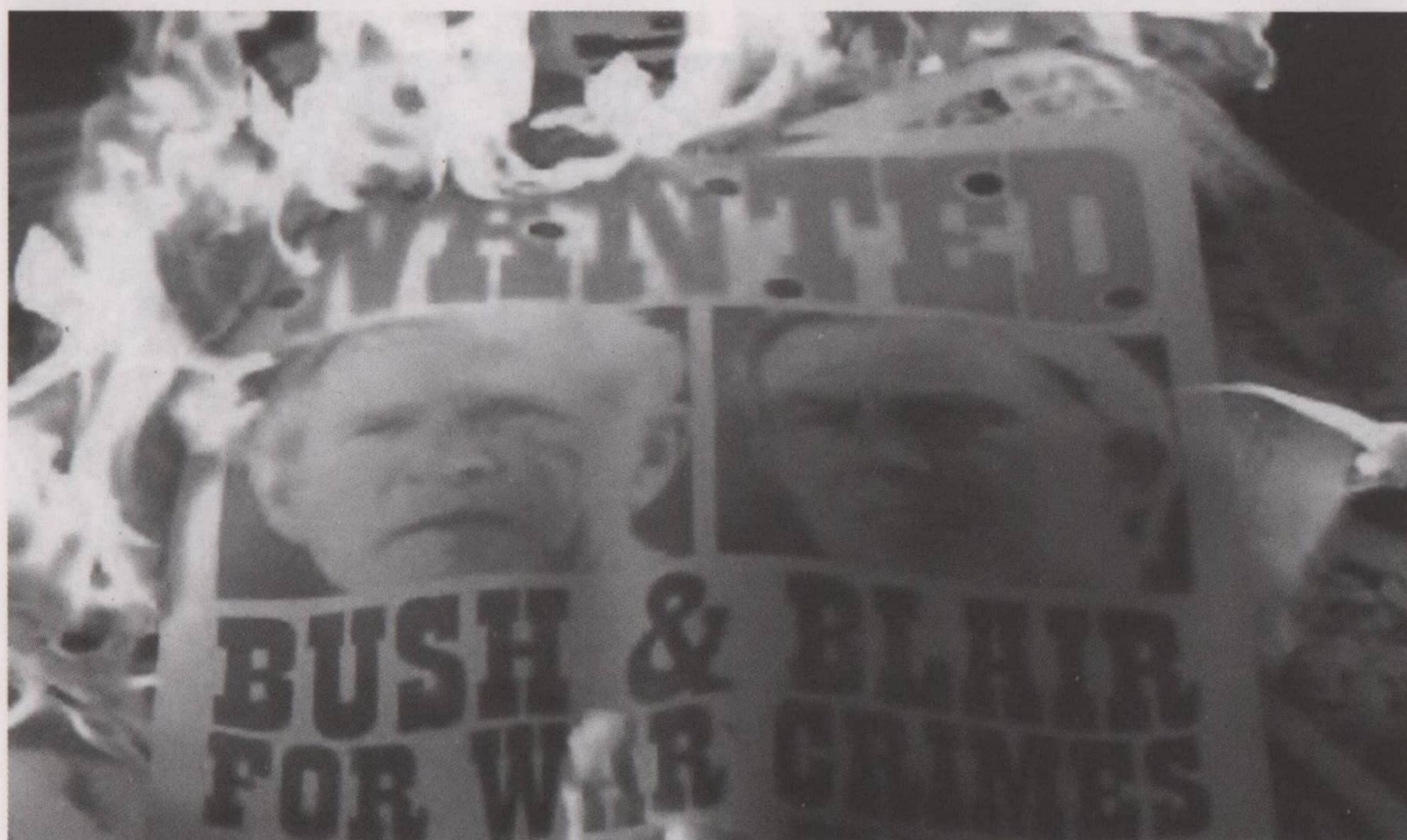
The Center for Biological Diversity said: "The federal government should protect these beautiful public places, not sell them off to be drilled and fracked, risking irreparable harm to our air, water and climate".

At the same time, seven US states, including New York, announced that they will sue the Environmental Protection Agency for failing to address methane emissions created by the oil and gas industry.

Louis Further

ANALYSIS

Networks of collusion



Anarchists are against the state, aware of the deceptions used to keep its centralised power. History and geography are re-made for that purpose. Hints at such deceptions occasionally appear in the media, reporting failures in public bodies like the police. Usually, the impression given of such lapses is that they occur in a vacuum, unconnected to those who might possibly command, instruct, inform and enable. 2012 saw two examples, mentioned below, of how such “lapses” were hinted-at, suggesting the hidden violence the state uses to safeguard its power. Networks of collusion can be suspected. Such networks develop as the state becomes more complex and hierarchical. Connections between former public school boys “the old boys network” can be distinguished from networks of collusion because the latter are far more democratic. People from all backgrounds can be co-opted, their skills and silence well rewarded. An example are those connected with the highly secretive nuclear industry, with connections running from certain sections of the workforce to energy companies and weapons manufacturers.

A network of collusion could be seen on 12th December. Radio 4 reported the £2m payout to Sami al Saadi, a victim of rendition – the process where suspects are kidnapped, taken for thousands of miles to be tortured and made to sign phoney “confessions”. Hatred and fear caused by that process has been a recruiting agent for fighters against the invasions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Sami al Saadi’s out of Court settlement meant that perpetrators of rendition could not be named and blamed. On 13th December the *Daily Mail* told how MI5, MI6 and the CIA colluded with this kidnap. The *Mail*’s article mainly criticised Tony Blair, under whose government it occurred. A quote there from Jack Straw, Blair’s foreign secretary, almost suggested that all Moslems are suspect terrorists! Settlement out of Court means that witnesses are not

called and details of such cases kept secret. No mention was made of those who instruct, inform and enable.

Ironically, also on 12th December, Prime posh boy David Cameron made a public apology to the family of Patrick Fenucain. He was a Belfast solicitor who defended nationalist activists. The official report into Patrick’s murder strongly implicated the state’s spooks, including the army’s special-forces. Rejecting this cover up Patrick’s family protested that there would be no Public Enquiry to point blame. Again, networks of collusion are hinted-at. Some readers will find links here to ways in which during “the troubles” in Ulster, “suspects” were tortured for information but such events kept out of the media. Torturers were also unwitting recruiting agents for the IRA.

No conspiracy theory is mooted here, only a clue to the reciprocity between agencies in the name of security/defence. Nor should we overestimate the cohesion in state institutions because they vie with each other for prestige, power and resources. The Hillsborough disaster cover-up does not fall with this pattern. Rather, it shows the Police do their dirty tricks in house. So far, no other state agency has been implicated in that concealment.

Much less widely-read but worth attention are three pieces by Nigel Wilson in *Socialist News*. He writes that in 1981 George Bush senior and his circle were concerned about anti-Americanism in Europe. A lobby group – they organised a network of highly influential people in Britain and the USA to counter those sentiments – called the British American Project for the Successor Generation, it was hoped that future Europeans would be pro American foreign policies.¹ Revealing a related network, a day before his highly suspicious death, David Kelly mentioned the Rockingham cell. Set up in 1991 that cell was pivotal in selectively sifting intelligence. Its data was used to supply reasons for invading Iraq. Rockingham worked with The

British American Project, for that purpose and specifically with the Office of Special Plans.² In 2002, only months before the invasion of Iraq, the CIA complained publicly that the White House was making political capital out of that agency’s findings. The *Guardian* reported it “refused to co-operate over links between Iraq and [9/11]”.³

Another job of the Rockingham cell was to provide material for Blair’s “doggy dossier”, the questionable report to Parliament about the Iraq war. John Scarlett, then head of the Joint Intelligence Committee, presented that report.⁴

Also before Iraq was invaded, Bush junior and his White House neocons made use of those contacts to publish ‘Full Spectrum Dominance’. Released in 2000, that document clearly showed its authors’ colonialist intentions. Referring to plans for space militarisation, it boasted about the Missile Defence Programme which was re named by its critics “Star Wars”.⁵ These Anglo-American networks of collusion got Tony Blair’s full support for the invasion of Iraq. Nigel Wilson shows that to advance that war Blair and his neocon friends distorted and obliterated history.⁶ Totally ignored were the post-1918 carve-ups in the middle-east and the anti-colonialist feelings. It was enough to show that Saddam Hussein was so evil that he had weapons of mass destruction.³ Hans Blick’s weapons inspectors were side-lined. Ignorance of such history and geography helped to conceal some of the reasoning of the 9/11 bombers and get public support for the invasions that followed.

Manipulators of these deceptions moved on to other top jobs. Sir John Scarlett KCMG OBE mentioned above is now employed by a US investment bank. Meanwhile, the Chilcot Inquiry is due to report to Parliament this year about the war in Iraq. We expect that it will have concealments in the name of security/defence.

Readers of this paper will have their own, possibly private bits of relevant information. Awareness of the above can lead some activists to quietism: afraid to go to demos, answer messages or the elitism of closed meetings. But the state’s aim of 24/7 surveillance is impossible. Our caution needs balancing with the public duty of resistance in its many forms.

Martin Gilbert

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2. Nigel Wilson, ‘Operation Rockingham and the Office of Special Plans’ in *Socialist News*, September 2010.
3. The *Guardian Weekend*, 22nd July 2006, pages 31–34.
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Mat Kavanagh

A short biography of the Liverpool-Irish class struggle anarchist

Mat Kavanagh was a life-long anarchist, one of the few who connected the generations of the Socialist League, and even before, with the new generations that emerged with the Spanish Civil War.

He appears to have been born in Limerick in Ireland in 1876. He came to England via Dublin and became involved in the anarchist movement in his early youth, being active in Liverpool in the years before World War One. He worked with Kropotkin, Malatesta and Rocker on a number of occasions. Rudolf Rocker, who spent some time in Liverpool in 1898 working with Jewish anarchists there, was to note that the English speaking group was really active at the time, and had three “good, popular speakers” which alongside Kavanagh, included O’Shea and Despres. They spoke every Sunday morning at the Monument in central Liverpool. Anarchist pamphlets and papers sold well there.

“For the young anarchists of the 30s, of whom I was one, and right until the 50s, Mat was our link with the traditional working class Anarchism of the past and our mentor as no other — Albert Meltzer

Later in 1907 Kavanagh was one of those who set up the Liverpool group of the Industrial Union of Direct Actionists, founded by Guy Aldred, John Turner and Charlie Lahr. The Liverpool group had 15 members and Mat appears to have been its most active member. The Liverpool group was to invite Guy Aldred up from London to speak and conduct a campaign in June of that year. Aldred was accompanied by his girlfriend, the anarchist Rose Witkop. Mat assumed that they were already living in free union, and offered them a double bed, much to Rose’s outrage and Mat’s subsequent embarrassment! The Liverpool meetings attracted large audiences and were noted in the local press.

When Jimmy Dick and Lorenzo Portet set up a short-lived Modern School in 1908 in Liverpool, based on the ideas of the martyred Spanish libertarian Francisco Ferrer, Mat was to lecture regularly there. Among other topics he talked on the subject of the Paris commune.

He was one of the anarchist speakers at Trafalgar Square in 1912, alongside James Tochatti, Carl Quinn, etc., speaking against the deportation of the celebrated Italian anarchist Malatesta.

Like most British anarchists, Mat took a clear anti-militarist stand during World War One. One of the great sadnesses of his life was to occur during the war. His only son, not yet twenty, was called up in the early years of the war and was to shortly die in the fighting.

John Hewetson in his obituary of Mat in *Freedom* was to remark that Mat was “imprisoned no less than nine times, always on revolutionary issues, and could discourse most entertainingly on the prisons of these islands”.

