Direct Action

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media do you buy it?

Vote Labour & still the horribly in Indonesia

A chapter for cha

social control: surveillance

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Anarchism, Direct Action & Utopia

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towards

editorial

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Media is communication. It is at the heart of society. To control society, you need to control the media, and it is no secret that the mass-media is owned by a dwindling number of dominant, rich, powerful, control freaks. If you are at all unsure of this, you need look no further than the pages of DA to find both evidence and the strange 'logic' behind media ownership and control.

But recognising this is not enough, and more debate within these pages is devoted to what to do about this situation. The capitalist right would have us continue along the de-regulation (and commercialisation) road in some vague hope that more diverse media results, while the left would leave it to that most specialised of control freaks, the state, to tighten its grip on the media and elbow the Corporates aside. Beware, that way lies Gandalf. The state leaders are past 'masters' at controlling their own interests. Anarcho-syndicalists would certainly argue against both these options, and in favour of a non-commercial, free media. Just how this is to come about is clear - as part of a wider change in society, to one in which we live not by greed, control and punishment, but by solidarity, community and mutual aid.

But what about the awkward details of this plan - the how's and the wherefore's?

Analysis - cogitation if you like - is a crucial pre-requisite to any good plan. Central questions for this brain work include the relationship of society and media now, and how it 'should' or 'could' be. Does society determine the media, or vice versa? This is a bit of a chicken-and-egg; they exist because of each other. 'Good' media, just like 'good' people, 'good' systems of organisation, and 'good' relationships, lead to a 'good' society. We currently have piss-poor societal structures, and a rapidly growing (in size) and diminishing (in quality) media machine. Reversing this is no Sunday driver outing. But then, maybe a mass trespass picnic? Make that a REGULAR SUSTAINED mass trespass and now you're talking.

In the meantime, watch out for the TV. No, I said watch OUT for the TV.

Last question. Is media 'bad'? Answer, no.

The implication that media technology is intrinsically bad has a passing attraction, but allowing it to seduce you could be fatal. TV is ace, it's just that crap they show on it...

The brave new Blaired millennium-dome world may be one of logos, images, product placement, smart brainwash, cool soundbites and bleached-white advert-non-reality, but there's always another side to these things. The Internet (and other new digital technology) has helped to temporarily decentralise Worldmedia Inc somewhat, and has proved to be a good opening for 'alternative' media. Successful no-profit thinking magazines like this very DA can be produced on a shoestring, using collective nouse and groups of people prepared to give some time and muck in. There are even things going on which are worth reporting on in such illustrious journals - direct actions, which are avouded by a paranoid mainstream press dependant on corporate advertising sponsorship. Hence, DA (and the like) is not all talk.

Basically, if you are a lazy waster and you want to remain one, then there are plenty of excuses around to help you justify your inactivity. But if you are talking media, then nowhere is it clearer that silence=consent. And in this case, the opposite of silence is not 'noise', but thought and action. Whinging on about the power of state and capitalist media is about as much use as an evening on the couch - it feels good at the time but nothing's changed next day.

Sure, we need a smart and coherent critique of the media machine and the part it plays in our continuing predicament. But this is not enough. Nowhere near enough. We can, must and will make our own media for ourselves. Media that is just as exciting, engaging and accessible as any 'mass-media', but without the oppressive undertones.

Right, I've done my bit, I'm off to my couch with the daily rag and the remote control. DA

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Notes for Contributors If you would like to contribute more than brief opinions, we request you send articles (between 500 and 1500 words if possible) in hardcopy and on disk in either Word for Windows PC version not greater than 7 or ASCII format. Contact us for electronic mail addresses or alternative formats. Failing that, any decent typewritten script will do, or even neat handwriting, if necessary. While unsolicited articles are welcome, they can only be returned if a SAE is enclosed.

