

anarchist fortnightly **Freedom**

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A new gulf war

In all the UK's recent wars, the key objective – more than any piece of land – has been control of 'the truth'. What's changed is the audience this truth is aimed at. In 1914 and 1939, it was the British population, which had to be prepared for the coming sacrifices. Now, while it's still crucial to have the British people on side, the target audience lives elsewhere, in this case the

Middle East. In his attempts to reach out to this audience, Tony Blair has failed.

Politicians aren't like the rest of us. They talk at us, but only to get us to do what they want us to do. They're completely out of touch with how we actually live and what we actually think. In the Middle East too, when they talk to the bosses they think they're getting the views of the people. They're not, and

this is why Blair has been so shocked at the furious response to the attacks he has ordered on Afghanistan.

The new gulf war is between different versions of 'the truth'. The gulf in question is the one that lies between the views our bosses want everyone to hold and the views many people actually hold. Blair's ignorance has led all of us into a catastrophe.

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Huge demonstrations as fears of wider war grow

Demonstrations have continued around the world, following the launch of airstrikes against Afghanistan by the American and British governments. But while anarchists and activists in five continents have expressed their opposition to the repeated terror strikes, which were finally launched on 7th October, so-called 'hawks' in the US military establishment have been pressing for the military campaign to be widened.

At the start of this week, US investigators named Iraq as the most likely source of the anthrax assault on American media organisations. Officials in Washington also claimed at the weekend that their investigation had amassed evidence of Iraqi involvement in the attacks on American cities last month. Their claims were widely interpreted as propaganda moves, aimed at softening up the American population for a full-scale war.

It is known that Pentagon officials have discussed plans for supporting insurrections against the regime of Saddam Hussein. They are thought to be considering a promise of air support for Kurds in the north of the country, and of ground support in the south, around the oilfields of Basra. CIA officials are also reported to have contacted Iraqi opposition politicians, to make arrangements for a transfer of power in Baghdad.

Many observers predicted soon after the 11th September attacks that the US government would use them as a pretext to intervene in the Middle East. It is known that many in the US military consider the continued existence of the Saddam regime to be 'unfinished business' from the 1991 Gulf War. The strategy of widening the Afghan conflict was given a boost at a top-level meeting held in the Pentagon last month. The result was a letter to President Bush from top advisers, urging him to seize the opportunity of moving against Saddam.

In last Sunday's *Observer*, US officials were reported to have told journalists David Rose and Ed Vulliamy, "we see this war as one against the virus of terrorism. If you have bone marrow cancer, it's not enough to cut off the patient's foot. You have to do a complete course of chemotherapy. And if that means embarking on the next Hundred Years' War, that's what we're doing". One anarchist speaker at London's Speakers' Corner last Sunday found this prospect alarming. "It's terrifying", he said simply.



American aircraft carrier USS Enterprise, currently launching attacks on Afghanistan

Censorship warning to BBC

Civil servants wrote to the BBC at the start of this week to demand that the organisation censor video messages from Osama bin Laden before broadcasting them. Alastair Campbell, the prime minister's official Director of Communications, said that the media was allowing the boss of the al-Qaeda terror network "an easy ride".

In a letter to BBC managers, Campbell said that they should treat messages from al-Qaeda with great caution. He reportedly told them to point out that information given in bin Laden's videos was impossible to verify, before broadcasting the videos themselves.

Many observers saw Campbell's move as a sign of desperation, in the face of mounting evidence that bin Laden has won his propaganda war against the West with ease.

But the BBC insisted it would not change

its policy. "There is an argument that bin Laden shouldn't have the oxygen of publicity", said Richard Sambrook, head of BBC news. "I disagree. It is better for us all to know what they are thinking". Referring to a ban on broadcasting the voices of Irish politicians, which the British government put in place in the 1980s, he went on "we learned from the ban on Sinn Fein that censorship like that doesn't work".

Many activists have condemned the government's attempts at media control. Anarchists in particular have asked why they should pay any more attention to the claims of western politicians than they would to those of bin Laden. "During the Gulf War, there were reporters in Baghdad", said one. "During the Kosovo bombing, there were reporters in Belgrade. Those wars were televised. When

the 'smart bombs' went wrong, the bosses' lies were quickly exposed. This time, there are no reporters on the ground, we've only got their word for it. They tried to lie before, they'll do it again now".

Other censorship fears have been awakened by a string of reports that activists' email accounts have been monitored. One man, who accessed his mail through Hotmail, had his account cancelled by service owners Microsoft. The cancellation was confirmed by a message which read, "the content of your sent and received mail is not in the interests of the United States government". Several fundamentalist Muslim websites have also been thrown off their American host servers after intervention by the FBI.

Editorial on page 7

Number of protesters swells



Trafalgar Square on Saturday 13th October

photo © Richie Andrew

Protests and peace vigils have been held in towns and cities across the UK since the first bombs began to fall on Afghanistan last week. The largest of the demonstrations so far was last Saturday's rally in Central London. An estimated 40,000 people joined a march from Speakers' Corner to Trafalgar Square.

One anti-war event, the No War But The Class War meeting in London, was actually being held as news came through that British and American forces had launched an air strikes.

London: 7th October

The No War But The Class War meeting looked to be a good event, with more than fifty people turning up despite the pouring rain. It suffered from the usual disparity of the sexes, with men outnumbering women by about 2 to 1, but on the positive side there

seemed a good turnout from ethnic Middle Easterners (a clumsy term, but I can't think of a better one).

About ten minutes into the meeting, the news of the bombing came through and a decision was taken to launch some immediate action. After agreeing to meet at Oxford Circus at 7pm, we guzzled down some food (many thanks to the caterers), and everyone headed off.

I stayed behind to wash the dishes, so missed the demo itself. But I did find a hundred or so mixed liberals, anarchists and Trot paper-sellers standing with their banners outside Downing Street. I'm told the demo went down to Parliament Square, and was heading up towards the Home Office when the police tried to block it off, so everyone rapidly dispersed in all directions. One arrest was made.

Sam

Everywhere: 8th October

Demonstrations were held in towns and cities across the UK, with events in Aberdeen, Bangor, Barnsley, Belfast, Birmingham, Bradford, Bridgend, Brighton, Bristol, Cardiff, Coventry, Edinburgh, Leeds, Llanelli, London, Luton, Manchester, Newcastle, Newport, Northampton, Nottingham, Oxford, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Reading, St Albans, Sheffield, Southampton, Stoke-on-Trent, Swansea, Walsall and Watford.

Glasgow: 8th October

Over 400 people gathered in George Square for a peace vigil. Human rights activist and asylum-seeker Aamer Anwar gave a speech condemning the attacks. "What is happening in Afghanistan is the equivalent of the UK bombing part of Dublin, London, Chicago or Boston in response to IRA bombings", he said. "The government says it does not want the destruction of the World Trade Centre to lead to a racist backlash, but they have contributed to such an atmosphere by virtually equating Islam with irrational violence". He went on, "how can Tony Blair be taken seriously when he speaks about the shame of the new evil of mass terrorism when his government sells lethal weapons to Israel, and has sprayed both Iraq and Yugoslavia with cluster bombs?"