In 1916 Mat went back to Dublin to take part in the activity initiated by Connolly and Larkin. However, he was never under any illusions about Irish nationalism which finally triumphed over the original revolutionary aspirations of 1916. Mat’s ideas proved to be unacceptable and he returned to England.

Mat was, with his wife Leah, one of those who contributed to work on the Whiteway anarchist colony near Stroud in Gloucestershire, which had been founded in 1897.

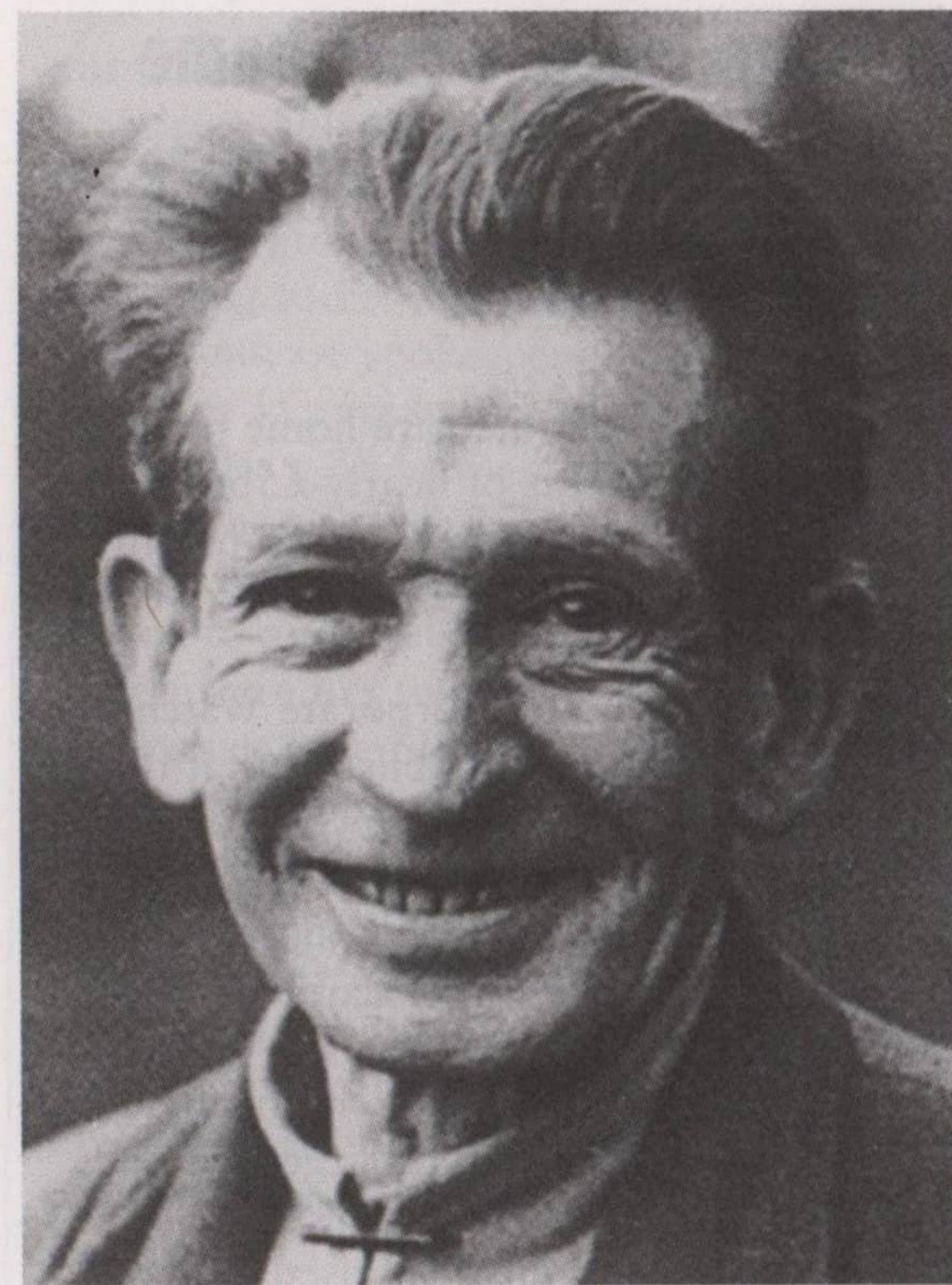
During the years after *Freedom* ceased publication in 1927, Mat was one of the few that kept the ideas of anarchism alive in Britain. He spoke at the first open-air meeting of the newly-energized anarchist movement in Paddington in 1936, an attempt to start a series of mass meetings. It came under attack from the fascists who were successfully driven off.

From 1937 Mat met up with Jack White of Irish Citizen Army fame, who had rallied to anarchism as a consequence of the Spanish revolution. They worked together on a survey of Irish labour, but this was irretrievably lost when White died in 1940 and his heirs burnt his papers.

During the war Mat moved to Southend. Now in his 60s, he was interned under Regulation 18b with other members of the local anarchist group, the Independent Labour Party and pacifists, when Southend was declared a danger area by the authorities. Mat organised these together and demanded to see the Commandant of the internment camp. He requested that the anarchists, socialists and Jews interned there be separated from the Mosley fascists who had also been rounded up. Eventually the authorities backed down and released Mat and co, realising that the so-called anti-fascist war they were pursuing would be questioned if obvious anti-fascists were being imprisoned alongside fascists.

Mat contributed to the pages of *Solidarity*, the paper of the Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation, which appeared from 1938 and continued throughout the Second World War.

Mat had to move up to London where he found work as a barber. He had worked most of his life on the building sites and advancing age had meant his seeking of



alternative employment. Albert Meltzer tells us that he was not a very good barber, but had the honour of shaving George Orwell, who wrote him up in an article calling him “an old Irish IRA (!) Anarchist hairdresser” who “used to cut my hair in Fleet Street”.

George Woodcock mentions him in his memoirs as a: “a leprechaun of a man with a glowing red cyst at the end of a long pointed nose”.

Mat contributed a series of articles on anarchist figures of the past to the anarchist papers *Freedom* and *War Commentary* from the 1930s until the mid-1940s. Among those remembered were James Harrigan, John McAra and George Barrett. In fact as Hewetson noted: “Just how far back his personal memories went was illustrated by his anecdotes about old Edward Craig whom Mat knew at the end of his life, and who, in his early manhood had been the inspirer of the Owenite Commune at Ralahine in the years 1830-33”. Ralahine is in County Clare, Ireland.

After the war Mat was to be one of the founders of the London Anarchist Group along with Ronald Avery and others and was to be active in the Union of Anarchist Groups (UAG). He spoke for the UAG at an international anarchist congress in Paris in 1948, “characteristically making new friends among some of the younger French comrades” (Hewetson). He was probably the most regular speaker in the London anarchist lecture series and at Hyde Park.

Towards the end of his life Mat moved to the Whiteway colony. In 1953 he moved from there to the cottage in the Wye Valley owned by the anarchist Tony Gibson. He died there on Friday, 26th March 1954.

Nick Heath

A ticking time-bomb across the care home sector

Britain's biggest care home owners have debts of more than £4.5 billion

Britain's biggest private care home owners have combined debts of nearly £5bn, raising fresh concerns about the financial health of companies looking after thousands of elderly and disabled people.

An investigation by Corporate Watch and *The Independent* has established that three of the top-10 companies, which own around 800 homes, have been rated as risky by leading credit agencies over concerns about their ability to pay off their large debts in the tough economic climate.

Meanwhile, receivers have been called in to a subsidiary of the ninth largest care home company, Bondcare, which has 74 homes, following concerns raised by its lending bank.

The government has failed to introduce any regulation to force care home providers to be more transparent about their finances – despite promises made in the wake of last year's Southern Cross collapse which caused huge anxiety for 31,000 elderly residents and their families.

Most leading care home owners have highly complex structures and loan arrangements making it difficult for local authorities and families to pierce the corporate veil and properly assess underlying risks.

Scrutiny of five of the biggest care home providers have a further layer of complexity because they are owned by parent companies based in secretive offshore tax havens.

Around 430,000 elderly and disabled people live in long-term residential care across the UK, but only one in ten are now in council or NHS run institutions.

There has been a significant expansion of large private companies over the past 20 years keen to cash in on the care business, while council-run homes and small businesses have decreased. Councils dealing with a 28% cut to their overall budgets from central government and an aging population are increasingly looking to the private sector to build new homes and reduce running costs.

Voluntary and for-profit companies account for 57% of the independent sector compared to just 5% in 1989, according to latest figures from market analysts Laing & Buisson. The newer, purpose built homes are much bigger and residential care is increasingly focused on people with complex conditions such as advanced dementia or Parkinson's disease.

Complicated care

Southern Cross was not the first company to fail – most councils deal with one or two closures every year. But it was by the far the

biggest ever to collapse and highlighted how little financial scrutiny there is of companies paid huge amounts of public money to look after the country's most vulnerable.

Local authorities, the biggest purchasers of care beds, have spent millions of taxpayers' money hiring management consultants to recommend companies without necessarily assessing future risks.

Buy-outs, bond issues, refinancing and inter-company loans contribute to the complex and sometimes risky financial arrangements of some private investors and companies involved in caring for Britain's most vulnerable – making it difficult for councils to keep track.

This regulatory hole isn't an issue, according to market analyst William Laing, who told *The Independent* that residents faced little risk as homes were more profitable open than shut – no Southern Cross homes shut, they were taken over by others.

Mr Laing said: "It is virtually impossible for local authorities to monitor the financial health of providers on presently available statutory information... The industry has lobbied, rightly in my view, against burdensome regulation, though it recognises that some sort of extra regulation is politically inevitable."

Justin Bowden, a national officer at the GMB union, disagrees: "Despite what was promised after Southern Cross, transparency, over-leveraging, tax havens, and debts all remain fundamental unresolved issues in this sector."

Sarah Pickup, president of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, said the last thing local authorities needed was for another major provider to fail. "Southern Cross showed us that the market had grown without the financial checks and balances which we need... but this is a sensitive area and it takes time to do."

The Independent and Corporate Watch examined the top-10 care home providers, as ranked by Laing & Buisson, of which eight are for-profit companies (seven private and one provident) and two are not-for-profit.

None of the companies examined have exactly the same business model as Southern Cross, but the debt levels of many leave them at the mercy of the market.

HC-One

Many of the biggest providers continue to struggle with debts taken on before the credit crunch. Last year the NHP property company created HC-One, a new subsidiary, to manage its 236 ex-Southern Cross homes, in partnership with Court Cavendish, another care home operator.

To avoid a repeat of the unaffordable rents that contributed to Southern Cross's demise, HC-One pays NHP 38% less rent than



Southern Cross. But NHP is still labouring under debts of £1.8bn that have mounted up after it breached the terms of its original £1.2bn bond in late 2008. The loans remain 'in standstill' as the company tries to re-negotiate with lenders.

Due to this uncertainty, credit ratings agencies Moody's and Fitch have both rated the debt as "junk" or sub-investment grade. In August, Fitch said it may make further downgrades as it could be "challenging to materially improve the operating performance of HC-One in a short period of time" as only 21% of its revenue comes from "more lucrative" private patients (local authorities bulk buy and pay less).

An NHP spokesman said it had worked hard to ensure its care homes business model was viable and remained vigilant to

complicated corporate structure was introduced in 2006 that split the operations and ownership of the homes.

Its 30-year leases with rents linked to the retail price index (RPI) and increases capped should protect the homes from any problems encountered by the owners.