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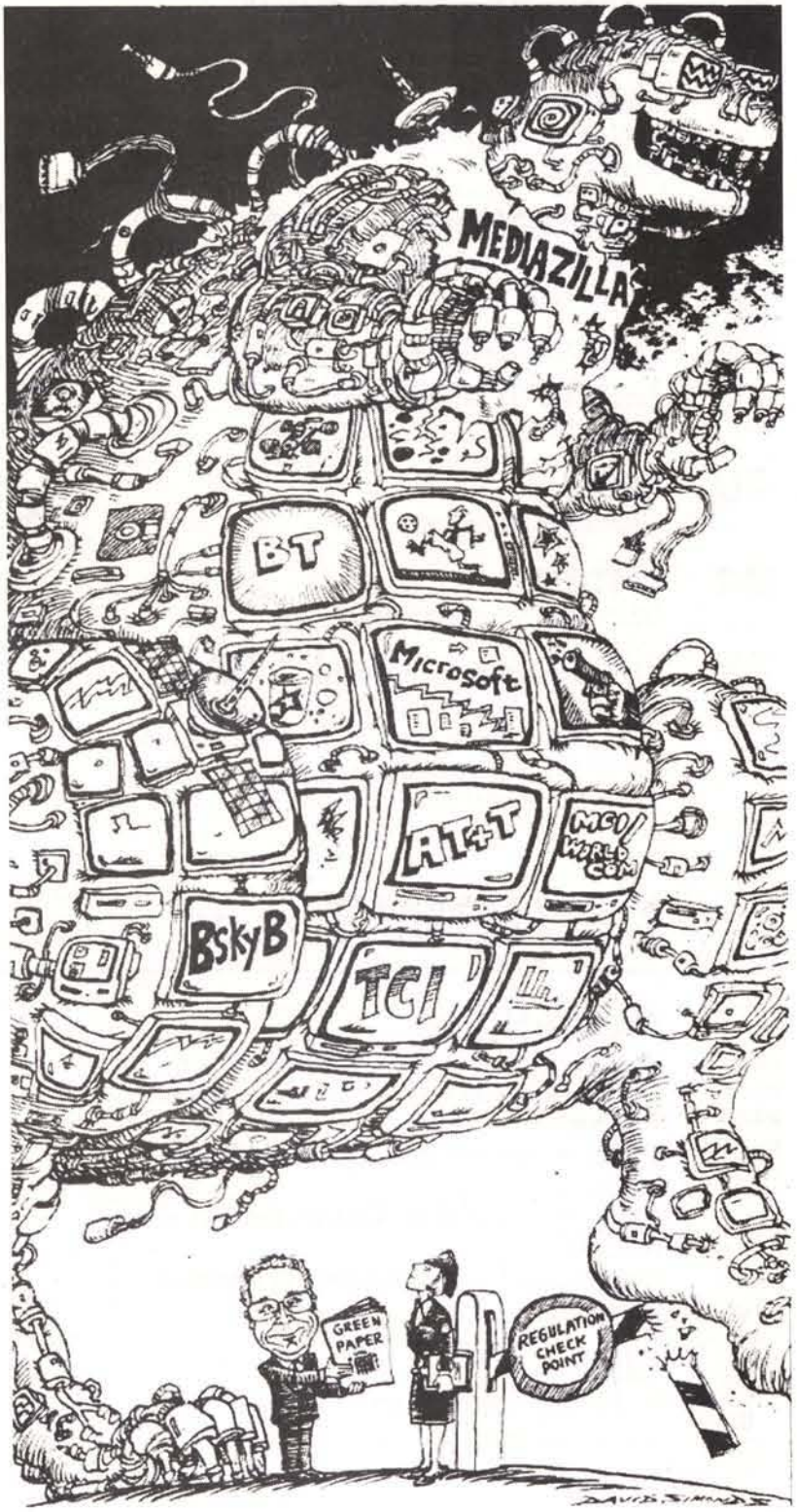
Media Corpse

Media ownership in Britain today is concentrated into the hands of a few moguls. The implications of this have given rise to a debate around the respective merits of complete de-regulation within the industry, or (a return to) increased state intervention. Those who argue for regulation to protect public service broadcasting (in the shape of the BBC), and for stricter limits on cross-media ownership, see the current trends as a fundamental threat to good old British democracy and free speech. On the other hand, the media corporations and rampant free marketeers want a free hand to expand and compete internationally for a better position in the hyped-up, multi-media future.



Besides the BBC, the state control brigade includes a range of social democratic organisations, from the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom and the media unions, to the left-wing press, with Red Pepper magazine, for instance, devoting much of its April 1998 issue to the case for restrictions in ownership. At best, this approach harks back to the state-run panacea of pre-Thatcherite days; at worst, it naïvely isolates the issue of changing the media from changing society in general. As an anarcho-syndicalist, I would point out that in any discussion of what type of media we should have, it would be appropriate to ask at the same time what kind of society should that media be reflecting. And the answer to that question is neither of the brands of capitalism offered so far in this debate.

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know the rules

Before discussing issues like democracy, free speech and society, a closer look at media corporations in Britain will set the scene. It would certainly be wrong to think of the British media industry as one unified bloc. Quite apart from the fact that they are all capitalist concerns in

competition with each other, there is another level on which their interests diverge. On one side is Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, on the other, the rest of the industry.

The British Media Industry Group (BMIG) was formed in 1993 by Pearson, Associated Newspapers, The Telegraph, and the Guardian Media Group, to lobby for reform of the cross-media ownership rules in the 1990 Broadcasting Act, which was brought in under Thatcher. What these companies had in common was to be trailing in Murdoch's wake because, as a foreign-owned company, News Corporation wasn't covered by the Act. By 1993, Murdoch was in control of 37% of UK national dailies and 40% of BSkyB, the satellite broadcaster.