London: 9th October

Activists from campaign group Wages for Housework held the first of their planned weekly anti-war pickets opposite Downing Street. Kay Chapman of WFH pointed out the global discrepancy between arms spending and the amount of money it would take to abolish poverty. "Globally, \$800bn is spent annually on military budgets, while only \$80bn would provide the essentials of life for everyone", she said. "We demand that military budgets be redirected to women and therefore to the community – invest in

caring, not killing". The women's picket will continue on Whitehall, 5pm every Tuesday. For more info call 020-7482 2496, or mail crossroadswomenscentre@compuserve.co.uk

Brighton: 11th October

Activists from No War But The Class War occupied an army recruitment office in the centre of the city. Around twenty people pushed past uniformed soldiers on the door, shutting the building down for the busy lunchtime period. Activists outside handed out leaflets and talked to people who had come for recruitment interviews. They also draped a banner over the front of the office. Those inside invaded recruitment interviews that were already taking place.

In a statement, the group said that "in declaring 'a war against terrorism', the ruling class has really declared a war on workers across the world."

Brighton NWBTCW are meeting every Monday, 7.30pm above the Hobgoblin pub on London Road.

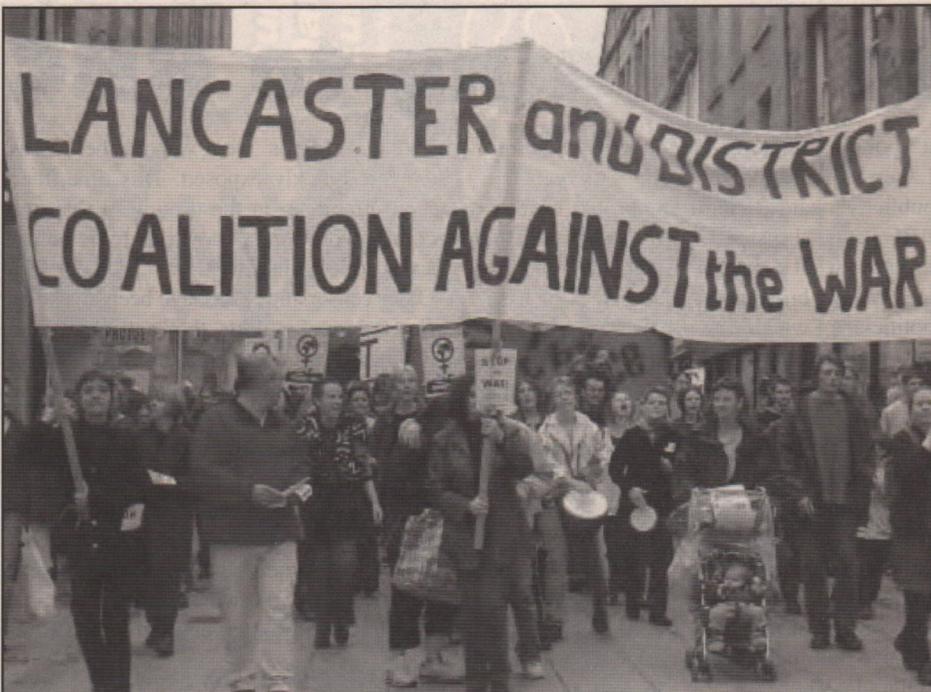
London: 13th October

The anti-war march from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square attracted at least 40,000 people in one of the biggest demonstrations held in the UK for years. Although it had been called by CND, many activist groups were represented, including Reclaim the Streets and the Wombles.

Lancaster: 13th October

Over two hundred people gathered in Market Square, in a rally organised by Lancaster & District Coalition Against the War. They then marched through the shopping centre (see picture, left).

Please keep sending in reports and photographs from anti-war actions around the country (all photographs will be returned). For more information, contact FreedomCopy@aol.com



From irony to insanity

So far, one of the most memorable aspects of Operation Enduring Freedom is the extent to which the irony inherent in its original name – Infinite Justice – passes through absurdity to the point of insanity. In one sense, Afghanistan represents the last battle of America's Cold War. Having backed Islamic fundamentalist forces as a proxy army against the Russians, the US now wants to kill the Taliban and restore the monarchy. To preserve some perspective while the chatter about justice goes on around us, it's worth reminding ourselves what happened in 1978.

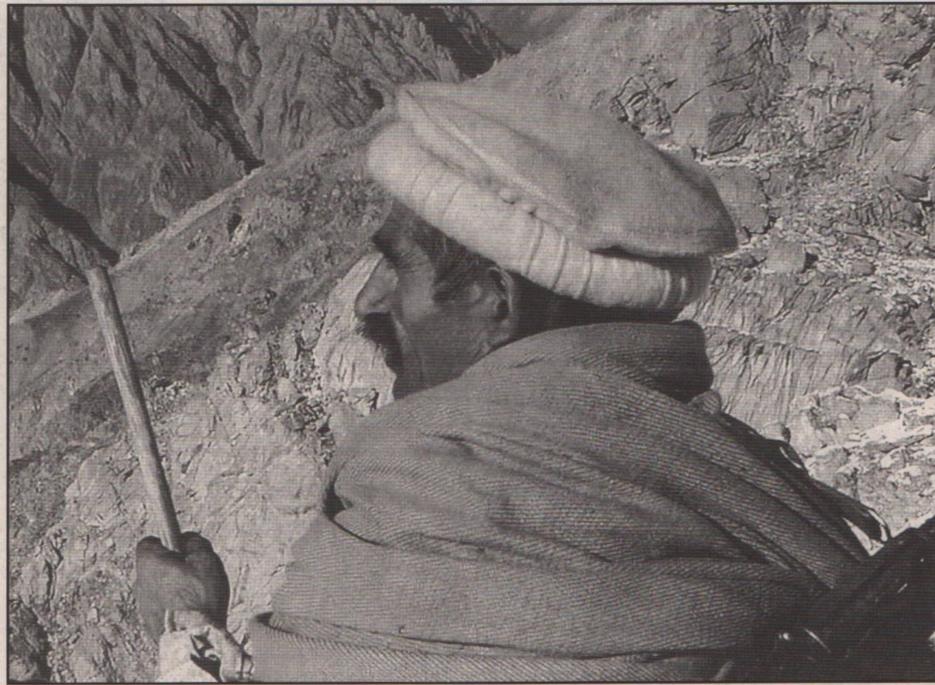
The overthrow of the Afghan monarchy by Mohammed Daoud in 1973 had been supported by the leftwing People's Democratic Party (PDP). One of the myths of the period is that the PDP coup, which in turn overthrew Daoud five years later, was a Soviet-backed initiative and that the Soviet invasion was part of Moscow's imperialist design (Afghanistan shared a thousand mile border with the USSR). Even in the days of the monarchy, Russia had been Afghanistan's largest trading partner, aid donor and military supplier. Washington saw the injection of Iranian capital into the country as a means of countering Russian influence.