Yet Corporate Watch has learnt that the leases are required to include a 12-week break clause that could be activated by receivers in the event Barchester was unable to pay its debt – allowing the investors to take control of the care homes.

A Barchester spokesman said it has "no intention" of defaulting on its debt and is "in discussions with lenders to amend and extend facilities".

Barchester is one of five of care home operators owned from tax havens – which can make thorough scrutiny of company finances very difficult. Its ultimate holding company Grove Ltd – which is part-owned by Irish billionaires John Magnier and JP McManus – is based in Jersey.

Another big operator, with 65 homes, European Care Group is owned by companies registered in the British Virgin Islands, where accounts are not required to be made public. Four Seasons is owned from Guernsey and Jersey and a company registered in the Cayman Islands owns NHP.

Four Seasons

When private equity group Terra Firma bought Four Seasons, the UK's biggest care home provider, in July this year, it reduced its debt from £780m to £525m.

Four Seasons is now paying between 9% and 12% interest a year, and in August the ratings agency Standard & Poor rated its bonds as 'junk' and expressed concerns about the "relatively aggressive capital structure" following the buyout and its "highly leveraged" risk profile.

A Four Seasons spokesman said the financing structure is a traditional one which has been used successfully elsewhere in many sectors including health, often at similar levels of rating and leverage.

Bondcare

Bondcare owns 74 homes across England and Scotland. According to the latest available accounts, Bondcare has loans worth £189m, which are largely secured against its property portfolio. However, its assets are outweighed by its borrowings, and several Bondcare subsidiaries are late filing accounts at Companies House.

Southern Cross ran 39 of Bondcare's homes until its collapse. Their management was transferred to a subsidiary Bondcare Nilerace in October 2011. In June this year, its UK parent company, BC2 Ltd was put into 'fixed charge receivership' – allowing its directors to be replaced.

The new directors include those known

turnaround specialists and in October, Bondcare Nilerace changed its name to Akari Care. None of the companies in the Bondcare group is in any form of insolvency, according to Ernst & Young, the receivers.

A Bondcare spokesperson said: "Bondcare operates 35 care homes under four operating companies – 39 former Southern Cross nursing homes were operated by Bondcare under a fixed contract have now been passed to another provider".

Bondcare has two intermediary parent companies based in Luxembourg and an ultimate parent company, Finsbury Trust Corporation Limited, registered in Gibraltar.

One of the Luxembourg companies has the option to buy all the company's freeholds for a fixed price until 2029. This gives it the potential opportunity to buy the group's investment properties for a below-market price and benefit from Luxembourg's lower taxes.

Justin Bowden said: "The Bondcare group seems to be in real financial difficulty. Some companies are choosing to be more transparent, but there has to be statutory regulation rather than surrendering the future of elderly vulnerable people to the casino of the market."

Bondcare said: "Our remaining homes are operating by financially sound, private companies and our resources are focussed on providing high quality care."

The seventh biggest company Orchard Care Homes is currently debt free after financial difficulties caused by the sale and leaseback of its homes led to an agreement with creditors in 2010 to write off outstanding loans in return for equity in the company.

The debts of MHA and Anchor Trust, the two not-for-profit companies in the top-10, are offset by their assets. BUPA, a provident association with no shareholders or dividends, has net assets of almost £4.5bn.

The health and social care regulator, the Care Quality Commission, are responsible for monitoring the quality of care homes, public and private. Many feel Southern Cross demonstrated that financial regulation is overdue, as better financial intelligence would help predict any potential future crises.

Michelle Mitchell from Age UK said: "Increased financial transparency is essential in order to support vulnerable care home residents. This is a major concern and we are calling on the Government to ensure that Monitor, the NHS Financial Regulator, is given a duty to assess the financial viability of care providers and, where necessary the powers to ensure compliance."

A department of health spokesman said it had been working closely with the care home industry and a public consultation about financial regulation would begin soon.

Corporate Watch

INTERVIEW

Industry insight: a spark's view

A SolFed member who has worked as an electrician since the late 1970s shares his experience of the electric supply industry, privatisation and trade unions.

I started an apprenticeship at 16 from school in the local electric company. It was then a nationalised industry and everyone was in one of the recognised (by the company) trade unions (a closed shop). There were many different departments and staff could move between them as workload dictated. As an apprentice I spent time in each department to give me experience of each and to hopefully decide in which one I would ultimately stay.

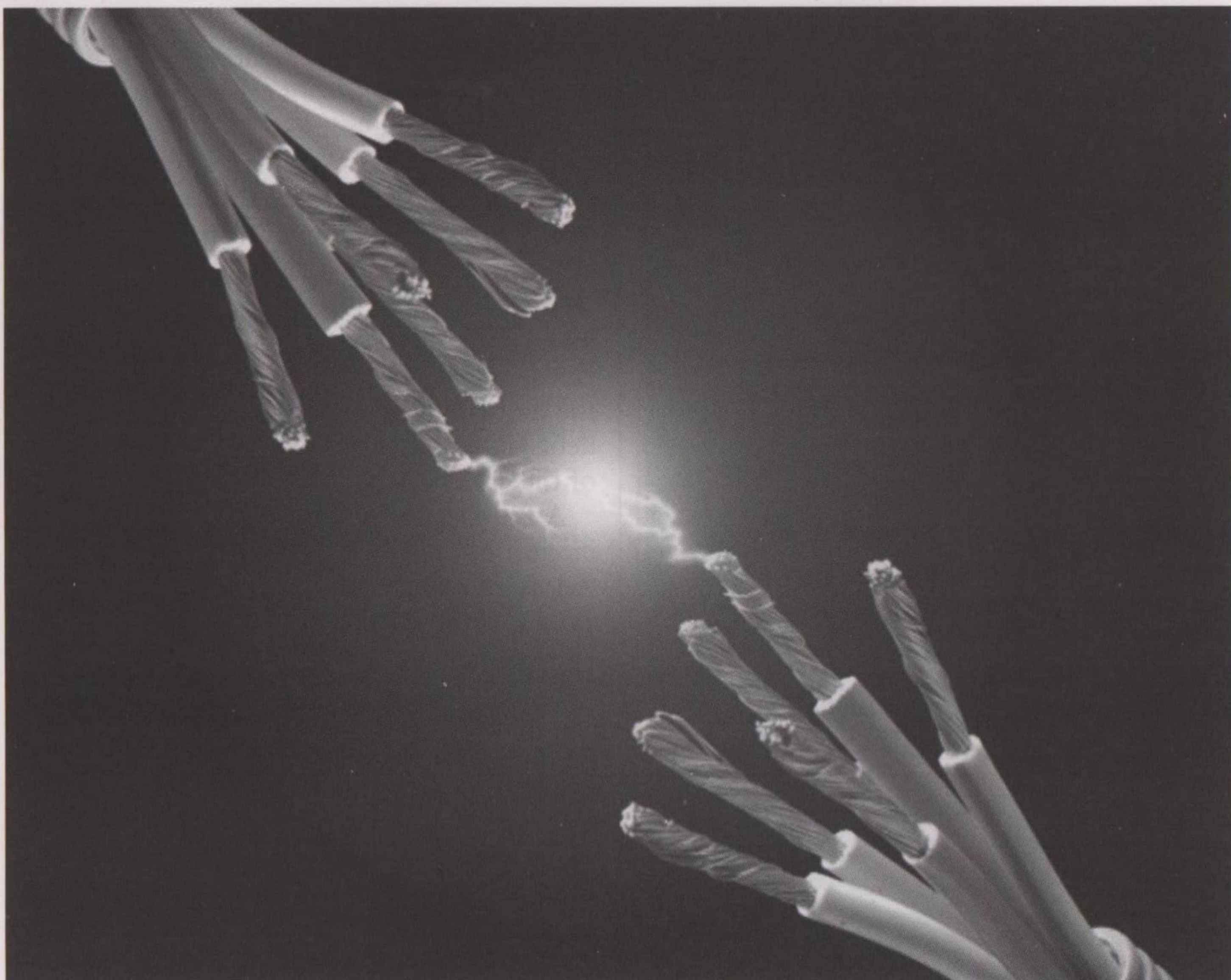
There were problems with management as in all workplaces (still very much us and them), there was also a great divide between office staff and the industrial staff (we never mixed). I think that was due to the fact that they (the office staff) would work as normal when we were in dispute and their wages and pensions were far more generous.

The unions had many nationally negotiated agreements with management. Our particular union was extremely right-wing, the full-time official always consulted privately with management before listening to our grievances. We eventually formed a break away union that was under the umbrella of one of the other main recognised unions but this created divisions between us and the colleagues who remained. As bad as this was from a solidarity point of view I could not have paid subscriptions to that bunch of phoney any longer (a Pyrrhic victory I know).

We were privatised in 1990 and received our 30 pieces of silver in shares, but to be fair I knew of no one who admitted to be in favour of privatisation. However, there was no campaign to try to prevent it that I was aware of. Just prior to privatisation a number of the better shop stewards were sacked, all very convenient for the calamity that was about to befall us.

The first assault was to split up some of the business into separate parts each with their own management and budget's, this had the desired effect of isolating the various sections of the work force which enabled the implementation of different wage structures and conditions. The company was then able to use its mantra: "though the main business has made millions we cannot give you a wage increase as the regulator will not allow us to cross-subsidise to other parts of the business".

The second was their weapon of mass destruction which is still often wheeled out



when a purge is required. I speak of nothing less than the TUPE (transfer of undertakings) which has all sorts of assurances and guarantees that when you're transferred to the new company all your pay and terms of conditions are protected. This, as you may guess, turns out to be another load of bull, after a certain amount of time you will usually end up out of work or with a far inferior paid job and this obviously with the connivance of your trade union who you have been paying subs to for years. You may also be given the option of redundancy or applying for any vacancies within the main company, but rejection after rejection takes its toll and very few find this to be the route to their salvation.

The company has also been very busy allowing a host of other smaller companies to be trained and authorised to work on the electric network, this allows them to have little fear of industrial action as they have a ready-made replacement workforce waiting in the wings. Some of these companies employ some of the staff who were TUPE to other companies and feel aggrieved at their former colleagues, so any solidarity from them is unlikely.

Our company has been taken over a number of times each resulting in fewer workers but strangely management seems to increase. You cannot draw any other conclusion than it is the company's ultimate goal to prevent us from being able to carry out our jobs and then make a business case for passing it all over to subcontractors with us via the dreaded TUPE.

The corporate image is a joke. We regularly receive colourful proclamations and requests

for our input, but in reality are advised to be quiet and just carry out what you are told. I recently attended a team briefing where we were read out a company proclamation which stated it was our duty to highlight any matter that we were not happy about carrying out. That same week I attended a briefing on company policy concerning a technical matter, after listening to the lecture it was pointed out to the manager that the policy was flawed and did in fact pose a danger if implemented. The response from the speaker (who obviously did not have the knowledge to understand the point) was that if you did not like it you could resign. The company knows that further down the line, if an incident does occur, then they can pull out their announcements that we were all sent and show everyone that obviously they had done all in their power to prevent an incident.

One final point I feel that should be made is about the myth that private companies cannot be inefficient. Believe me when I say that the company that I work for jumps from one debacle to another, carrying out costly reorganisations without any benefit, lots of managers and very few productive staff. It's a good job that it is a private monopoly and even the most incompetent people cannot fail to make a profit.