A few months later, in January 1994, the Department of National Heritage announced a review of the rules. ITV companies such as Carlton, Granada and Meridian, were eager to grab more franchises and played on the Tories' fears that the British independent broadcasting sector would be gobbled up by foreign media groups if British media companies could not expand. With growth in the satellite and cable sectors, and promised, but as yet unproved, millions to be made in multi-media and digital broadcasting, de-regulation of the ownership rules was seen as essential to allow British companies to compete internationally.

Given the need to confront Murdoch in a period leading up to a general election, however, progress was predictably non-existent. But action could no longer be put off when an explosion of outrage greeted news that BSkyB had a 20% stake in a bid to run the new Channel 5. The cross media ownership proposals of May 1995, therefore, owed much to the thinking of the BMIG, and restricted ownership to 10% of the total British market, and to 20% of any particular sector, be it press, TV or radio.

Not surprisingly, Murdoch condemned the new rules, accusing his rivals of pandering to state regulation. Incidentally, in the aftermath of all this, New Labour weren't slow to cosy up to the one-time arch-ogre. Two months later, Tony Blair was to be found addressing Murdoch's top management, outlining his concerns about the "immense power" of the proposed media regulator. With Blair now safely ensconced at Number 10, talk of further changes is on the back burner.

the ad industry

The British media is a multi-billion pound industry, as shown by annual spending of over £3 billion on newspaper ads, and over £2.5 billion on TV and radio commercials. To compete for such money means that holding on to, and improving, market share and audience ratings has become an end in itself. This, in turn, has led to content becoming more and more dumbed down, 'Americanised', lowest common denominator trash, cleansed of the uncomfortable and controversial. At the same time, coverage of current affairs has become increasingly trivialised, dominated by celebrities, and indistinguishable from the output of press agencies and public relations bureaux.

The fate of Granada's World In Action seems typical. After losing a libel case to Marks and Spencer, Granada, intent on expansion, and turning its back on investigative journalism, has now overhauled World In Action, which looks set to join First Tuesday and This Week on the current affairs scrapheap. This decline in investigative journalism, due to commercial "constraints", is mirrored in the press where total staffing is estimated to have fallen by at least 40% between 1977 and 1993, while the total number of newspaper pages has risen by 72%. Costs get cut; staff get down-sized; but profits just carry on rising.

Nor are the so-called quality broadsheets or the BBC untouched by such economic pressures. Just as much as The Sun or The Mirror, the likes of The Guardian have to attract advertising revenue and if moving "down-market" is the only way to do it, then so be it. Even the BBC, which doesn't compete for advertising, still has to defend its TV ratings, otherwise to defend the continuing tax on TV (the TV licence), would begin to become untenable if audience figures, already on the wrong side of the 50% mark, drop much further. And indeed, recent history at the Beeb has not only involved chasing ratings, but also cutting costs, selling off assets, and expanding export sales.

In fact, while British TV productions earned £234 million in foreign sales in 1996, over £500 million worth of programmes were imported at the same time. In order to attract foreign viewers, then, British TV productions are becoming more like the American programmes that account for 81% of Europe's total TV imports.

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death of democracy?

On the face of it, there would seem to be a pretty good case for rolling back the de-regulation process. The argument goes something like this. There is increasing concentration of the media among fewer and more powerful owners, caused by unregulated competition for advertising revenue and sponsorship. This couples with "tabloidisation" - in other words, decreasing diversity, less variety of expression, and fewer demands on audiences and readers, caused by the commercial pressure to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. The net result is these few big media owners will be able to exert an undue influence in shaping public opinion. In support of this view, the left use examples like the effects of the Tory press on British general elections in the past two decades and Silvio Berlusconi's rise to power in Italy through the use of his media interests. Curiously, The Sun's role in the Tories' downfall is usually not mentioned.

Your stance depends on your point of view on whether choosing one bunch of dodgy politicians over another every five years is the sanest way of running society. As long as some media tycoon, or group of them, doesn't appear to be affecting the outcome, then there's no problem. Anarcho-syndicalists have always put forward the point of view that democracy and free speech is about a lot more than choosing our rulers every few years.

In any case, much of this "undue influence" argument is merely a reaction to the perception that the right wing press kept the Tories in power for nearly two decades. Will the point be as strongly argued if the Tories now appear to be kept out of government? Would it have even been put forward at all, if media support for the main political parties had appeared more evenly split? I think not.

The main point is that true democracy involves the participation of everybody in the decisions which affect their lives; and true free speech involves people having equal access to the means, educational as well as

(cont'd on page 6..)