The Shah of Iran entered into a \$2bn aid agreement with the Daoud regime. In 1975, Daoud dismissed forty Soviet-trained military officers and began training agreements with India and Egypt. Iran's SAVAK secret police began to operate in the country, fingering communist sympathisers to Daoud. None of this prompted a military response from Moscow. But when Daoud began to attack the PDP itself the party seized power, declaring itself committed to Islam within a secular state and non-alignment in foreign affairs. It was committed to land reform, separation of church and state, eradication of illiteracy and the emancipation of women. It also promised to develop a public sector.

The party cancelled debts owed to landlords by peasants, abolished the taking of interest on loans, built schools and clinics and provoked an immediate backlash from the large landowners, tribal chiefs, monarchists and Islamic factions. By spring 1979, a guerilla war had begun, with CIA-funded Islamic reactionaries trying to overthrow a faction-ridden PDP government. When the USSR intervened, it didn't do so to protect the social gains inherent in the PDP programme, but simply because it felt the PDP government was too weak to survive and that the end result of its collapse would be a US-backed regime on its border. Washington actively undermined the Kabul government, which in turn led to Soviet intervention.

As a foreign policy, this amounted to insanity. In order to destabilise an already collapsing Soviet Union, the United States underwrote the designs of Islamic militants in the region, and did so in collusion with the secret service of Pakistan (which itself saw Islam as a buffer against any threat from the left). In the process, they delivered the Afghan people into the arms of a fundamentalist regime that banned alcohol, ejected women from public life and ordered public amputations and executions.

The jihad that was launched got \$10m of American money. The CIA also allowed the mujahedin to make a little cash on the side from the heroin trade. The Pakistani military safeguarded the processing labs that sprung up along the Afghan-Pakistan border. (The result is that almost all the heroin on US streets comes from the region). For a while, the Taliban were the people to do business



with in Afghanistan, certainly as far as the Clinton administration was concerned – they were the most stable force in a country of factions, and therefore necessary to safeguard the oil interests of Central Asia.

Islam as an ideology has a double edge for those who want to take advantage of it. Fundamentalist Islam is a product of poverty – it preaches social change through self-transformation rather than by social action, and suggests that equality comes about despite differences of class instead of through changing them. It nevertheless has a rhetorical commitment to economic equality. Moreover Islam, like all religions, is a paper that many things can be written on, from the tolerance and universality that is its heritage to the distortion which rules the Saudi state.

The cutting edge of Islam though, in all its variations, is its commitment to the *umma*, the worldwide community of Muslims. In a world where capitalism is the only game in town, where universality becomes the universalisation of exploitation, and where Asia and the Middle East are playgrounds for western capital, it is radical Islam's commitment to an oppositional universalism that give it its oppositional credibility. Washington

might want to pretend that the fanatics it trained and financed have no interest in anything beyond terror, but (as bin Laden's statement, released to the media as the bombing began, shows) the despair which is the currency of everyday life in Baghdad and in Hebron remains the key.

Crucially, it is western support for Israel which is ultimately at issue. This is expressed in the hypocrisy which says attacks on American cities were terrorist acts while the daily actions of the Israeli defence force can never be, and also in the recognition that, after 1967 in particular, Israel is bankrolled and allowed to carry out whatever slaughter its security demands because it is America's 'loyal friend' in the Middle East. The occasionally belligerent independence of Egypt and Syria, the fall of the Shah, and the growth in support across the region for the secular radicalism of the Palestinian militants have meant that Israel has been crucial to the US project, to "inhibit and contain those irresponsible and radical elements in certain Arab states who, were they free to do so, would pose a grave threat indeed to our principle sources of petroleum" (in the words of Henry Jackson,

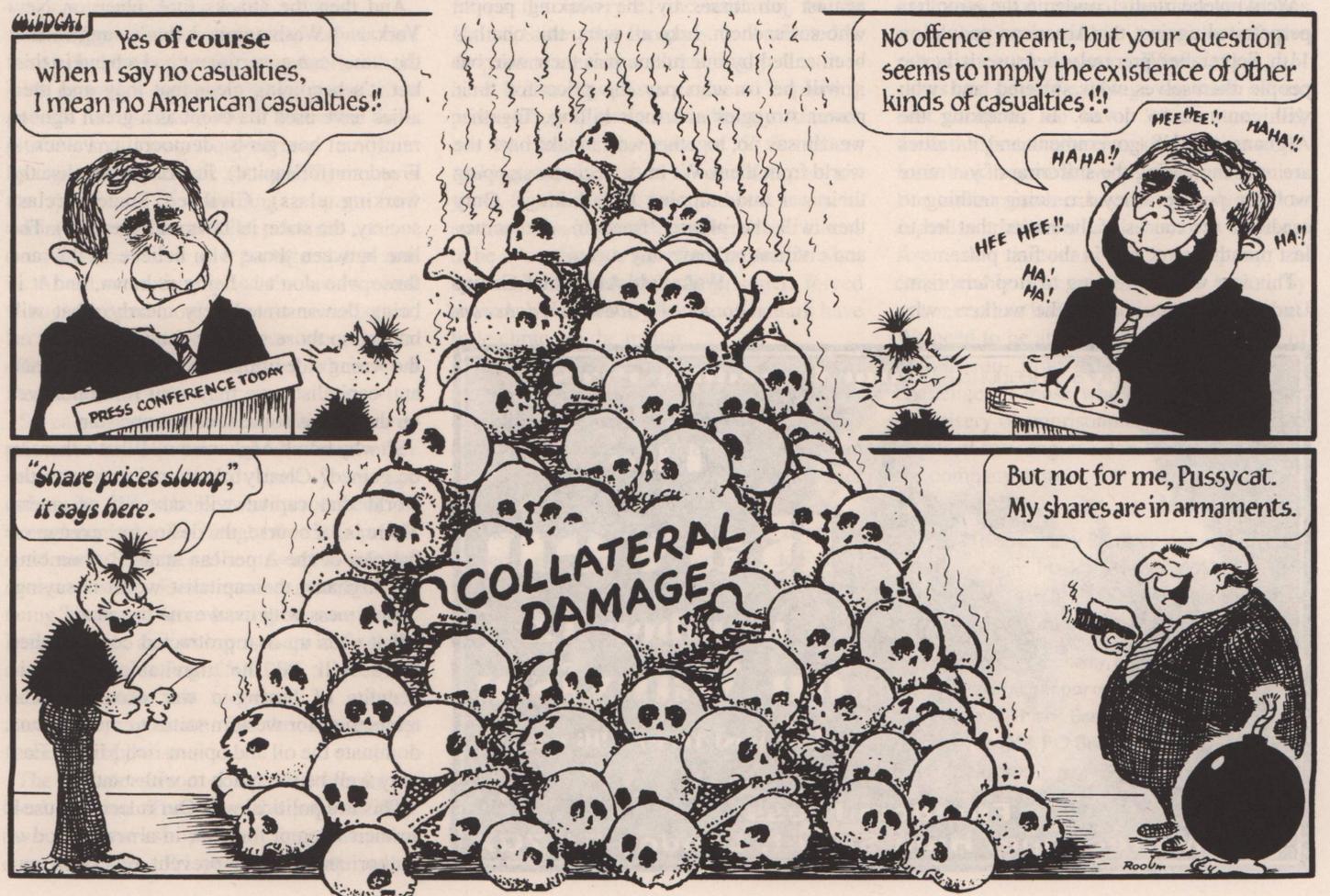
a US Senate specialist on the Middle East).