It is blatantly obvious that the trade unions we have paid into all our working lives have failed us dismally, at best it could be described as incompetence, but a more accurate term would be complicity. The only way forward, I believe, is for us to reject the old structures that have continually stifled our aspirations and form one revolutionary union controlled completely at every level by the membership.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Anthony Hayne, the only co-operating defendant in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park bridge May Day ‘bombing’ trial in which he gave evidence against the other four Occupy Cleveland protesters caught up in an FBI sting in April last year, got a bit of a shock when the sentences were handed out to three of the Cleveland Four defendants prior to his trial. He obviously thought he had gotten a good deal – 15 to 19 years in exchange for his testimony against the other four arrestees, compared to the 19 to 30 years (including ‘terrorist enhancements’) the State prosecutor had asked for in their trials.

Except the judge handed down 11 and a half years to Doug Wright, described by the prosecution as the ‘ringleader’ of the ‘plot’; Brandon Baxter was given a nine years and nine months sentence and Connor Stevens got eight years and one month. This got Hayne and his lawyers scrambling around discussing whether to withdraw his guilty plea, fearing that the prosecution would not stick to their side of the deal that guaranteed him half the length of sentence of his ‘co-conspirators’ in return for his co-operation.

Then US District Judge David Dowd Jr. offered to stand down for Hayne’s trial because of criticism that he had been swayed by pleas of remorse in the first set of sentencings if Hayne’s though he wouldn’t get a fair crack of the whip. In the end he got six years for his ratting out of his comrades. The fourth member of the Cleveland Four, Joshua ‘Skelly’ Stafford, remains under psychiatric evaluation pending a ruling on his fitness to stand trial.

“When I first got out in the yard and I heard groups of men talking about how Sarah was going to marry Jim or how Frank had betrayed Susan, I thought, ‘Damn, these cats all know each other and their families. That’s odd,’” he says... “But after a few minutes I realised they were talking about soap operas. Television in prison is the great pacifier. They love *Basketball Wives* because it is ‘T and A’ with women of colour. They know how many cars Jay-Z has. But they don’t know their own history. They don’t understand how they got here. They don’t know what is being done to them. I tell them they have to read and they say, ‘Man, I don’t do books’. And that is just how the empire wants it. You can’t fight power if you don’t understand it. And you can’t understand it if you don’t experience it and then dissect it.” (Mumia Abu-Jamal talking about his experiences of being in the general prison population after 30 years in solitary.)

Russian anarchist prisoners

Whilst the case of Pussy Riot has been garnering mass press coverage, along with the odd column inch on the repression of ‘official’, i.e. party political, opposition, the media attention being paid to the extra-parliamentary opposition, and the police and judicial onslaught being released on the anarchist and anti-fascist resistance to the nationalism currently rampant in Russia in particular, is non-existent – save for the odd Voina guerrilla-art event, such as the self-erecting cock painted on the bascule (draw-) bridge opposite the Moscow FSB HQ (pictured below).

Currently there are a growing number of anarchist and anti-fascist prisoners in Russia facing long prison terms stemming either from their attempts to defend themselves against the increasing neo-nazi street presence (e.g. the 2010 Barrikada and 2011 Vozdukh clubs incidents, the Nizhni Novgorod/RASH case and the Kirov Autonomous Action raids) or from street protests against Tsar Putin I with the arrests for ‘mass riot’ in Bolotnaya Square following the ‘March of the Millions’ on 6th May this year.

The Vozdukh incident took place in December 2011 at an anti-fascist music event in Vozdukh club in Moscow where the venue management, and without the agreement of the organisers, had hired neo-nazis as a security (common in Russia). The inevitable conflict broke out between gig punters and the security, who were provoking the audience. The concert was stopped prematurely, but the security attempted to take some of the guests hostage, threatening them with punishment from their friends – nationalist football hooligans. Concertgoers resisted and the security opened fire with rubber coated metal bullets, injuring two.

Anti-fascists Alexey Olesinov and Alexey Sutuga have been in pre-trial detention in

Butyrka remand prison since February 2012 and April 2012 respectively and a third, Alen Volikov, was arrested in November last year in connection with the case. Their families have all faced increasingly violent intimidation, both by the police and by fascist groups (Alexey Sutuga’s wife, Olga, has been beaten up by neo-nazis twice), witnesses have been attacked and Alexey Olesinov has been suffering serious health problems in prison. The case is taking its toll on everyone and Moscow Anarchist Black Cross have put out an appeal for funds to help the three with legal and travel costs for their families.

In the Barrikada club incident in July 2010, six anti-fascists, who had stopped their car in order to smoke, were attacked by audience members from a neo-nazi gig armed with rubber bullets and flares. The anti-fascist were arrested and repeatedly beaten whilst in custody. Igor Kharchenko remains in prison in Moscow. Other outstanding prosecution cases include the five anti-fascists from Nizhny Novgorod arrested in April 2011, who the authorities are attempting to have declared members of a fictional extremist organisation “Antifa-RASH” and are charged with the same offence as Igor Kharchenko, “involvement in the activities of an extremist group” – though it currently looks as if the case will not make it to trial. The second set on mass arrests, those in Kiron on 27th November last year of eight members of Autonomous Action, involve charges of “incitement of hatred or hostility, or abasement of human dignity” for a neo-nazi organised provocation involving leaflets purporting call for attacks on nationalist by ‘fellow’ anti-fascists.

BRA

Donations can be made via <http://wiki.avtonom.org/en/index.php/Donate>



COMMENT

ABOUT FREEDOM

ANGEL ALLEY

A merry new year to all our comrades. Our regular readers will have noticed the delays to this and the previous issue which cannot be blamed on the inclement weather. However there *is* progress and we hope to be back on schedule by March. Many thanks to the comrades who have responded to Matt's requests for contributors.

We hope that those who can make it to Croydon for Kropotkin's memorial bash on Friday 8th February enjoy themselves and will be enlightened by the speeches about one of our former prominent contributors. So if you want a talk to be about yourself in the far future grow your beard and get scribbling.

Forthcoming events at Freedom include a talk by Belorussian Comrades on 15th February about the repression and imprisonment happening there and what we can do to show solidarity. This will be hosted by the Anarchist Federation and the London Anarchist Black Cross, and thus we can give a timely reminder that both groups have drop-in sessions at Freedom for those interested in their work.

Our best wishes go to Alfie and Zac, who will be starting their second retrial on 11th February.

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It's now even easier to work out when your subscription is up for renewal. The number above your name on the address label now tells you the year and month when your subscription runs out. There's a renewal form on page 19 of this issue if you need it, or you can subscribe online at freedompress.org.uk/news/subscribe. Don't forget that donations are always extremely welcome, or you may like to take out one of our special supporter subscriptions. If you're passing by, you can also drop off your sub payment at our shop in Angel Alley, off Whitechapel High Street.

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NEXT ISSUE DEADLINE

The next issue will be dated March 2013 and the last day to get copy to us for that issue will be Wednesday 12th February. You can send your articles to us by email to copy@freedompress.org.uk or by post to 'The Editors', Freedom, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

A sideways look

by SVARTFROSK

In 1982, when I was still living with my parents in a council house on a small estate in outer London, there were close on six million households in a similar situation. This meant just under a third of all families rented from their local council. The estate I lived on had pensioners, factory workers, many from nearby factories, builders, telephone engineers, secretaries. While it would not be true to say all human life was there, a lot was.

Fast-forward to today and what is now called social housing, as much of it is under the control of housing associations, is about half what it was, a mere 17% of all households. The bile directed at Bob Crow for living in social housing despite earning six figures shows that it is not now "for everyone". I work in a skilled workplace – virtually no one there lives in a council or housing association house – thirty years ago plenty would have. Two things explain this, they are interlinked. Firstly, right to buy and the use of aspiration as a political aim by Thatcher has meant that social housing is seen as the worst option. The other thing is demand so massively outstrips supply that rationing is the only response in a system that won't increase supply. Rationing of social housing happens through the Housing Register, run by local authorities. Local authorities ration on the basis of need, so social housing becomes concentrated among those with the greatest needs, such as pensioners, the disabled, those on benefits with children, etc.

The main impact has been that social housing is now seen as basically just for welfare recipients. The consequences of society as a whole behaving like this is underinvestment and a certain stigma.

I think what is happening with the NHS is what happened with council housing thirty years ago. Council housing had a lot of critics then, and rightly so, as it was administered in a very bureaucratic way and was not responsive to its residents' needs. The NHS has had big criticisms over North Staffs hospital and a string of other scandals. It can also be seen anecdotally, loads of people have negative stories about how they or relatives were neglected in hospital. Any institution could quite happily weather this sort of criticism, though. But the warning signs can be seen clearly in the fragmentation and undermining of the health service.

A few weeks ago, I was talking to people at work and someone mentioned that some workers wouldn't want to change jobs because of their terms and conditions. Fair enough, I thought, that's a point I've made myself in the past, usually referring to leave or pay entitlements. But he didn't mean that, he meant those who had private health care as a workplace benefit. The assumption is that health care should be provided individually, through signing up to BUPA or similar, not collectively through the NHS.

Apart from in the public sector, it is now normal for most professional jobs to offer private health care as a benefit. Some of this is pure self-interest from the employer, so that key staff can be made well and got back to work quickly. But some of it is just expectation among certain groups of workers.

Once any service becomes something just for the least well-off in our society, it will be cut and cut and no one who might have any clout will defend it. This happened to council housing, health is next.



We are in the process of booking the 2013 London Anarchist bookfair and will let people know the date, via our website, soon. It will be at Queen Marys again and will be on probably 19th October but might be the 26th. We know a number of the rooms were very crowded and we are hoping to do something about this. Watch the bookfair website for more details. If you have any comments about last year's event, please let us know.

We are emailing people to see if anybody has any spare cash. In 2013 we brought over Lindela Figlan from Abahlali base Mjondolo for a UK wide tour. He spoke at 17 events in his 21-day stay and it seems like he went down really well everywhere he spoke.

While we really agree with bringing speakers over from non-European countries and we want to continue this trend, the tour cost us nearly £1,000 and left us with a deficit on the 2013 bookfair of £600. Individuals and some tour dates did contribute towards Lindela's costs, but as you can see, we by no means covered the costs.

So, we are hoping a few people and groups might have a bit of spare cash to try and put a dent in the loss we made this year. We are not necessarily expecting you to, but if you could pass it around any lists you have, it would be really good if we can cover some of these costs.

If you know anybody who can help, they can either send us cash or a cheque (made payable to Anarchist Bookfair) via Freedom

Bookshop – we can supply the address if you don't have it. Or, you can pay money directly into our bank account either by going to our website (anarchistbookfair.org.uk) and using the Paypal button or our bank details are:

- Account name: Anarchist Bookfair
- Account number: 65193541
- Sort code: 08 92 99

If we cover the costs this year, we will try and bring another speaker over for a tour in the next couple of years.

London Anarchist Bookfair Collective
<http://anarchistbookfair.org.uk/>

The collective invites groups and individuals to make proposals for meetings/ workshops at this year's Bristol anarchist bookfair, on 20th April 2013, at The Trinity Centre, Trinity Road, Bristol BS2 0NW.

The event will run from 11am to 6pm, and meetings/workshops will run from 12 noon until 6pm.

This call has gone out publicly on our website, Indymedia and other public forums. However we are also emailing specific groups/ individuals – either because they have already enquired about running a meet/workshop or because we think you can bring something to the mix.

If you are interested, take a good look at the Meetings and Workshops page on our website (http://www.bristolanarchistbookfair.org/?page_id=1931). You will see there are a variety of different meeting spaces and activities.

If the space you are proposing an event for requires a form to be completed then that will be found on the above web page.

There are a huge number of contemporary issues worthy of discussion, as well as many organisational, strategic and tactical debates needed. We obviously won't have the space and time to address them all, but we do hope to come up with a programme of interest to all those who attend the event.