New Deal for (G)REED

In late October, claimants groups throughout England, Scotland & Wales launched a campaign against Reed Employment UK Ltd, which is administering the New Deal in NE London. The aim of the campaign is to draw public attention to this systematic exploitation of the unemployed for corporate profit; and to deter other, equally greedy, private agencies from sticking their snouts into the trough so cynically prepared for them by the Labour government. Ultimately, the campaign aims to force Reed to withdraw from the scheme.

In towns & cities across the country, claimants & campaigning groups are flyposting offices of Reed Employment, aimed at:

* Reed managers who, over the next few months, will become aware that they cannot exploit the unemployed for their own benefit,
* Reed staff, to remind them that their work is not without consequences,
* other employment agencies, who may receive the same treatment if they follow Reed's lead, and
* telling the wider public what Reed are up to.

In the past, companies like Reed, who make huge profits off the backs and the suffering of the unemployed and others, have been able to console themselves with the thought that actions against them were just one-offs. Not this time. The flyposting will be followed up shortly by other actions and the campaign is planned to be sustained.

Reed Employment is one of the UK's biggest recruitment agencies, with offices on the High Streets of most major towns and cities. In April 1998, Reed posted 1997 pre-tax profits of £14m, up from £12.3m the previous year, after a 19% rise in turnover to £227m. Chairman Alec Reed described it as "a quietly successful year". According to the 1997 Sunday Times Rich List, the Reed family enjoys a fortune of £50m, making Alec Reed the 360th richest person in the country. But for him, rich is never rich enough. In March, under a contract with the Employment Service, Reed launched a pilot scheme to deliver the New Deal for the Young Unemployed in the Hackney and City area of London.

Reed is one of almost a dozen private companies that are now contracted to exploit the unemployed in areas throughout the country. Some Employment Service workers regard this as the thin end of the wedge of eventual privatisation.

Predictable start

Within weeks of launching their glossy "New Deal Campus" in Hackney, Reed were revealed to be indulging in sharp practice:

1. Reed tried to undercut salary rates for staff administering the New Deal Gateway by £3,000 a year. They even advertised posts at these rates in local Jobcentres, until this cynical attempt to exploit not only claimants, but also those processing claimants for exploitation was stopped.

2. Reed have negotiated fees from employers for each "job ready" client they place through their existing network of employers. Thus, they are being double-funded, first through their New Deal contract, then by employers.

To some observers, this is merely an indication that monitoring will be advisable. To claimants, it comes as confirmation that the New Deal is rotten, root and branch.

To get involved or for info. e.g. on groups in your area, contact: Haringey Solidarity Group, PO Box 2474, London N8. Phone 0181 374 5027, E-mail hsg@clara.net, Website http://home.clara.net/hsg/hhome.html

To let Reed know you know, contact: Reed Head Office, 6th Floor, Tolworth Tower, Tolworth, Surbiton, Surrey, KT6 7DN. Phone 0181 399 5221, Fax 0181 390 8860, E-mail clientservices@reed.co.uk, Website http://www.reed.co.uk

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(cont'd from page 5..)

physical, to enable them to put forward their own point of view. The society we live in, on the other hand, restricts such opportunities to a chosen few. The public service sector is just as guilty as any other part of the media in defending this unequal system, making the claims that it defends democracy and free speech somewhat laughable. Being the propaganda arm of the capitalist state it would be surprising to find otherwise. Biased views, twisted reporting, and slavish regurgitation of state propaganda are as true of the BBC as of the tabloids. We don't have to cast our minds back too far for a few examples - the miners' strike, northern Ireland, even coverage of the Labour Party of the 1980's and early '90's. There are plenty more.

Double-Media

"See, Frank? Keep the light in their eyes and you can bag them without any trouble at all."

I do not wish to promote or protect the interests of private multinational media corporations. Far from it. I do question, however, the basis on which one section of the capitalist media is deemed worthy of support against another. An analogy might be appropriate. Anarcho-syndicalist transport workers opposed privatisation of the railways, not on the grounds of defending state control, but to raise the idea of workers' control within the debate on the best way forward for rail workers. This went alongside the strategy of encouraging workers to take action. The fact that only a small amount of action took place and it did not lead to more widespread action, or to the scrapping of privatisation plans - never mind workers' control - makes it no less valid to put this alternative forward.

Likewise in the current media debate. When workers in the media industry have taken action in the past there has never been any question of anarchosyndicalists supporting them. This would still be the case if media workers were to begin a campaign against any privatisation moves in the BBC. We would still feel free to point out the many failings of the state broadcasting system, and to put forward alternative, radical ideas for bringing about real democracy and free speech.

But to ultimately change the media fundamentally will take much more than merely fiddling around with media ownership and market quotas.

Fighting Racist Media in Dover

Ever since last year, when the first Roma refugees arrived in Dover fleeing persecution in the Czech and Slovak republics, there has been a nasty undercurrent of racism in the town.