As the former head of Israeli military intelligence, Shlomo Gazit, puts it, "its location at the centre of the Arab Muslim Middle East predestines Israel to be a devoted guardian of stability in all the countries surrounding it. Its role is to protect the existing regimes; to prevent or halt the process of radicalisation and to block the expansion of fundamentalist religious zealotry" (this is quoted by Noam Chomsky in his book *The New Intifada*). The blind eye turned to Russia's murderous activities in Chechnya suggests that Russia under Putin is envisaged as playing a similar role in Central Asia.

The physical and ideological defeats inflicted on the secular left across the world over recent decades, the contamination of democratic, secular, and revolutionary politics by Stalinism and nationalism, and the post-Marxist retreat to an anti-humanist politics of 'difference' – all these have meant that, for a large number of those at the sharp end of capitalism's 'globalisation', pan-Islamic solidarity is the only game left. Moreover, as Eqbal Ahmed once observed, radical Islam represents 'a jihad against time', and an attempt to prevent capital's 'end of history' by retreating from it. If we want to challenge the 'time' of capital more effectively, we need to build a secular anti-capitalist project that pits anti-imperialist solidarity against capital's 'globalising' project and the glorification of 'difference' alike. Working to stop the war against Afghanistan has to be our starting point.

Winning the American and western European working class to fight against the likes of Bush and Blair is (however much the anti-capitalists of the Monbiot and Klein school might recoil) an inescapable necessity. The bombing of Afghanistan is, in a way, a war without consequence. The country is already a ruin, and to bomb Kabul is easy. It's less easy to resist working class insurgency in Manchester or Marseilles. The best way, ultimately the only way, of stopping imperialist designs abroad is to reignite the class war here.

Nick S.



Stop the killing, stop the war



• Capitalism's war

Following the atrocities of 11th September, our rulers have decreed that we are at war. They tell us this is to secure our 'freedom, democracy and civilisation', that these can only be safeguarded by the killing of yet more people and by us putting our own lives in the firing line for them. We say this is nonsense, and that our rulers' war should be opposed. The inevitable deaths of civilians in Afghanistan will only lead to more hatred being directed at the United States and its allies. This will heighten the chances of more terrorist attacks being committed and the suffering of yet more working people, no matter which passport they hold. The US government, in a bid to control as much of the world as possible for its capitalist paymasters, has supported some of the most oppressive regimes on the planet. It has overthrown popular governments in order to install its own puppets, and allowed the suffering of millions for the enrichment of the few – it is not the champion of freedom it portrays itself to be.

We wholeheartedly condemn the atrocities perpetrated against the American people on 11th September precisely because it is the people themselves who suffered and who will continue to do so. In attacking the Afghans, the US government and its allies are only increasing the suffering of yet more working people. They are doing nothing to eradicate the causes of the hatred that led to last month's atrocities in the first place.

This war will do nothing to stop terrorism. Under capitalism it is us, the workers, who

always suffer. When there's a war it is us who get killed, when there's peace it is us who lose our jobs while the bosses play their global power games and cash in. War is good for the state and the bosses, especially in times of economic slowdown. This is exactly what we are experiencing. War allows them to pump the money they have stolen from us in taxes directly into the pockets of their big business friends. The arms manufacturers are laughing all the way to the bank and helping to prop up the stock exchange, while we are thrown on the dole. War allows them to divert our attention away from the causes of our misery (them) by labelling anyone who refuses their dictates as unpatriotic. Our rulers have no interest in extending freedom, they've used the fear they've created to call for identity cards, the changing of the Human Rights Act, more police and other measures to erode what little freedom we have. These things will do nothing to stop the crashing of aeroplanes into buildings, but they will help the state to clamp down on internal dissent and the possible fight back against job losses by the working people who suffer them. Like all wars, this one has been called by our rulers. It is their war, but it will be us who pay the price for their power struggles and their killing. Together we can say no, together we can take back the world from them. We must begin by stopping their war and stopping their killings. Only then will the phrase 'freedom, democracy and civilisation' have any meaning.

Wakefield Anarchist Group
contact Ferdi@deathsdoor.com

• What's this war about?

States don't fight wars on a whim, but for very specific reasons. It might be to halt the spread of so-called 'communism' during the Cold War, to defend access to Gulf oil supplies or to stamp their political influence in an area like the Balkans – whatever it is, there are always clear goals which the capitalist class have in their sights before unleashing the military. So what are they up to in Afghanistan? What do they hope to achieve by bombing a country ravaged by decades of war, poverty and drought? There is nothing that immediately leaps out as being vital to the capitalists, so what are they after?

Look back before 11th September. There were the beginnings of some very serious economic trouble, and questions were being asked about capital's increasingly global dominance, both by revolutionary and reformist elements. The notion of 'democracy' (in bourgeois terms) had come under attack during anti-capitalist protests, which were beginning to get more dangerous to participate in.

And then the attacks took place on New York and Washington. I don't suggest that the American government had a hand in this, but it's becoming clear that they and their allies have used the event as a green light to reinforce bourgeois democratic values – Freedom (for capital), Justice (criminalise the working class), Civilised Society (class society, the state, its laws and agencies). The line between those who believe in this and those who don't is being redrawn, and it is being demonstrated very clearly what will happen to those who are considered to be on the wrong side of that line. As anarchists and anti-capitalists, we may well find ourselves on the end of some severe repression.

So why bomb Afghanistan? What's there to be gained? Clearly it's to make clear to the world that capital will take no prisoners. There is, of course, the desire for revenge on the part of the American state. By bombing the Afghans, the capitalist world is saying, "don't mess with us, we run the show".

If it ends up in a protracted conflict, then there will be the inevitable economic benefits of having a war economy. The temptation for western states to move in and dominate the oil and opium-rich Middle East may well be too much to withstand.

This is a political war. Our rulers will use it in their attempt to usher in a new period of authoritarianism, to prevent recession and

to reimpose the dominance of 'democratic values'. We must keep that voice of opposition alive.

Callum B.

• A new bogeyman

What western capital has been looking for is a suitable bogeyman to pick on, as an excuse to start moving into the Middle East and exerting its influence. Osama bin Laden has come along and provided the perfect bogeyman. Afghanistan suddenly becomes the 'rogue state' protecting him. Something of a capitalist's fairy tale, innit?

EM

In the 1950s, the bogeyman was President Nasser of Egypt. Later on it was Idi Amin in Uganda. In the 1990s, there were Milosevic in Yugoslavia and Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Of course, all of these were second-rate compared to what the USSR kept throwing up, but there was no way the US or UK wanted to lock horns with them.