You will note there is a deadline of 19th March for proposals. This will allow the collective to discuss the proposals, and in the likely event there are more proposals than spaces, we will select what we consider the best mix... and that may mean asking similar proposals to be combined, and some may be dropped. We will then produce both an online and printed programme.

We would also be delighted to hear from anyone who'd like to run a linked event before the bookfair – we'd be interested in helping with it and promoting it. Do get in touch.

Lastly we'd appreciate your help in promoting the Bookfair to ensure a good attendance and the maximum spread of discussion and debate, so feel free to blog or twitter about it, put something up on your own website, tell your networks, and so on. We also have it as a crackbook event at <http://www.facebook.com/events/437820852938597/>

Bristol Anarchist Bookfair Collective
<http://www.bristolanarchistbookfair.org/>

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).

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GETTING ACTIVE

WHAT'S ON

JANUARY

■ **8th and 22nd Practical Squatting Evening** at 56a Infoshop, 56a Crampton Street, London SE17 3AE from 7pm to 8pm, see <http://www.56a.org.uk/> for details.

■ **10th, 17th, 24th and 31st** London group of The Anarchist Federation meets weekly on Thursday evenings at Freedom Bookshop 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. If you would like to attend please email london@afed.org.uk beforehand.

■ **12th** News from Nowhere Club presents 'Adventures in the Wild East': *The Story of the Eton Manor Boys' Club*, with speaker Dr Michelle Johansen, at The Epicentre, West Street, Leytonstone E11 4LJ, buffet 7.30pm, talk starts 8pm, for details see <http://www.newsfromnowhereclub.org/> or call 0208 555 5248.

■ **15th Practical Squatting Evening** at LARC, 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1 1ES from 7pm to 8pm, see <http://www.squatter.org.uk/>

■ **15th Radical Anthropology talks**, *Songlines of Aboriginal Australia* with Chris Knight at St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 0HT from 6.15 to 9pm, for further details see www.radicalanthropologygroup.org

■ **18th** The Red & Black Club at LARC, 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1 1ES from 8pm, Dissident Island Radio will be broadcasting live as the local anarchists host a traditional east end knees-up.

■ **22nd Radical Anthropology talks**, *Are hunter-gatherers gender-egalitarian?* with Camilla Power at St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 0HT from 6.15 to 9pm, for further details see www.radicalanthropologygroup.org

■ **29th Radical Anthropology talks**, *The wives of the Sun and Moon* (North America: Arapaho) with Chris Knight at St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 0HT from 6.15 to 9pm, for details see www.radicalanthropologygroup.org

FEBRUARY

■ **3rd Brighton Punx Picnic Benefit Roast** at the Cowley Club, 12 London Road, Brighton, from 2pm until 6pm, £4 for full vegan roast or £5 roast with pudding, for further details see <http://www.facebook.com/events/313551958757911/?fref=ts>

■ **5th Radical Anthropology talks**, *Human society, labour and nature: myths and realities* with Gabriel Levy at St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 0HT from 6.15 to 9pm, £10 waged, £5 low : waged, £3 unwaged, for further details see www.radicalanthropologygroup.org

■ **5th and 19th Practical Squatting Evening** at LARC, 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1 1ES from 7pm to 8pm, for more see <http://www.squatter.org.uk/>

■ **9th** News from Nowhere Club presents *The Country and the City* with speaker Mike Dibb, at The Epicentre, West Street, Leytonstone E11 4LJ, buffet 7.30pm, talk starts 8pm, see [newsfromnowhereclub.org/](http://www.newsfromnowhereclub.org/) or call 0208 555 5248.



● The twelfth **Anarchist Bookfair in Ghent** will take place on Saturday 2nd March 2013 at 'De Centrale', Kraankinderstraat 2, 9000 Ghent, from 10am until 7pm, admission free. There will also be a social event in the evening from 9pm (entrance €5).

There will be many independent publishers and distributors, NGOs and action groups from Belgium, UK, France, Netherlands, Germany, all with selections of their books, magazines, DVDs, music, t-shirts and more. Apart from a large selection of libertarian / anarchist books, you will find many publications in the fields of anti-globalisation, direct action, anti-militarism, feminism and radical

eco-action, alongside workshops, debate, etc.

The bookfair has been organised by Ilia vzw, AK-Univ and Infomania.

For further details see www.aboekenbeurs.be

● The ninth **Anarchist Bookfair in Zagreb** (ASK – Anarhisticki sajam knjiga) will take place from 5th to 7th April 2013.

ASK takes place in Zagreb every spring, as a local resource for anarchist and libertarian books and other publications. We also aim to open discussion on subjects that are important for the anarchist movement, or for our local community.

For further details see www.ask-zagreb.org



The Cowley Club is a collectively-owned, volunteer-run libertarian social centre in Brighton soon to be celebrating its 10th anniversary.

The Club contains a bar, vegan cafe, bookshop and library as well as hosting a constant programme of talks, films, discussions and gigs and providing welfare rights advice and free English lessons for migrants.

The Cowley Club functions as a base for a variety of local activist groups from Smash EDO to SchNEWS and Brighton Anarchist Black Cross.

12 London Road, Brighton, BN1 4JA
cowleyclub@riseup.net

WWW.COWLEYCLUB.ORG.UK

BRIGHTON'S LIBERTARIAN SOCIAL CENTRE

LIBRARY

The Cowley Club Library is both a lending library open to all and an archive/research library for anarchist and other associated movements.

We welcome donations of anarchist and other related materials - either new publications or historical archive materials.

Contact the library at: cowleylibrary@gmail.com
And check our online catalogue on the website.



BOOKSHOP

The bookshop is open in the daytime, stocking anarchist, feminist and other radical literature. As well as the latest publications from publishers such as AK and PM Press, we also stock a variety of magazines, T-shirts, postcards and badges as well as a ton of free info.

We host regular author talks and discussions. In the last year we have hosted Kate Evans, John Zerzan, David Graeber and Clive Bloom.

We are always looking for interesting new stock and new authors to host.

For more info check the website or email: cowleybooks@gmail.com

The rich get richer

NHL lock-out ends after four months

The lock-out by National Hockey League (NHL) bosses, previously covered in *Freedom* (September 2012), has finally ended following a four-month, 361-game stand-off. The season will now start, with the number of games reduced from 82 to 48. Lost revenue is reported to have cost the bosses around \$1 billion.

The dispute was over a collective bargaining agreement and the decision by league bosses to reduce the salaries of players in order to give franchise owners a “bigger share of the pie”. This is despite a period of unprecedented success that has seen league earnings sky-rocket over recent years. Whilst many will have little sympathy with well-

paid players, the knock on effect of the lock-out has meant that stadium staff, food and merchandise sellers, and everyone else whose income depends on the league functioning, have not been paid, and do not have huge savings to fall back on, as many of the players have.

Many teams have fired ancillary staff, whilst those who have managed to keep their jobs have had their salaries slashed by 20%. Many businesses such as hotels, restaurants, bars and other shops close to Hockey arenas have reported dismissing large numbers of workers, citing significant drops in revenue due to the lock-out.

The hockey players themselves have had much better fortunes. Their contracts have enabled them to travel anywhere in the world to play whilst the lock-out was in place. Many signed extremely lucrative short-term contracts in Europe.

This is the third lock-out by major US sports in the last twelve months. Brief lock-outs occurred in the NBA, and the NFL, both leading to reduced seasons and significant losses in revenue and associated loss of incomes for workers in linked businesses.

Whilst many fans are looking forward to the return of hockey, there are also a growing number of fans who are refusing to return to watch a sport that has seen several damaging lock-outs over the last twenty years. Many workers employed in and around the industry are rightly concerned for their long term futures and prospects.

However it is not all doom and gloom. Several hundred multi-millionaires have just won a dispute that means they will be paid several million more, as well as gaining a pensions scheme for the first time in NHL history.

Matthew Black

AC Milan abandons game

◀ page 24

did. The sight of the out of touch middle aged white men who run football getting on their high horse because uppity black players had refused to participate in their tick box campaign just highlighted how unfit for purpose their solutions to racism are.

Whilst not as iconic an image as Jesse Owens at the 1936 Nazi Olympics, or as Tommy Smith’s black power salute at the 1968 Olympics, the sight of the AC Milan footballer, Kevin Prince Boateng, refusing to play and leading his team off the pitch following a barrage of racist abuse, will certainly live long in the memory, and may yet be a catalyst for others to follow suit.

Midway through a match against a team from the lower leagues, Boateng was in possession of the ball close to where the

majority of the racist chanters were placed. He picked up the ball and kicked it in the direction of the fans, took off his shirt, and walked towards the tunnel. As soon as the 5,000 fans in attendance realised what was happening – the vast majority of them gave him a standing ovation, with Boateng applauding back.

As the decision to abandon the match was taken out of the referee’s hands by Boateng and his teammates, UEFA are said to be considering a suitable punishment for the club and Boateng.

Whilst Boateng’s actions have been applauded by many, there are also detractors who accuse him of tokenism, and of making meaningless gestures that damage the sport rather than address issues of racism. Included

in those who take the latter position is the snake oil salesman, Sepp Blatter, who whilst saying that Boateng could be described as ‘courageous’, claim his actions offer no long term solutions to the problem of racism, and that clubs should face sanctions for abandoning games in such a matter.

As a side issue – the town’s Mayor, a member of Berlusconi’s People of Freedom Party, has called for Boateng to face criminal charges for kicking a ball at 200km towards fans, and claims that he was at the match and did not hear any abuse whatsoever... What a surprise.

Regardless of the medium to long term impact of Boateng’s actions, I for one applaud his decision to walk off.

Matthew Black



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REVIEWS

FICTION

An Introduction to Trade Unions

The union meeting came and went. To his surprise, he ended up addressing the meeting. It was low key and when the branch secretary introduced the item about the LobCo takeover, he asked if anyone had anything to say about it from the affected groups. Dom got up on stage after his colleagues looked at him, and told the meeting about the new management and the changes to his section. He went into some detail about his argument with the new boss, even getting a laugh a couple of times. The meeting didn't result in anything concrete, but there were lots of warm words.

The one plus was that the branch secretary did say he'd accompany him to any disciplinary that might happen. After the meeting, about a dozen from the meeting went to the pub. The union committee were all keen to talk to Dom, and it soon became apparent why, as they saw him as someone they could get to do things. It was just like every other organisation he'd ever come across, more work than people to do it. More to the point, none of the other people directly affected by the LobCo thing were there and some were in a different union.

He called Dave later.

"Dave, I'm confused by all this working class solidarity," he said.

"I can tell you're taking the piss," replied Dave. "Was it that bad?"

"No it wasn't, but I can't quite see it's going to be a lot of help. The branch secretary has said he'll represent me at any disciplinary. But, er... that's about it."

"Okay, mate, gotta dash, but Jen is coming down on Saturday. We've booked the community centre for a workshop – you'll find it useful. Make sure you come."

On Saturday, Dom found himself arriving at the community centre, ten minutes before the advertised time. Jen had done workplace organiser training before, and was here to share some of it with local anarchists. This was a basic introductory session and she started by getting people to talk about their own situations, then try and strategise ways of moving on from it. Part of it was given over to approaching workmates and how they might be won over to the ideas of taking action.

After the last session, they adjourned to the pub, as was traditional. Dom was excited, fired up, thinking of new things to try with his workmates the following week.