Local resentment against the asylum-seekers was encouraged by the government when it labelled them "bogus" and dragged its heels over providing extra funding for the area (which had already faced cuts in services). When the neo-Nazis of the National Front tried to exploit the situation with marches in November 1997 and February 1998, anti-fascists mobilised to stop them (see DA5 &6).

In August, a successful Multi-Cultural Festival was held in Dover. It was well-supported by people from the local area, and from further afield, who were able to enjoy a day of music, poetry, handicrafts and food from a wide diversity of cultures.

In the last few weeks, however, the bigots have gone back on the offensive, with the media at the forefront, following the arrival of refugees fleeing the civil war in Kosovo.

In early October, the Dover Express bracketed asylum-seekers together with bootleggers and drug-traffickers as 'human sewage'.

This was the cue for the local bigots, and the Dover Express was happy to give them a platform to peddle urban myths and pub gossip about asylum-seekers. According to one self-appointed spokesperson for the town: 'One asylum seeker is being housed even though he won £150,000 on the National Lottery ... [The police are] called out up to 15 times a day because of immigrants shoplifting. And at least three brothels have popped up around Dover.'

The result was predictable. On several occasions asylum-seekers have had their windows put in, fireworks and petrol bombs have also been used. Blatant intimidation has turned to physical assaults; one Albanian refugee who fought back against 3 attackers may now be automatically deported for his actions in self-defence.

The Daily Mail also ran a two-page feature about Dover, entitled 'The Good Life on Asylum Alley', which sported a full address of one family in its first line; the house has since been attacked.

As the attacks continue, the bigots are getting bolder, circulating disgusting hoax letters and getting more and more vocal. One such, Shiela Farrell, has called a public meeting (as DA goes to press), and the flyposters for it depict a Kitchener-style "Dover Needs You!" headline. She aims to lobby parliament for more racist action. Bullying is becoming more common, as the non-racist majority in Dover get increasingly branded anti-British and the like, if they dare to voice their opinions. Meanwhile, the papers are warming to their art, with the Dover Express more recently mentioning correspondents warning that townsfolk 'will soon take the law into their own hands' and the 'smouldering violence' in places like Marseilles. In short, a detailed run-down of racism in Dover's media would run to chapters, while the letter writers vie with journalists and politicians in the casual use of terms such as 'spongers', 'cheats' and 'freeloaders'. Local builder Paul James, who is a friend of the Dover Express, has recently announced that he intends to stand as a local British National Party candidate.

the response

Since organising the Dover Multi-cultural Festival, Dover's anti-racists have continued to increase support for asylum seekers. Two new groups, the Roma Refugee Organisation and Dover Residents Against Racism (DRAR) have been formed. A recent meeting of the DRAR suggests they are now step up the offensive against the local racists. Information on racist organisation is being gathered and shared to provide a basis for responses. Then, there are the responses themselves. Counter-demos will meet any public racist gatherings, and their casual lies will be met with direct responses, whether in the papers or on the street.

THE EXPRESS, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1998

THE LAST WORD

OUR LETTERS

Please write to *Dover Express*, 25 High Street, Dover, CT16 1PR

LETTER OF THE WEEK

All aboard DSS special

Editorial from the Dover Express dated 1/10/1998:

"We want to wash dross down the drain."

WELL now the truth is out. There are no extra coppers in the coffers for our overstretched police force to deal with the high-profile problems that beset us in Dover and district. We're not surprised that this Government, whose honeymoon with the British electorate is swiftly turning from sweet to sour, do not believe there is a compelling case to treat us differently to any other part of the country. Well, Home Office Minister Alun Michael, that's where you're wrong ... This area, the gateway to the rest of the civilised world, is conversely the home for Scroungers Inc. Illegal immigrants, asylum seekers (when they get to asylum are they happy?), bootleggers (who take many guises) and the scum of the earth drug smugglers have targeted our beloved coastline for some unwarranted attention. Kent Police, who are doing an exceptional job, have got their backs to [the] sea and are being pushed ever closer to the cliff edge. While Labour luvvies dribble on at that most historic of northern pleasure outposts — Blackpool — we are left with the backdraft of a nation's human sewage and NO CASH to wash it down the drain."

GOLD RUSH: Immigrants step off the ferry and enter the promised land

THE Ferry arriving in Dover is the DSS special for Slovacs, Czechs, Albanians and other Eastern Europeans. They are given homes, food vouchers and money, also advice on how to claim more Social Security.

They are now housed not only in bed and breakfast accommodation, but in Stembrook Court and the new flats formally the Victoria Hospital. Why not in the Channel Tunnel Village at Farthinglos, the Marine Barracks at Deal or the Old Park Barracks?