There are three things all these bogeymen had in common. The west could kick their arses without too much opposition from other governments, they'd all been friends of the US and UK in the past, and they were all been described as latter-day Hitlers once the ungrateful bastards turned on the hand that fed them (or, in most cases, armed them). At least bin Laden hasn't been referred to yet as another Hitler – but it's only a matter of time.

Ronnie

• View from Norwich

With the increased repression in Britain, and with much of the world being on a war footing, the two directions the anarchist movement can take are manifesting themselves in East Anglia (home to many UK and US military bases).

On the downside, even before the bombing began some activists were arrested and held overnight in an effort by the state to deter opposition. No charges have been brought so far, but information from a reliable source suggests this was a warning to anarchists that they could soon be classed as terrorists.

The good news is that hundreds of people were attending regular peace vigils in Norwich, even before the first bombs fell. And the city is full of posters against the use of violence by governments.

Rory Bowskill

Anarchist Information Network, Norwich

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Mark Barnsley on the profit-hungry prisons multinational Aramark

The new company store

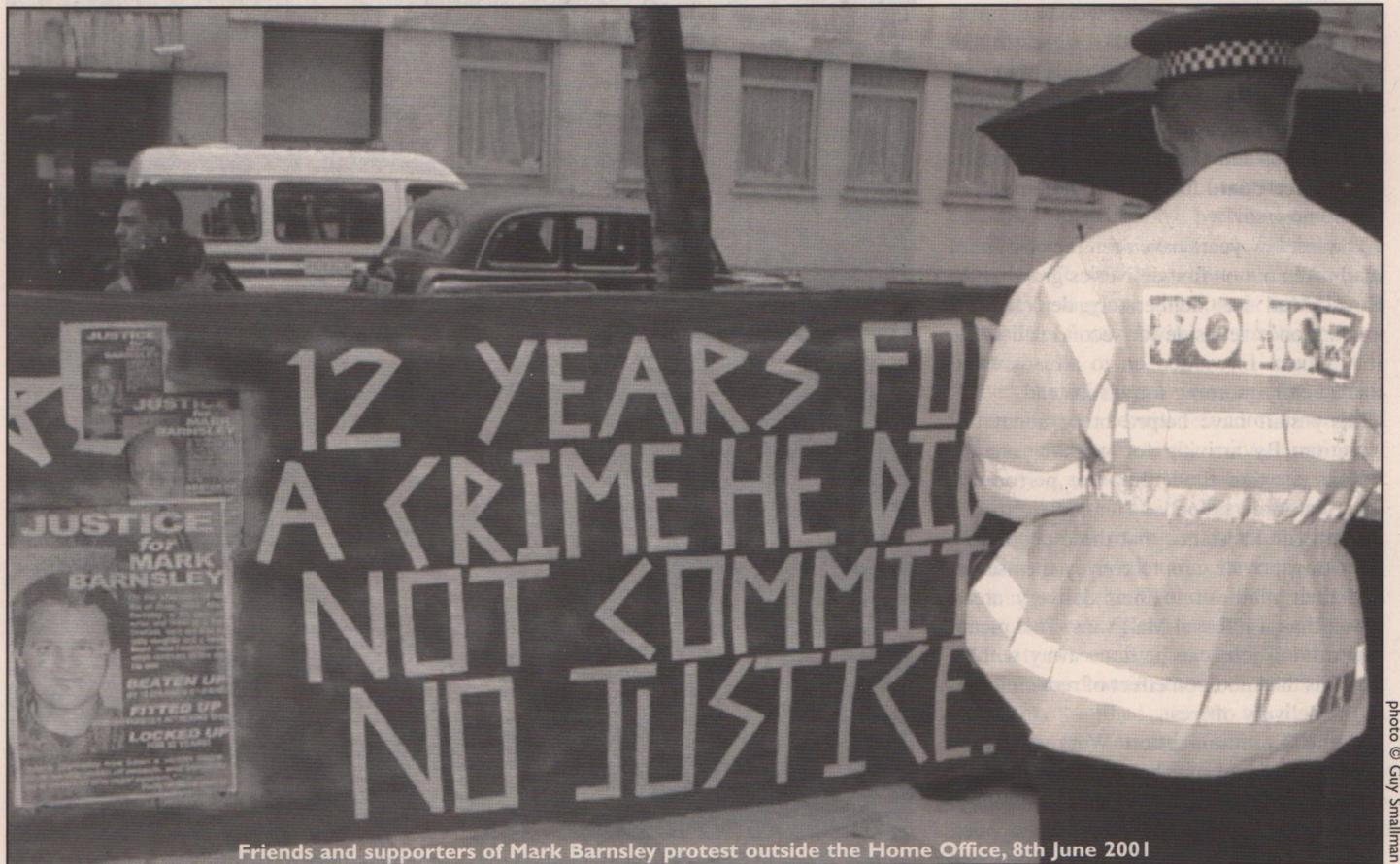
Nineteenth century Irish immigrants fleeing poverty and starvation were lured to Argentina with the promise of work on the huge and remote estancias. Here, isolated and vulnerable, they were rapidly forced into debt by the over-inflated prices of the company store. Many were compelled to sign away their freedom to become company slaves.

The company store is a cornerstone of freebooting capitalism, earning it a special place in the pantheon of working class hatred. It features in literature and song. With this and the workhouse, there's little wonder that most working class people still have an all-pervading fear of debt to this day.

Company stores undoubtedly still exist to exploit workers on the wild frontiers of capitalism, and it's not all that long since British pit villages were subject to this enforced monopoly. When it comes to actual enslavement though, modern first-world capitalism is generally more subtle.

However, there's one place in the world where slavery is still regarded as entirely acceptable, indeed where it is flourishing as never before, led (like so many things) by the ubiquitous forces of American capital. Having plundered the third world with impunity for so long, first-world capitalism has now turned its attention to the incarcerated working class in its own prisons, potentially a rich source of exploitable labour. Even forced labour is considered entirely acceptable.

As in prisons elsewhere, compulsory work has long been an intrinsic part of the British penal experience. But earlier prisoncrats rarely had the audacity to imagine they could turn a profit from a belligerent workforce. All that's changed, with the establishment of a prison industrial complex based on the American blueprint. For much of the past decade, British prisoners have been subdued and manipulated, coerced and tricked into a compliant state, not least through the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme



Friends and supporters of Mark Barnsley protest outside the Home Office, 8th June 2001

(IEP). This is one of the state's more subtle and ingenious methods of subjugation. Prisoners are now ripe for exploitation by private capital.

The private prison companies are making profits as never before. They have a big investment in New Labour's draconian penal policies in every sense, initially subsidising a massive prison-building programme while reaping enormous profits in return. Altcourse Prison, for example, built and run by Group 4, has paid for itself in only three years, with the next 22 years of its contract being pure profit for the company.