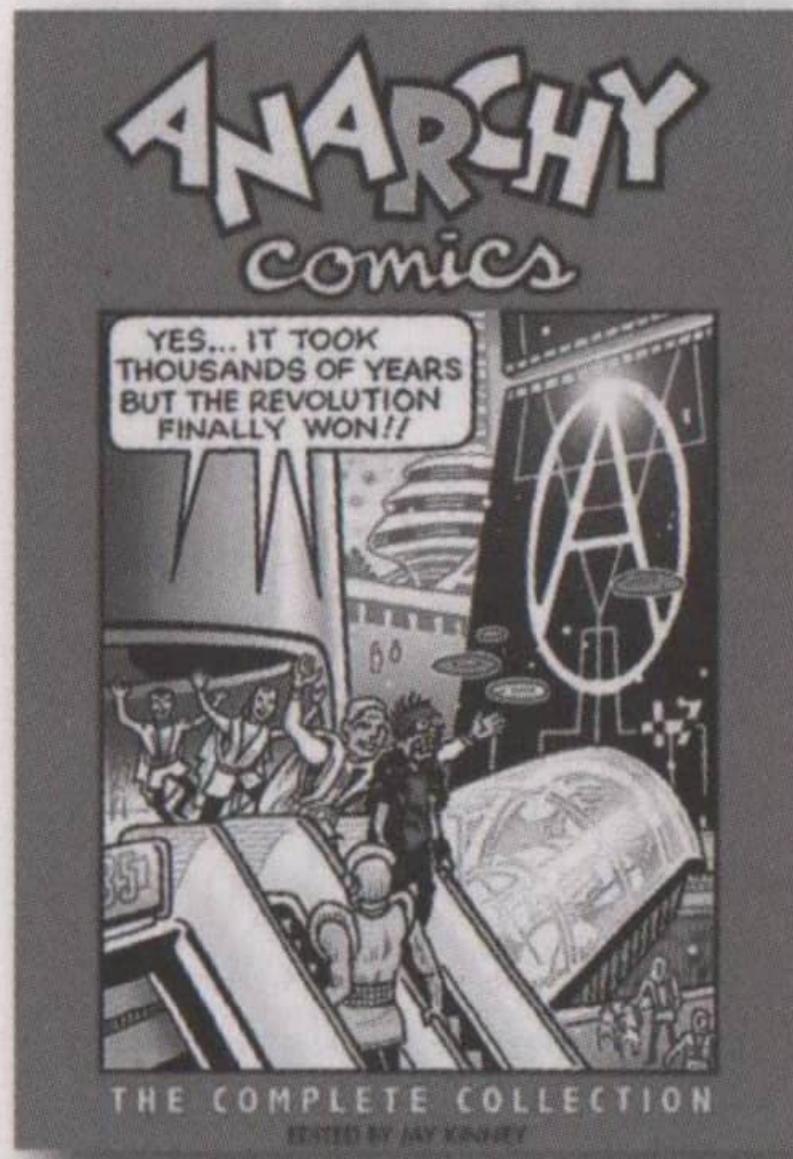
"You look like you're looking forward to work on Monday, Dom," Dave laughed.

Dom smiled. For once, he was.

Martin H.

To be continued...

BOOKS



Anarchy Comics: the complete collection

Edited by Jay Kinney,
PM Press,
£14.99

Until I had read the story of Tintin in his anarchist incarnation in the legendary *Breaking Free*, my only exposure to political cartoons had been the satirical drawings of politicians with red faces and big noses in mainstream daily newspapers.

My appreciation of the power that cartoons can have was put into perspective by Donald Room, who wrote in issue 12 of *The Raven* about cartoons and their use in anarchist propaganda. He said that cartoons can be "appetisers for words", and can "make assertions in the form of metaphors, and tell stories effectively and attractively".

The first I knew of this book, or indeed the original release of the comics was when I stumbled across it at the recent Manchester book fair.

The first thing that stands out about this book for me is the impressive production values, which are typical of many PM Press releases. The book is a compilation of all four issues of the underground and iconic anarchy comics, that ran between 1978 and 1986.

As well as including all of the original material, there is a in-depth introduction that tells the story of why, how and when the comics were created, the story behind each issue and brief biographies of the thirty artists and writers from around the world (including *Freedom's* own, Donald Room) who contributed. Furthermore, there are out-takes, rough drafts and full colour glossy reproductions of all original cover art, and many photographs of the central people involved.

The comics themselves are an interesting mix of fiction, philosophy, history, and satire, with artwork that covers many different styles and uses different techniques.

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Apparently, one third of the profits went on vehicles for the local Football Association, including a fleet of "luxury Mercedes Benz for executive committee members".
2. Néstor Kirchner featured in *la Patagonia Rebelde*, stalwart of anarchist film nights everywhere. He later became President of Argentina. He got the job after the Peronist Youth, of which he was a member, were

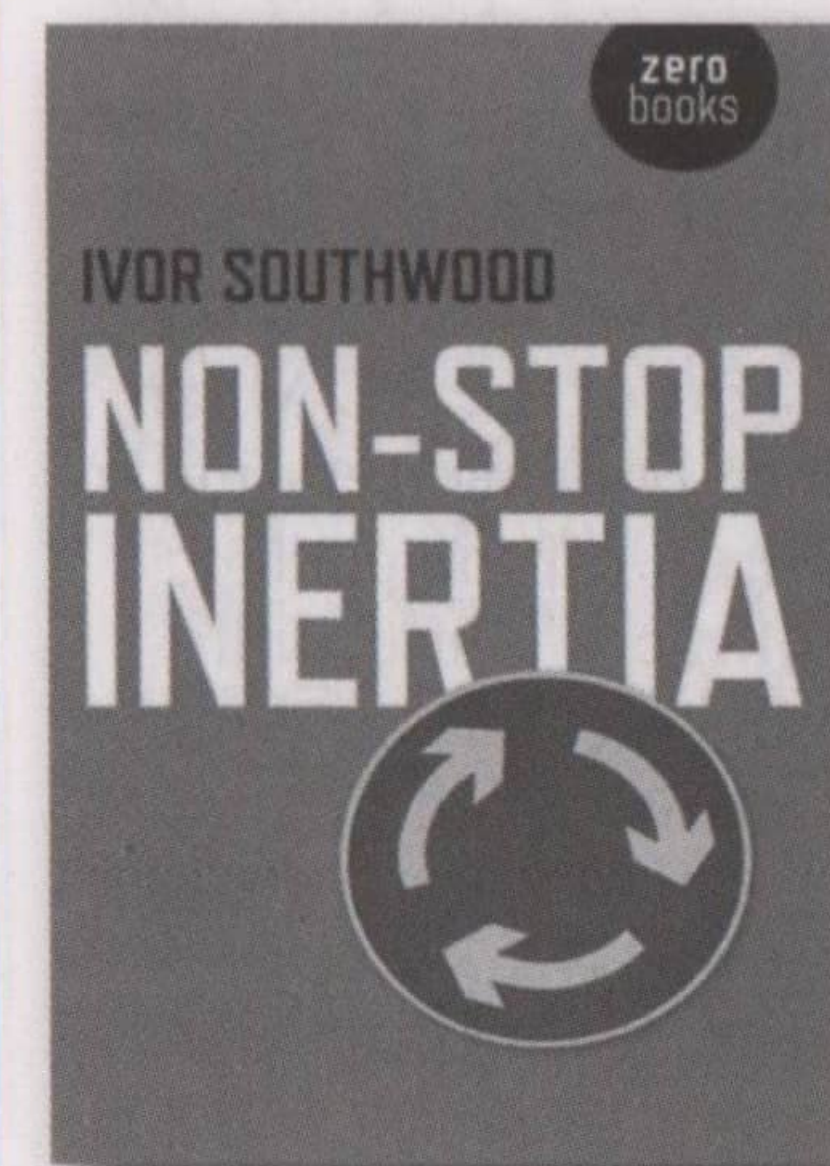
At one time this book would be something that I would not have dreamt of reading, but I found the mix of anarchism and art entertaining, funny, but also serious and poignant at the same time. I can understand that cartoons are not everyone's cup of tea, but this book is well worth a look... get yourself a copy.

Matthew Black

Four issues of *Anarchy comics* were published between 1978 and 1987, by Last Gasp, an imprint of the "underground commix" movement. This book reproduces all four issues in full and in order, with reminiscences and author biographies. Some of the work is by well-known artists of the genre, and some by artists usually published elsewhere, such as Clifford Harper of London and Gerhard Seyfried of Berlin (my own modest contribution is on page 109).

A good source of illustrations for ripping off by twenty-first century anarchist publications (be careful to acknowledge copyright), this comes at almost the same time as *Autonomy: the cover designs of Anarchy 1961-1970* (edited by Daniel Poyner, Hyphen Press). Interest in old anarchist art seems to be in fashion.

Donald Room



Non-stop inertia

by Ivor Southwood,
Zero Books,
£6.99

I hope Ivor Southwood doesn't take me the wrong way when I say that even though *Non-Stop Inertia* is brilliantly written, I don't quite see what the point of it is. Certainly, over the space of a hundred pages he makes a strong case for saying that life amongst the ultra-casualised 'precariat' workforce is a living nightmare. But just who is that message

asked to supply members as extras.

3. It was defended by newly-freed slaves, who formed a contingent 5,000 strong, and groups of foreign exiles, principally French, Spanish and Italian, the last led by Giuseppe Garibaldi, who went on to fame for Italian unification.
4. Defunct economist John Maynard Keynes.

REVIEWS

aimed at? And what can anyone do about it?

As he takes us from bleak “non-place” to job centre and back again, this is very much Ivor’s story, and he very much knows of what he speaks. He also invests it with the passion of something like catharsis, combined with philosophical insights by way of Marx, Habermas, the sociologist Stuart Hall, and definitely not Alain de Botton.

All in all then, a clearer picture of the profound alienation facing the new breed of precarious worker could not be asked for – we know the social causes, we know the day to day routines (or lack thereof), and we know the intellectual descriptions.

But there’s something missing here. If you know this life for yourself, you might nod and raise a for once genuine smile every now and then, but overall the effect is profoundly depressing, and that’s something you definitely don’t need. If everything about this way of living is new to you – perhaps you are in a steady ‘middle class’ or relatively safe public sector job to the extent that there is such a thing in 2013 – then it’s all very interesting but...so what? What exactly are you supposed to do with this information? You might as well have read a novel.

The crunch comes in the final section (‘Ways Out’). Despite the title, Southwood can’t offer one. That’s not his fault – everything about this existence is deliberately designed to preclude any way out. Even the marginal utility of unionisation is pretty much out, unless you are going to join a syndicalist organisation anyway. Southwood offers the example of one de facto overtime strike he took part in:

“On one occasion a particularly stupid management decision meant that part of this overtime was set aside for us to perform menial tasks for the senior staff. We were indignant at this, and in response a few of us agreed to decline that hour’s ‘optional’ overtime on the day before, once this work had already been factored into the schedule. By declining this offer at short notice we made a collective statement which we had no means of articulating in formal terms, and which we therefore had no obligation to explain (although pressure was put on some of us to do so); we just happened to each decide to take an hour off on the same day.”

All well and good. But throughout the rest of *Non-Stop Inertia*, Southwood has been hammering home that – such is the individualistic, dog-eat-dog nature of temping – ‘deep acting’ had been constantly required not to betray even the slightest hint of discontent, lest a bad reference result. Surely this would have happened to the strikers, and scattered to the career winds they would have had no chance of further resistance.

I don’t wish this review itself to be pessimistic, and I believe it must be possible to organise the precariat. But likely it will be near enough impossible til large sections of the more regular workforce have provided a lead. In the meantime, Southwood finds himself arguing for individuals to adopt “camp” gestures – another potential bringer of bad reference if bosses cottoned on.

There are no easy answers, so I can’t

blame Southwood for not providing some. That said, I found the read a thoroughly dispiriting one.