Poulton Close old people's home was closed by Social Security because there was a shortage of money but it was soon opened for the asylum seekers when they required accommodation.

Where did the money appear from? Folkestone Road is now virtually a no go area after public transport stops.

When is our MP Mr Prosser and the Labour Government going to do something positive about this situation instead of producing White Papers which do nothing for at least a year. At the rate these people are arriving, Dovorians will be in the minority.

The Dublin Convention was quoted when I spoke to Mr Prosser, but this is being flouted as asylum must be claimed at the first border crossed, so how do they arrive here? I think the name Asylum Seeker is a misnomer as how can youths in their early 20s be asylum seekers. I have yet to see any old people.

These people are now becoming so arrogant and flaunting their new found wealth it's becoming a nightmare for the ordinary people of Dover.

They are better off than our pensioners who have worked hard all their lives and these people have never contributed anything anywhere.

Something has got to be done before these people take over our town.

Mr Prosser your Government has been in office for 17 months now so you cannot blame the last Government because the situation has got worse since you came into office.

Who is going to pay for this. Some people are making a fortune, but what about us the taxpayers. We shall remember when it come to voting at the next election.

P. & S. Capper, Castle Drive, Whitfield

You can contact DRAR directly or through DA/Solidarity Federation, who are involved locally. Both can provide further info., put you in touch, forward your messages of support, donations and offers of help. You can also write letters (if that's your thing) to the local rags.

DRAR, c/o Refugee Link, PO Box 417, Folkestone, Kent CT19 4GT.
DA/SF PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2 4YR.
Dover Express: 25 High Street, Dover, Kent CT16 1PR or fax: (01304) 240455.
Dover Mercury (not quoted here but similar to the Express): 8 Church Street, Dover, Kent CT16 1LY.
The campaign against the National Front in Dover has a homepage at http://www.canterbury.u-net.com/Dover.html

Work 'til you drop?

The Working Time Directive - what it is unlikely to do for you.

Anyone who thinks the fight for the 8-hour day has been won, think again. Last October, the government implemented the European Union Working Time Directive in Britain. Not exactly a massive step for the workers movement - but even this was cached in words of moderation and caution. The Government required "maximum flexibility" from the unions in the directive's interpretation. And there was no need to point out the room for "interpretation" on the side of management.

The regulations in the Directive provide that working time (including overtime), averaged over a period of 17 weeks, should not exceed 48 hours for each 7-day period. Working time is defined as any period during which a person is working at his/her employers' disposal and carrying out his/her activities and duties. There is greyness within this definition. For example, paid meal breaks, paid travelling time or on-call situations could be classed as 'non-working' time.

Then we come to the lengthy get-out clauses. The limit on weekly working time will not apply to any individual worker who agrees with the employer in writing that it should not apply in his/her case (and how will such 'agreements' be got out of employees is not mentioned). Where such an 'agreement' exists, the employer will have to maintain a record including the actual hours worked by each individual for the previous two years.

Night workers should not work on average more than 8 hours in each 24-hour period. However, this is subject to the average hours calculation period of 17 weeks, unless special hazards of heavy strain are involved, when it applies to any shift period. A night worker is defined as someone who, on the majority of days, works at least 3 hours of their time during night-time hours. Night-time is defined as between 2300 hours and 0600 hours. This may be altered by collective agreement.

There are, however, many problems with even these limited entitlements. For instance, no restrictions on night hours apply in specified circumstances, such as security work, or in activities involving the need for continuity of service or production. Now, what is 'need'?

An adult worker will be entitled to a rest period of not less than 11 consecutive hours in each 24 hour period. For a young worker under 18 years of age, the entitlement is 12 hours unless their periods of work are split up over the day or of a short duration. The adult regulation may not apply to shift workers when changing shifts or to workers engaged in activities involving periods of work split up over the day, particularly cleaning staff. Again, security work and 'needs' of continuity of production may result in these entitlements not applying.

Adult workers will be entitled to an uninterrupted rest period of not less than 24 hours in each 7-day period. However, this may be amended to provide two uninterrupted rest periods of not less than 24 hours in each 14-day period, or one uninterrupted rest period of not less than 48 hours in a 14-day period. For young workers, the entitlement is for 2 days in each 7-day period; those two days being consecutive 'if possible'.

Where daily working time is more than 6 hours, adult workers will be entitled to an uninterrupted rest period of not less than 20 minutes. Where the pattern of work puts health and safety at risk in particular because the work is monotonous or the work rate is predetermined, the employer will have a separate duty to ensure the worker is given adequate rest. Again, no time or frequency is laid down for this so, again, it is open for 'interpretation'.