Increasingly, these companies are also able to make a fast buck from forced prison labour, doubly exploiting those they incarcerate. Last year, prison labour made £52.9 million for private companies and the state.

The token remuneration prisoners receive for their labour is still remarkably small, with prisoners earning pennies rather than pounds for an hour's work. But even these pitifully small wages are seen as fair game by capitalism. Intrinsic to the IEP scheme is the restriction of incoming property and commodities. In some jails, prisoners can not even have so much as a postage stamp sent in. At the same time, prisoners are required to buy more and more things than ever before, because of cutbacks in prison spending. In effect, they have to subsidise their own incarceration.

So-called 'special orders', which allowed prisoners to purchase goods from other sources, were outlawed some years ago (when the IEP scheme was introduced), so everything has to be bought from the prison canteen – the penal equivalent of the company store. Even remand prisoners are being prevented from having the most basic items sent in, and with prisoners in England and Wales spending £500,000 a week on canteen goods, this monopoly is another attractive proposition for the ever-greedy forces of capitalism.

The private prison companies are in an ideal position. They own the prisons, they own the workshops and they own the company store. Prisoners not only spend

their pitiful wages at the company store, but also their own money or money sent them by friends and family (which the IEP scheme rations as a way of encouraging greater work productivity and overall compliance).

Currently however, the vast majority of British prisons are still in the hands of the state, with private companies being increasingly reluctant to take on crumbling Victorian jails (building their own offers far greater long-term profits). But even here, the company store monopoly is an attractive proposition for a greedy company, and over the past few years one outfit has become ubiquitous, running prison canteens up and down the country. This company is called Aramark.

Aramark is yet another US import grown fat on the misery of incarceration. In the United States, the company is contracted to do prison catering and cleaning, just as it is here. It also runs prison canteens. Exploiting prison labour directly and indirectly, Aramark has an annual turnover of \$7.3 billion, making a profit of \$1.6 over the past six years. The company boasts that it treats its customers as 'long-term partners', and claims to be a 'company where the best people want to work'. Unfortunately the prisoners forced to pack prison ration packs for Aramark have little choice in the matter.

Aramark has been assured of a total monopoly over their captive clientele, and consequently insists that individual prisons enforce the strictest possible rules so it can profit from absolutely everything a prisoner buys.

When Aramark takes control of a prison canteen, prices go up (sometimes doubling) and the quality and range of goods comes down. The high mark-up 'Happy Shopper' brand (and to a lesser extent their own house-brand) is Aramark's stock-in-trade, but in some cases even prison-issue items are being sold.

Prisoners' spending is predictable, particularly as it is being limited to a smaller and smaller range of products, and orders have to be placed anything up to a week in advance. Goods are brought into the prisons pre-

bagged for distribution, reducing costs to an absolute minimum. No need for advertising, no need to have stock sitting around for months, no need for friendly sales staff. Prisoners are offered a stark choice – buy here at these prices or go without.

Like the other parasites who exploit the slave labour of prisoners, Aramark represents capitalism in its crudest form. Such companies have us where they'd like to have everyone – forbidden trade union membership, denied all employment rights, punished for not working hard enough, locked in a cell at night, ready to work again the next day, with profit sucked out of us in every possible way.

For those of us behind bars, nothing's changed since the earliest days of capitalism. But that's not to say we can't fight back. The exploitation of prison labour for profit has only become viable because of the compliance of prisoners. Work strikes, go-slows and acts of sabotage are some of the best weapons we have. When combined, these things and others make a captive workforce look less attractive to greedy companies. But while prisoners have previously tried to organise petitions and boycotts against Aramark canteens, the company is considerably less vulnerable to action by prisoners than it is to activists outside prison. We need to be able to attack every aspect of the prison industrial complex, and to challenge all those who seek to profit from the misery of imprisonment. Contrary to the words of the song, we don't owe our souls to the company store.

Mark Barnsley

On 5th October, Mark Barnsley was moved again. Write to him: Mark Barnsley WA2897, HMP Whitemoor, March PE15 0PR (please enclose SAE and writing paper).

In the Hands of the Enemy, a new book of writings by Mark and his supporters, is now available from the Justice for Mark Barnsley Campaign. Send £6 (inc p&p) to JMB, PO Box 381, Huddersfield HD1 3XX (cheque/PO payable to 'Justice for Mark Barnsley').

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Consignia promises mass redundancies

News that Consignia (the company formerly known as Royal Mail) is to shed one in ten jobs came as no surprise to anyone who has been watching the signs over the past twelve months. Rumours have persisted for years that second deliveries are to be abolished. In fact, it was only the insistence of the Department of Trade and Industry during the Tory years of the 1980s and 1990s which prevented the Post Office Board from doing the dirty deed before now.

The last few years have seen the amount of mail taken out on first deliveries grow, as the Royal Mail has deliberately depleted the amount once set aside for second deliveries. It has been forwarded on to already overloaded early morning rounds instead.

Many staff have helped bring about this situation. By arriving for work before the official starting time, they are performing what can only be called 'unpaid overtime'. There is an insistence that these people use their own private cars to convey themselves and their mail-out to their delivery areas, rather than use Royal Mail vans. This means that driving jobs can be done away with. It also has the knock-on effect of reducing jobs in the delivery offices.

If the Communication Workers Union (CWU) had had any bottle, it would have pushed for a car ban years ago, in order to protect existing jobs and to create new ones. But it has never pushed for such a ban, and is unlikely to insist on one now. The unofficial early morning starters and car users have masked the problem of overloaded



rounds for years, as well as saving Royal Mail hundreds of thousands of pounds in real overtime payments and new jobs.

Royal Mail claim they are broke. They are

going to make the workforce pay for years of mismanagement and massive golden handshakes to bullshitters who have managed to persuade the Post Office Board they have

some talent to offer as businessmen. No such golden handshakes will be on offer to the rank and file, who will bear the brunt of the job cuts.

Nor will it simply be a case of 'last in, first out', as many old hands suppose. The current use of automatic warnings for sickness absence and conduct issues, condemned in the recent Sawyer report (*Freedom*, 11th August), will continue apace. One London CWU area rep reckons to be dealing with three dismissal cases a day, and even at local level office reps will be dealing with two or three cases a week (where at one time it would have been two or three a month).

Managers are no longer prepared to listen to extenuating circumstances such as hospitalisation or absence due to an accident on duty. It is quite clear that their minds are made up before the hearings, which have now become nothing more than window-dressing. This is how the Royal Mail will cut 20,000 jobs within the next eighteen months.

The next big changes will probably involve privatising the road fleet and introducing one big delivery later on in the day. There is already talk of a £50 annual charge for receiving mail at the more traditional early morning time. If you are waiting for your giro, tough! Pay up or wait. And thanks to the business brains who wasted a fortune on a ridiculous name change, plenty of former Post Office employees will be waiting for theirs in the near future.