Adam Ford



Fighting for Ourselves
Solidarity Federation, £6

Solidarity Federation released their book in late October. Soon after, I got hold of a copy and read in cover to cover in about a day. It’s very recently been published free online, and is downloadable in .ePub and .mobi (Kindle) formats. Already, it’s been widely read within certain circles of the workers’ movement, but I’m writing this review because I think that it deserves a much wider audience.

Background

The book is the product of about a year’s writing, but much longer in terms of the internal discussions and debates which fleshed out the positions and arguments within the book.

Solidarity Federation (SF or SolFed) are the British section of the International Workers Association (IWA) – a grouping of functioning unions and union initiatives whose tendency within the workers movement dates back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

To give a very brief background, anarcho-syndicalism represents a synthesis of (as should be evident from the name) anarchism and syndicalism. From anarchism we get the core principles of opposition to the state and capitalism and agitation towards a libertarian communist society. From syndicalism, the method of unions organising horizontally (as opposed to hierarchically) and using direct action to achieve its aims rather than through negotiation and representation.

However, a considerable majority of ordinary workers will never have heard of anarcho-syndicalism, unless they’re really avid *Monty Python* fans. That is one of the issues this book sets out to rectify. Annoying peasants aside, anarcho-syndicalism was once one of the primary driving currents in the global workers’ movement, most famously in the social revolution that took place during the Spanish Civil War of 1936–39.

However, many of the largest sections of the IWA were smashed by fascism, world war and Stalinism, or pushed aside by the social partnership of the trade union movement. *Fighting for ourselves* recovers the history that was lost with this and offers an analysis of anarcho-syndicalism in

practice and how the lessons and mistakes of the past can be drawn upon to organise effectively today.

Relevance

If *Fighting for Ourselves* was just an exercise in navel gazing, however, I wouldn’t be reviewing it here. It might still be of interest to myself, as a supporter of SolFed and advocate of anarcho-syndicalism, but it would have little relevance to those who were neither of these things.

Instead the book starts off not with the history described above but by addressing the tendencies in the labour movement that PCS members will be more familiar with. Namely, trade unionism, the Labour Party and Marxist workers parties such as the Socialist Party (which carries a lot of influence in our union and whose members occasionally hand out their leaflets outside the Triad – HMRC offices).

In explaining how they understand trade unions, SolFed draw a distinction between the “associative” and “representative” functions of unions. It explains how the latter function inevitably tends towards bureaucracy and a disconnect between the leadership and the members, something many members will be familiar with for different reasons. Even if you don’t agree with the analysis presented, it is certainly thought-provoking enough to warrant giving time to and addressing rather than ignoring altogether.

A similar analysis explains how the problems with revolutionary workers’ parties and the Labour Party both start by separating “economic” struggles from “political” ones and the inevitable disconnect between workers and their representatives. Again, even if you disagree, it is a thorough analysis and one that demands to be engaged with.

But there is more to this book than simply doing down trade unionism and Labourism in order to big up anarcho-syndicalism. As well as offering political analysis and Labour movement history in an easily accessible form which one doesn’t have to do any homework to be able to understand, it looks at exactly where we are in the present and how we can apply the history and lessons offered to that situation.

The key argument of *Fighting for Ourselves* is precisely the one that the title suggests – that we, as workers, need to take the struggle against cuts, austerity and the day-to-day injustices of capitalism into our own hands if we want to be able to win.

Rather than offering up this conclusion based on abstract theory or idealised situations, it does so on the basis of a history that workers are too often unaware of. Criticism of the mainstream of our movement is followed by a coherent and accessible explanation of the alternative they are putting forward. Nor is anarcho-syndicalism presented as that alternative without question. As already mentioned, the history and tradition is analysed critically and the mistakes of the past are brought to the fore as something that must be explained and learned from.

THE ARTS

Mental Fight Club and the Dragon

Mental Fight Club is a creative community group that arose in 'Old Southwark' just near London Bridge in 2003, dedicated to creative explorations of mental illness, recovery and well-being. It arose out of my wretched lifelong experience of severe mental illness and its ethos is built on the creative connection and wisdom that is found in one's new relationships with others in the long march through recovery – and for me it has been a very long march.

Mental Fight Club doesn't have a membership as such. The word 'Club' is a humorous paradox because many of the people who come along to MFC are the sort of people who aren't joiners anyway – quite the opposite, they are all often the socially alienated, the disconnected and the marginalised. MFC has always attracted a diverse range of people – service-users, local residents and workers, artists, scientists, philosophers, performers, anyone really. We are open to all, and 'our first and second rules', if we have any at all, parodying the first and second rules in the film *Fight Club* – you *do* talk about mental fight club.

MFC all started one night (25th December 2003) when I was suddenly lifted out of a long period of suicidal depression which just the



week before had taken me on a reconnaissance mission to Beachy Head. I started to feel quite elated in the early hours, so I reached for a poetry book to help me steady my mind. I had at least learnt that the 'up' periods could be as damaging to me and as stressful for others as the lows. The book I took from the shelf was *Mental Fight* by Ben Okri. I read it out loud repeatedly during that night. By the time dawn broke, I rather liked it; its global messages seemed to be relevant to my tiny personal experience. But then I wondered if this was just my euphoric grandiosity or simply following my general habit of over-connecting with things. So I decided to find out what others thought about it. I threw a party in the crypt of St George the Martyr, my local church ten minutes from London Bridge. Myself and four friends performed the first section of *Mental Fight* with music interleaved at the party and... people did like it. So I suggested we all meet again seven times to read the next seven sections and came up with the name 'Mental Fight Club'.

In the next four years, during which time I continued to go in and out of illness, we managed to put on a further 10 small creative events, but sadly it all came to a very abrupt halt in 2007 when I disappeared into a death-embracing psychosis and MFC shut down.

We remained closed for three years. I emerged from the horror-state in March 2011, when I returned one Sunday to St George's for a service and afterwards went down into the crypt for coffee. I took one look at it and the idea of setting up The Dragon Café came leaping into my mind – a relaxing café and creative space open to all, open one day a week. It was as quick and clear as that. The idea came so fast, partly because during my psychosis I had become a drifter and a drinker and had spent many many months inside and outside of London using pubs and cafés as my substitute day centres. So I had been mulling over generally how cafés are good places to go when you are feeling so out of it. Cafés offer a minimal sense of social connection, but allow anonymity.

Mental Fight Club now runs The Dragon Café every Monday from 10 am until 8 pm (sometimes later) in the crypt of St George



the Martyr Church, the very place where we started in 2003. The Dragon Café is a crystallisation and development of all the creative work we did during what I now refer to us as our founding period from 2003–07. To manifest The Dragon Café has required us to sit down and think hard about what Mental Fight Club was/is and what sort of ethos we wanted to develop in the management of this much larger project. What became creatively clear was that the inspiration for MFC's ethos is drawn from seven Creative Muses which had emerged during our founding period. The first and overarching Muse that we must never forget, no matter how well we as a group feel, is the painful and isolating experience of severe mental illness and the journey through recovery into a renewed state of mental well-being and social connectivity. The second is the area of Old Southwark – the area between London Bridge and the Elephant & Castle in which most of our creative events were held and which has a long tradition of outlaws, outcasts, public disturbance, prisons, pubs, burial grounds and creative genius... think Shakespeare, Chaucer, Keats, Blake and Dickens for starters. The third is the icon of

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Conclusion

Even if you are not an anarcho-syndicalist, or even sympathetic to the ideas (a category which I imagine covers an awful lot of the people reading this review), you ought to read this book. Not because I'm an anarcho-syndicalist and think more people ought to be exposed to the ideas – though I won't deny that this is true! Rather, because it is a contribution to a debate that we all ought

to be having right now.

Why are we in the situation we are in right now, where the government feels so safe to attack all that we have won over a century of fighting? What kind of movement do we need to fight these attacks? How do we build that movement?

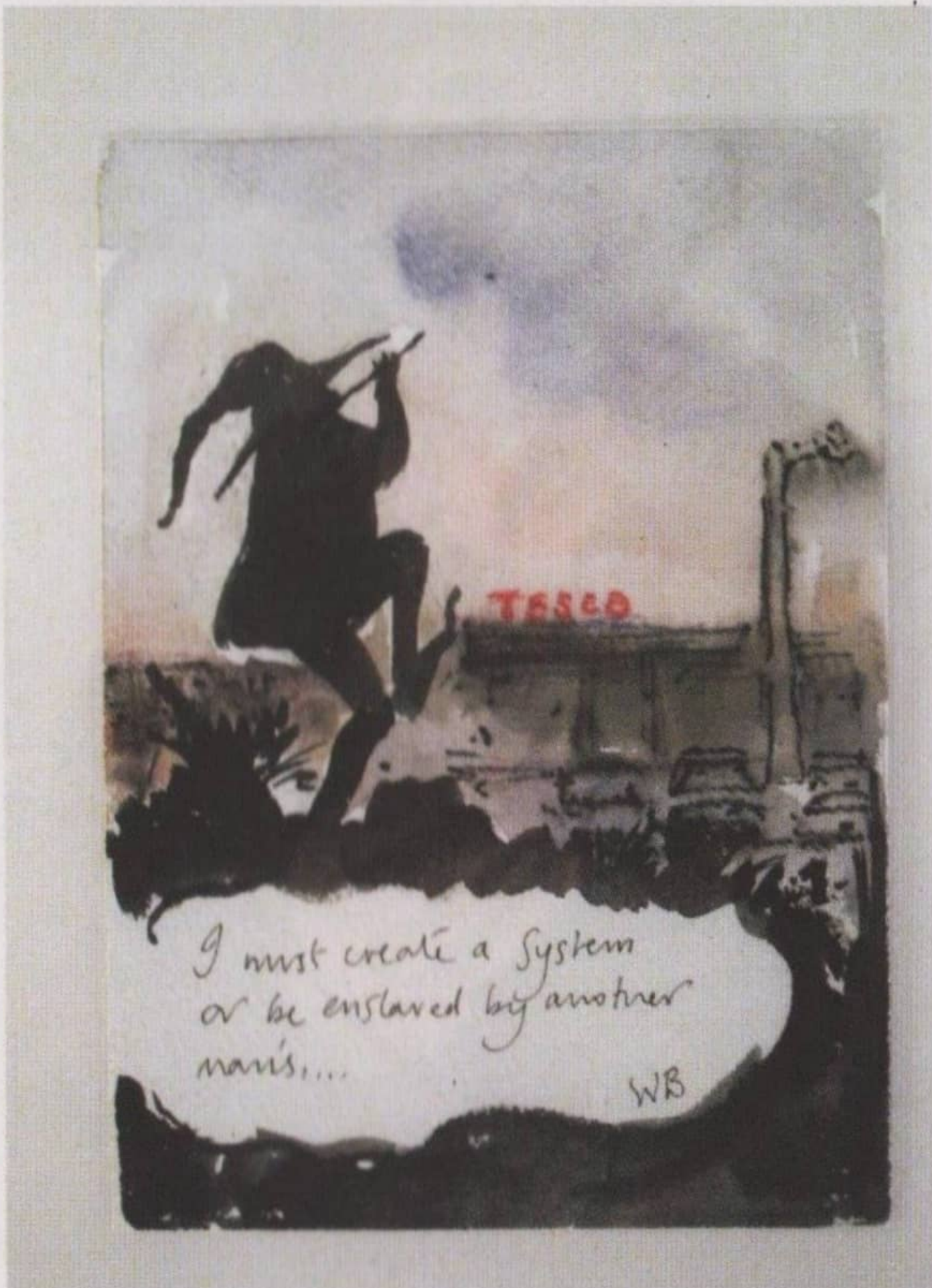
Even if you don't agree with their answers, SolFed are offering answers. And if you don't think that they are the answers then your

task is obvious – to examine the same history, the same present conditions, and offer up answers of your own.