After 3 months continuous employment, a worker will be entitled to a minimum of 3 weeks paid leave in each year, increasing to 4 weeks from 23rd November 1999. Workers will be required to give at least 4 weeks written notice specifying the dates. In doing so, they must adhere to any prior written notice from the employer stating when leave may or may not be taken. Holidays cannot be replaced by payment in lieu except where the employment is terminated.

Transport workers are exempt from these regulations. What constitutes a transport worker is not clearly defined, although it is likely that only those directly involved in transportation such as drivers, etc. are excluded, while mechanics, track repairers, catering staff and so on who work in the transport industry would be covered.

The Solidarity Federation offers advice and help on working conditions, including the Working Time Directive. Contact the SF help line on 0161 232 7889.

Tameside tangles

The Tameside care workers' dispute has been going on since March 1998 (see DA8 for details). The media is gathering strength against the dispute -the Manchester Evening News recently claimed the Tameside support group has been taken over by 'extremists'.

Despite the local ~~mafia~~ media showing their true colours, the campaign remains active and actions against the local Labour Party Councillors, who bear responsibility for the dispute, continue. Roy Oldham, leader of Tameside Council, was out for a meal with his wife recently and a group of strikers and supporters arrived and apparently took the edge off his evening.

A local ex-Council Worker was sacked after being found in possession of 'Yobwatch', a locally printed leaflet which focussed on the activities of the Council. Apparently, 'Yobwatch' is coming back into print soon.

Roy Oldham presents his best side for the cameras

Meanwhile, times are harder than ever for the sacked strikers, and an appeal has been launched to raise money and solidarity to raise their spirits (and those of their children) over the festive break. These are ordinary people like you and me who have got landed with an extraordinarily bad set of bosses and are being made to pay for it, so give generously.

Send donations and support to:

Tameside Workers Strike Fund, Unison, 29 Booth St, Ashton-U-Lyne, OL6 7LB (cheques to Unison Tameside), or Public Service Workers, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW (cheques PSWN). All money goes to the strikers and their families.

Solidarity Federation Events & Resources

(see below for addresses and telephone numbers)

Body Shop Campaign

Still going and still getting Body Shop all uncomfortable. Contact groups below for details of your nearest actions.

Africa Solidarity Group

Supporting struggle in Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, Sierra Leone and elsewhere. More people always welcome - contact SE London SF.

Self-Ed Education Collective

SelfEd have a correspondence course running, and various events planned for 1999. Self-Ed, PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2 4YR.

POSTAL WORKERS

Victimised or bullied at work?
CWN-SF are collecting information for their anti-bullying campaign. Contact them via the SF Contact Point (see main listing).

Health and Safety at Work: an anarcho-syndicalist approach.

New booklet with sections on health and safety "rights", gathering information, an effective direct action approach, case studies, recommended tactics and strategy, useful publications and helpful organisations, and a critical look at trades unions' record on taking action on health and safety. £1 (cheques to Solidarity Federation) from Solidarity Federation Contact Point.

Norwich Solidarity Centre BOOKSHOP

For pamphlets, books, magazines, newspapers on: Workplace law - anarcho-syndicalism - health & safety info - anarchism - anti-fascism. Open every Saturday, 12 noon - 2pm.

Brighton, Glasgow, Somerset, Cardiff, Aberystwyth, Cambridge.

Solidarity Federation Addresses

SF Contact Point: SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW. Tel. 0161 232 7889

Networks - make contact with others in your type of work -

Education Workers' Network, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW.
Public Service Workers' Network, PO Box 1681, London N8 7DN.
Communication Workers' Network, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW.

Locals - get involved locally in regular meetings and action -

North & East London SF, PO Box 1681, London N8 7DN. Tel. 0181 374 5027
South East London SF (Red & Black Club), PO Box 17773, London SE2 4WX. Tel. 0171 358 1854
South Herts SF, PO Box 493, St Albans ALI 5TW.
West Midlands SF, PO Box 6705, Redditch, Worcs. B97 6SQ
Norfolk & Norwich SF (Norwich Solidarity Centre), Rm 13, Muspole Workshops, Muspole St, Norwich NR3 1QD.
Manchester SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 511W. Tel. 0161 232 7889.
Sheffield SF, PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2 4YR.

To make contact with groups and individuals in the following areas get in touch through the SF Contact Point: Preston, Liverpool, Dover, Middlesborough, Chester-le-Street, Edinburgh, Bristol,

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◯ Rush me Free information about DA and SolFed

Name.....
Address.....
All Cheques to 'Direct Action'. Please add £3 for overseas subscriptions.
Return this form to: DA-SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW, England.

North & East London

Socials

Last Thursday of the month, 8pm.
Near Camden Tube - details -

SF, PO Box 1681, London N8 7DN
Tel. 0181 374 5027

We also hold advice surgeries and have regular discussion meetings. Drop us a line for details of times and places.