Liverpool Postie

Editorial on page 7

Anarchists gather for bookfair

Anarchists from around the UK are meeting in Central London today for the 20th annual Anarchist Bookfair. The bookfair, which has been held in Holborn's Conway Hall every autumn since it started in 1982, has moved this year to a larger venue because of an increasing demand for space. The Camden Centre on Euston Road will host over seventy stalls, selling and distributing books, CDs and other material. There will also be around forty meetings and film showings at the Friends' Meeting House, opposite Euston Station. This is about ten minutes' walk from the Camden Centre.

There was controversy last week, however, as it emerged that Bookfair organisers had turned down a request for workshop space from US activist group, Catholic Worker.

Ciaran O'Reilly, a representative of the group, condemned organisers for turning down his request to run a workshop. "Anarchy means little if not free expression", he said. But bookfair organisers insisted they had done the right thing. "We had not heard of the group, and we were slightly concerned about how they could reconcile Catholicism and anarchism", they said. "We asked Ciaran for some clarification about Catholic Worker's views on issues such as abortion, same-sex relationships, contraception and original sin. All we got back was abuse".

Ciaran replied, "a workshop would have been the correct forum where we could be questioned". He condemned the organisers' questions as "sited in the bedroom".

Editorial on page 7

Right to jury trial attacked

Many people prosecuted in British courts would lose their right to demand a jury trial, under proposals put forward by a senior judge last week.

A review of the way criminal courts work, led by appeal court judge Robin Auld, recommended that a new unified criminal court be set up in place of the current crown court and magistrates' courts.

If Auld's recommendations are followed, they would see the biggest reform of the punishment system for decades. Defendants charged with offences such as murder and rape would still be tried by judge and jury, and those facing lesser offences by magistrates, as now. But middle-ranking offences, for which the punishment was likely to be less than two years' imprisonment, would now be heard before a new 'district division'. Offences in this category could include theft, assault and drug offences.

These offences can now be heard before a crown court or before magistrates. Currently, the defendant is entitled to choose. Auld's proposals would see defendants stripped of that power, which would be handed over to magistrates instead.



Faslane peace activists, October 2000. Anti-militarists have often benefited from "a noble tradition of juries acquitting people on the basis of justice rather than follow oppressive law". Under the Auld proposals, the prosecution would be able to appeal.

The recommendation is likely to be the most controversial among the 300 outlined by the review. But another recommendation, that prosecution lawyers should have a right of appeal against jury verdicts they consider 'perverse', was also attacked last week by civil rights groups. John Wadham, the

director of liberal human rights group Liberty, said, "there's a noble tradition of juries acquitting people on the basis of justice rather than follow oppressive law".

The government asked Auld to carry out the review in 1999, claiming that it wanted to find ways of making courts fairer.

Property firm targeted

The head office of property management company Nelson Bakewell was occupied last week, in a protest against the sale of council property in Hackney.

Six residents of the borough took over the Central London office at lunchtime on 12th October. The firm had been targeted because of its role in organising the sale of council property. The borough was recently declared

bankrupt. Two activists d-locked themselves to furniture, while others leafleted employees of the firm. The workers were soon told to go home by management, while the protesters talked to police. Cops forcibly removed the activists in mid-afternoon, except for the two who had locked themselves on. They unlocked themselves an hour later, and rejoined their fellow demonstrators outside the office.

There were no arrests.

One Hackney activist said, "nurseries, green spaces, welfare and advice centres and many other much-used and much-needed resources in Hackney are having their council funding slashed and their buildings sold off. We want to ensure that Nelson Bakewell withdraws from the sale of community assets".

What we say ...

First casualty of war

The first casualty of any war is the hollow claim of the mainstream media to report the facts impartially. For all the complaints from the BBC about government attempts to cramp its style, the only change is that they usually censor themselves. In peace or war, the truth that gets reported is the truth the ruling class wants us to hear.

If the government gets its way, the censorship will be cruder. But if it doesn't, censorship will still be there, just more subtle. Witness the BBC description of bin Laden as a 'terrorist' and his al-Qaeda network as a 'terrorist organisation', for example. The point isn't that bin Laden is no terrorist. It's that the BBC never uses the word to describe Bush or Blair. If bin Laden is a terrorist, they are too.

What about the hushed tones which reported the three minutes' silence last month? Hushed and reverent isn't reporting, it's joining in with a mood of national mourning, which is a process of taking sides. 'Nation shall speak peace unto nation' is the BBC motto, but in no war since it was set up has it lived up to this pious resolve. Nor is it likely to start now.

Same old story

When John Major toyed with the idea of limited privatisation in the Post Office, he got a bloody nose.

That the same thing is being whipped through now is evidence of two things. The first is that trade unions as they stand are of limited use. The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has missed most of the chances to protect its members' interests. This is partly the fault of its members, who didn't bother to look at what was happening in the world around them and read the runes accordingly. This lesson is the old one, that a union is only as strong and as militant as its members allow it to be.

The second lesson is also old. The Tories tried to privatise the Post Office and failed. The Labour Party will succeed, just as Labour always succeeds where the Tories fail. The reason is that Labour is always indulged in the office by people who should know better. The Tories will be resisted just because they are Tories; Labour, with the very same measure, will be forgiven, just because they are Labour. We're stuffed if we don't look beyond the labels, and see what is actually being done to us. Labour, Tory, same old story – we wouldn't give either the time of day.

Anarchist Bookfair

There is no organisation uniting all the anarchists in this country, though many think there should be one and some have tried to set one up. The nearest we come to shared activity is the Anarchist Bookfair, a good opportunity to share ideas and contacts. But is it enough? Can't we sometimes speak with one voice, without risking the diversity that so many of us say we treasure?

The bookfair is an important tool for uniting us. We suggest that papers, like *Freedom*, which are not aligned to any particular group can do the same thing. Of course, not being attached to a group or platform can be a drawback as well as a strength, if it becomes an excuse for having nothing to say. There is, in other words, a risk of quietism. But *Freedom* succeeds as long as it is open to all sections of the movement, and this is what we have tried to achieve.

If there are anarchist positions you think are not represented in these pages, write the article. Without diversity, *Freedom* fails. Read it, write for it, get involved. This is your paper too, if you only decide to use it.

Readers' letters

Views on Blair

Dear *Freedom*,

Garry Bradford didn't like your attack on the racist policies of Australian and British governments (letters, 6th October). Tough.

The rightwing government in Australia aren't 'our friends', as Garry seems to think. And what 'full facts' on 'illegal immigrants' is he waiting for, before he condemns racism?

How can anybody – let alone a self-declared 'anarchist' – say that Blair "does quite well"? Or that we "have to trust that he does know what he is doing"?

Garry admits he voted for Blair in June. Some anarchist! He's got no right lecturing *Freedom* on anything.

Mal

Dear *Freedom*,

How do these leftwingers (and, according to Garry Bradford, at least one anarchist) feel about Blair just four months after voting for him? It's a wonder they've got the brass neck to involve themselves in the anti-war movement.