Phil Dickens

Books reviewed in *Freedom* are available from our bookshop in Whitechapel, *Fighting for Ourselves* is also available via <http://www.freedompress.org.uk/news/products-page/books/fighting-for-ourselves/> for £6 post free.

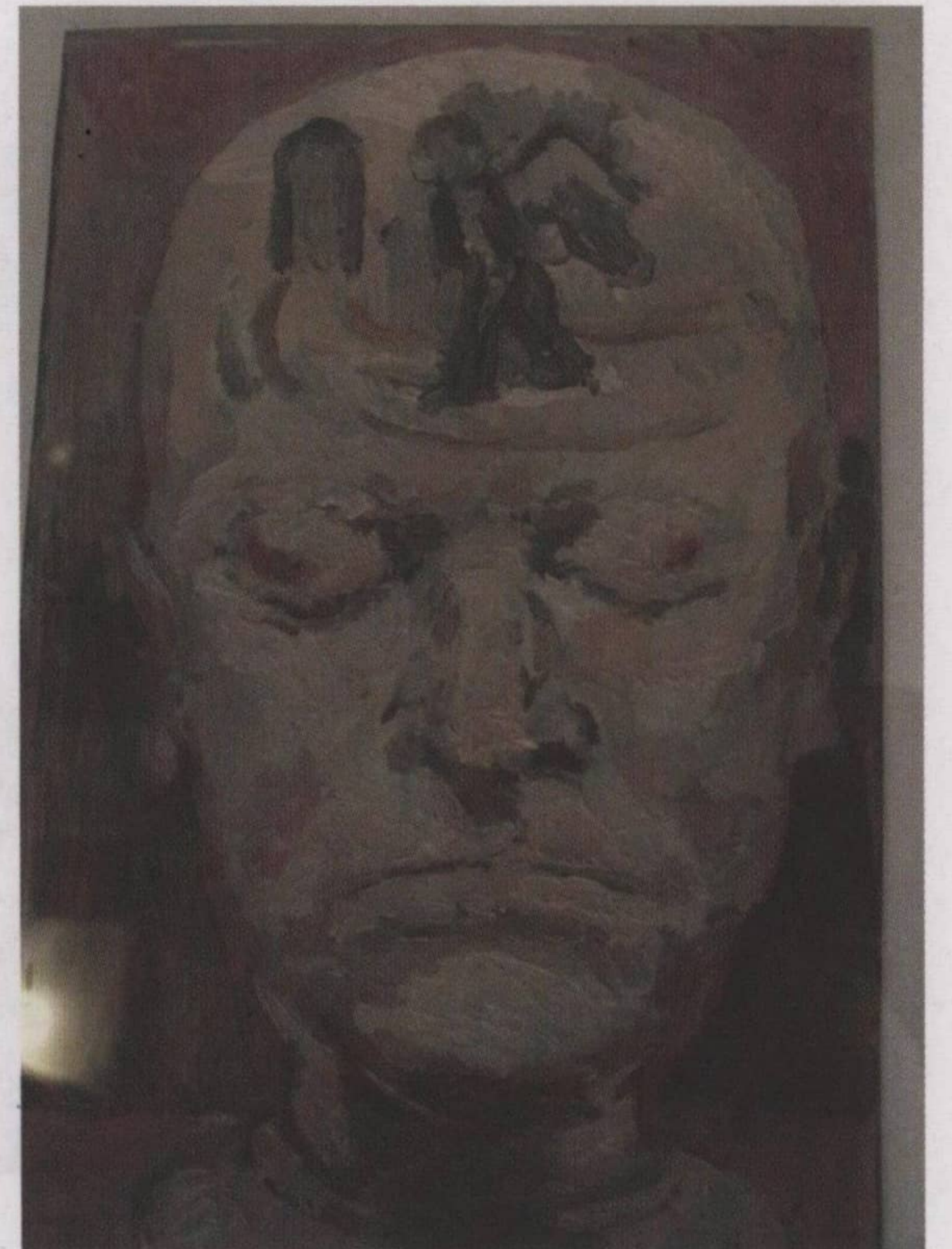
on Café



St George and his dragon-slaying myth, the Patron of the church in which we started. The fourth is Ben Okri's epic poem *Mental Fight* which had brought us together in the first place, the fifth is the music of Nick Cave and Patti Smith which kept recurring in our early creative work, the sixth is of course, the film *Fight Club: a fabulous, if highly disturbing, exposition of one person's mental illness*. The seventh is of course, the Art, Life & Vision of Mr William Blake. I increasingly think that while it was me who started Mental Fight Club, it is William Blake who actually founded it! It was he who created the phrase 'Mental Fight' and it was because of my emergent interest in him that I picked up and bought Ben Okri's book in the first place. He is a massively

insightful and inspirational figure – ahead of his time in so many ways, pre-figuring Marx, Jung and Freud and opening up a compelling spiritual vision of human life and the world in which we live, that is utterly unique yet vastly connecting to a huge spectrum of people with wide-ranging beliefs.

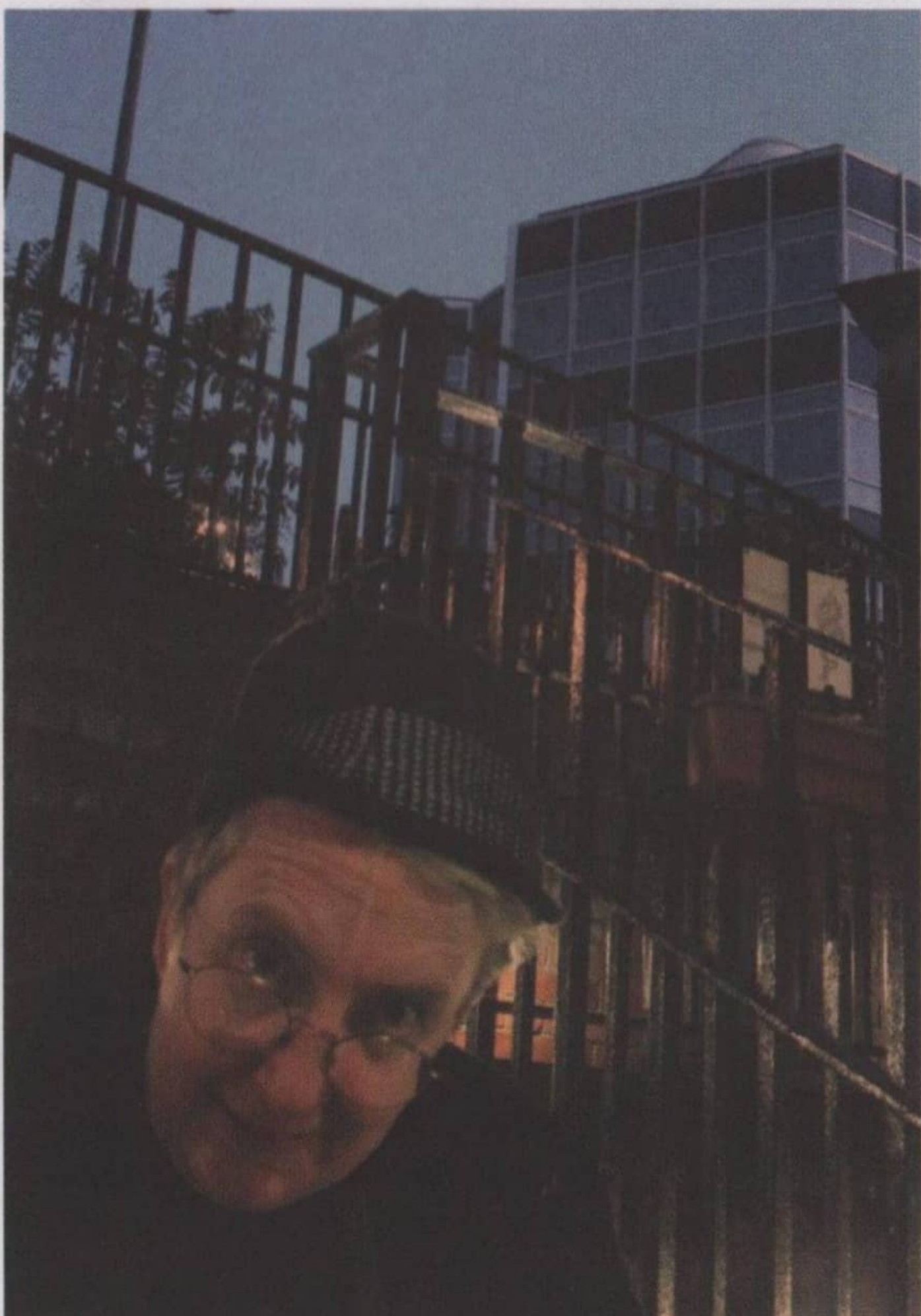
We also thought long and hard about the kind of organisational ethos we would seek to create. There has always been both open-hearted and anarchic elements to Mental Fight Club. While our creative endeavours are always carefully structured, they always have an element of spontaneity where people step up to perform or speak if they feel moved to. After such a long stretch of illness I was also acutely aware that, in the founding period, Mental Fight Club was far too dependent on me for its organisation. So devolving responsibility was crucial to setting up The Dragon Café and adequate budget lines for seven part-time managers were included in our project plan. I was also very aware that service-user led groups, because of the high degree of sensitivity and vulnerability amongst their creators, are more prone to either implosion (*cf* Mental Fight Club 2007) or explosion, i.e where grievances and disagreements cause a lot of unresolved pain and organisational disintegration. We knew that The Dragon Café would involve a team of part-time managers, but that it would also require a much larger team of volunteers to support it (we currently have 100 on our books). Most of us are service-users, so the committee and the managers thought and talked a lot about how best we would all work together and we came up with the idea to foster what we now call a 'Mindful Working Ethos'. It's an ethos which requires all the team members to be aware of the roles that they take on while working at The



Dragon Café, a consideration of boundaries and how we deal with conflict amongst ourselves and with Dragon Café patrons. Overall it has with a strong emphasis on self-care, respect for others and, most crucially, open communication. Our two by-lines are, if anything is troubling you 'Pass it On' and if things are feeling difficult or as if they are going wrong, to remember that, bar famine, fire, plague, flood or (food-poisoning!), 'Nothing's a Disaster!'

Sarah Wheeler
MFC Creative Director

The Dragon Café runs every Monday from 10am until 8pm in the Crypt of St George the Martyr Church, Borough High Street, London SE1 1JA. See <http://dragoncafe.co.uk/> for details.



SPORT

AC Milan abandons game



Player walks off following racism

The issue of racism in football and how to deal with it is a highly contentious one. The causes of racism in football are clearly

societal and not confined to the stadiums in which they occur. Therefore any lasting and meaningful solutions will need to be deeply rooted in society rather than the tokenism we have seen from the footballing authorities.

The policies of meaningless fines for both players and clubs, banning individual fans,

and feeble vanity projects such as the 'Kick it out' campaign, have had their day. The recent refusal by several premier league players to wear the 'Kick it out' t-shirts in the warm up before matches generated more media coverage than the campaign itself ever

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THE QUIZ

1. According to *The Sowetan* newspaper, what happened to a significant chunk of the profits from South Africa hosting the World Cup?
2. Which country's president featured as an extra in a film about an anarchist uprising?
3. When the Uruguayan Army was destroyed in a civil war, the conservative victors besieged the capital, Montevideo, for nine years. Who defended it?
4. Who said "Practical men who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back"?

Answers on page 20