RW

Pointless insertion

Dear *Freedom*,

Colin Johnson (article, 6th October) appears to have missed my point in quoting Kant's notion that any 'ethical principle' has to be capable of universalisation as a common good. The point was intended to be ironic – that the attacks of 11th September prove that US and NATO aggression has rendered terror capable of universalisation too. I don't disagree with Colin's general points at all. A position was edited into my last article,

'An Infinite Injustice', which confuses the issue still further. When I wrote the piece, it ended with the Fanon quotation to the effect that colonial violence only yields to anti-colonial violence. The editors inserted the final sentence of what was actually printed. The words, "military attacks on Afghanistan won't address the problem" came from them. In one sense, this new sentence is tautological. Of course they won't address the problem – they are the problem. In that sense, the insertion is pointless. I suspect it was done to fudge the argument about anti-colonial violence that Fanon made. All I can say is that if anyone wants to take on the debate, my position should be read as the 'Infinite Injustice' article minus the last sentence.

Nick S.

Illusion of selfhood

Dear *Freedom*,

Colin Johnson (article, 6th October) quotes Acton's saying, that "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely". He asks, "do we need to go any further than that?". Surely we do. We need to ask why human beings want power in the first place. Isn't it because we feel insecure? And don't we feel insecure because we think we are separate individuals, not integral parts of a greater whole as Richard Morgan (letters, same issue) maintains?

Power, capitalism, war, terrorism – all seem to spring from the illusion of separate selfhood. True anarchism would be living without that illusion. Such a life might also be true religion, with god turning out to be something sacred beyond time and thought, rather than a boss in the clouds.

Francis Ellingham

A wider range

Dear *Freedom*,

I've been reading *Freedom* for the last four months. I think it's a really good paper. The contents are relevant and informative, and I like the design. My local shop says it sells really well, so that's not just my opinion.

I've just got one suggestion. Your writers are often spot on. Nick S. has been red hot in the last few issues, writing powerful and incisive stuff. But I'd like to see a wider range of anarchist comments, from different perspectives in the movement.

Buffy

We'd like to carry a wider range of anarchist opinions as well (see editorial, left). Anybody interested in writing for *Freedom* can contact us at FreedomCopy@aol.com

New peace group

Dear *Freedom*,

A peace group has been established in Aberystwyth, meeting every Sunday. We want to establish contact with other peace groups throughout the British Isles.

Bob Mander

Peace, Box 103, Aberystwyth, Wales

Crossword clue

Dear *Freedom*,

I like this crossword clue, which I found in a recent copy of the *Independent on Sunday*: "False claims about a hidden danger, perhaps, in economic system (10 letters)".

The answer, of course, is 'capitalism'.

David Peers

Donations

1st to 13th October 2001

Freedom Fortnightly Fighting Fund

Glasgow, BB, £9; Wolverhampton, JL, £3; Bronx NY, JW, £3; Portsmouth, SB, £5; Eccles, MG, £8

Total to 13th October = £28.00

Total for 2001 = £923.00

Freedom Press Overheads Fund

Glasgow, BB, £8; Wolverhampton, JL, £2.

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Total for 2001 = £1,560.00

Raven Deficit Fund

Glasgow, BB, £9.

Total to 13th October = £9.00

Total for 2001 = £605.00

FREEDOM: SCOOP OR POOP?

Tell us at the Anarchist Bookfair

There's been some changes this year to *Freedom*, your favourite anarchist newspaper. Come along and tell us what you think, and tell us your ideas for the future.

The 20th Anarchist Bookfair is being held today in Central London. There are meetings at two venues: the Camden Centre and Friends' Meeting House (opposite Euston Station).

The *Freedom* meeting is for our readers, contributors, editors and anyone else who's interested. Join us at 11am in Room 3 at Friends' Meeting House, or visit us on the *Freedom* stall in the Camden Centre.

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The next issue of *Freedom* will

be dated 3rd November,

and the last day for copy

intended for this issue will be

Thursday 25th October.

Contributions can be sent to

us at FreedomCopy@aol.com

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**Saturday 20th October 2001
10am-7pm Camden Centre
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Nearest tube Kings Cross Buses: 10, 30, 46, 63, 73, 91, 214

Anarchism The 20th Annual Anarchist Bookfair

2001

www.anarchistbookfair.org • Anarchist Bookfair, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1

London Anarchist Forum

1st November Situationism, Anarchy and Crypto-Fascism (talk and discussion led by Steve Ash)

This fortnightly discussion forum is held on Thursdays from 8pm at the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn. Following the above dates the LAF will return to Fridays for the rest of the winter.

For more info see: www.trak.to/LAF or contact LAF@anarchic.co.uk

Faslane October Blockade

Monday 22nd October from 7am

at Faslane Trident base on the Clyde near Glasgow

For a briefing and further info contact The October Blockade

Action Line on 0141 423 1222

see also Scottish CND at www.cnsscot.dial.pipex.com

British CND at www.cnduk.org

Trident Ploughshares at www.gn.apc.org/tp2000

Close Campsfield Detention Centre

Saturday 27th October 2001

12 noon to 2pm

Action against the Campsfield detention centre

see www.closecampsfield.org.uk

contact: 01865 558145 or 01865 557282 or 01865 726804

COPEX ARMS FAIR

30th October to 1st November at
Sandown Racecourse

Exhibition of 'counter-insurgency' items

For protests contact CAAT

tel 020 7281 0297

enquiries@caat.demon.co.uk

TYNESIDE RADICAL FILM FESTIVAL

The Side Cinema, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 3JE

Part 1. Global protest

Wednesday 31st October at 8pm

- Crowd Bites Wolf: Prague (Guerrillavision, 23 mins)
- London May Day 2001 (I-Contact, 7 mins)
- Genoa (Indymedia, 28 mins)
- The Pies the Limit (Whispered Media, 28 mins)

info: Paul on 0191 272 4635 or paul.chatterton@ncl.ac.uk

Northern Anarchist Network

Autumn Conference in Bury, Gtr Manchester

Saturday 3rd November 10.30am to 7pm

and Sunday 4th November 11am to 3pm

For details contact Harry on 01422 842558

Dutch Anarchist Bookfair

on Saturday 10th November

3rd Anarchistische Boekenmarkt in Utrecht, 11am to 6pm

The event will be held at two locations: the bookfair at the Moira,

and the cultural programme at the ACU. Cheap accommodation

available at the nearby Strowis hostel (strowis@xs4all.nl)

Anarchistische Boekenmarkt, p/o Simon Bolivarstraat 91,

35 73 ZK Utrecht, The Netherlands

peetje@antenna.nl

Red Rambles 2001

Red Rambles walks and rambles for Radicals, Libertarians, Anarchists, Greens, Socialists, Syndicalists, et al. Walkers are reminded to wear walking boots, appropriate clothing and to bring waterproofs, food and drink. See <http://members.tripod.co.uk/ainema/index-2.html>

Sunday 18th November 2001

Lathkill Dale in autumn, 6 miles. Meet at 11am at Monyash Village Green by the War Memorial. Walk leaders Malcolm & Marion.

Telephone 07939 440548 / 01773 827513 or e-mail ain@ziplip.com

FREEDOM fortnightly

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