South Herts Solidarity Federation

Discussion Meetings

8pm Second Wednesday of the month.
In St Albans (near main railway station)
drop us a line
for contact details -

South Herts SolFed,
PO Box 493,
St Albans AL1 5TW

Walton Hospital Dispute - Appeal

40 Catering and Domestic staff remain effectively sacked after being caught up in a dispute between Aintree NHS Trust Board and two private health sector contractors since April 1st, 1998. The women have picketed Fazarkerley Hospital every day since, but the contrctor has refused to employ them. Letters of support/info.: UNISON Sefton health Branch, 32 Sergrim Rd, Huyton, Merseyside L36 2 QD. Tel Peter Ballard 0151 529 5138. Protests to: Aintree NHS Trust, Fazarkerley Hospital, Aintree House, Lower La., Fazarkerley, Liverpool.

Manchester SolFed

Support and Advice Sessions

Victimised at work?
Poor working conditions?
Low wages? No union?
Drop in -
First Tuesday of the month, 7-9pm, at:
The Brow House, 1 Mabfield Road,
Fallowfield, Manchester.

Also at the Brow House:

Discussion Meetings

9pm First Tuesday of the month.

Winter Topics:

⇒ January 5th - Golbal Inequality
⇒ February 2nd - Health and Safety at Work
⇒ March 2nd - Self-Education

Manchester SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW. 0161 232 7889

Special Human Rights?

Pinochet, Amnesty International, The Body Shop and the US Christian Right have something in common...

These days, power and authority are not weilded as overtly as they used to be. Today, our great leaders have new, subtle and more painless ways of making the many work for the wealth of the few. Authority today says 'you don't need to organise for your needs, we'll look after you as long as you pull your weight (for us)'. But behind the smiley faces is the same old ideology.

In May this year, Amnesty International launched its commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in conjunction with The Body Shop. Anita Roddick, founder of the company, had been invited as a speaker to the weekend's Festival. The Body Shop opposes collective bargaining by unions.

The Solidarity Federation (with the assistance of London Greenpeace), started an ongoing campaign to draw attention to Body Shop's attitude to its workers. The Body Shop's initial response to this was "The reason we have not recognised unions to date is that we do not wish to accord *special rights* (our emphasis) to a small minority of employees over and above the rights of the great majority". The "right of the great majority" to have their interests represented by management!

In reality, any rights or benefits won by union organisation would be enjoyed by all workers, and a recognised union's membership would grow rapidly. The real reason The Body Shop will not recognise unions is that it wants to control worker representation itself. Management train "independent advocates on behalf of individual employees in difficulty" and run "Workplace Consultative Councils of elected employee representatives".

They are opposed to workplace organisation independent of management and to collective bargaining by the workers' own elected representatives. This would involve an unacceptable challenge to the "benevolent" management's self-defined right to determine what is in the interests of "the great majority".

Top managers and shareholders take all the credit (both money and praise) for success... ...absorbing the costs of failure is the role of employees

Body Shop reality

In 1997, Body Shop "sales advisors" were paid between £8,000 and £10,800 per year; then Chief Executive Anita Roddick accepted a "reduced" salary and benefits totalling £148,000, in addition to share dividends worth well over £1m (plus, husband Gordon got about the same). The self-styled champion of gender equality clearly does well out of her (mainly women) front line workers.

Structural inequality in pay based on gender is one of the most important ways working class incomes are kept down in Britain. The assumption is that female-dominated occupations are "second income" jobs to supplement a male "breadwinner". Legislation such as the Equal Pay Act is virtually useless; it would be fraudulent to claim it could address this widespread women's oppression.

In The Body Shop, pay and conditions are bad enough to cause a 45% annual staff turnover in company-owned shops (compared with a 'benchmark' of 34%). In the absence of collective bargaining, Body Shop workers are voting with their feet, and are not fooled by management's tame "consultation" and "representation" into believing that they are "stakeholders". Staff attitude survey's show they are increasingly untrusting of management.

Like any other capitalist business, the company exists to make a profit and to pay dividends to shareholders (like the saintly Roddicks). Improved productivity and performance by those £8-10K sales advisors is the key. Top managers and shareholders take all the credit (both money and praise) for success. However, current poor performance in the United States is having predictable consequences. The company, now under a new chief executive after a failed bid by the Roddicks to take back overall control, is to close many of its shops in the US, with inevitable job losses. Further cutbacks in the production of lines are also planned. As usual, management's benevolence does not extend to absorbing the costs of failure, this is the role of employees.

authority figures

Abuses of human rights are rarely gratuitous. They are typically the planned response of the powerful to attempts by the rest to organise and improve our lot. This includes workers. The Body Shop's planned response is to dismiss those who draw attention to its anti-union policies as "fringe organisations", and to accuse the idea of worker organisation as seeking "special rights".

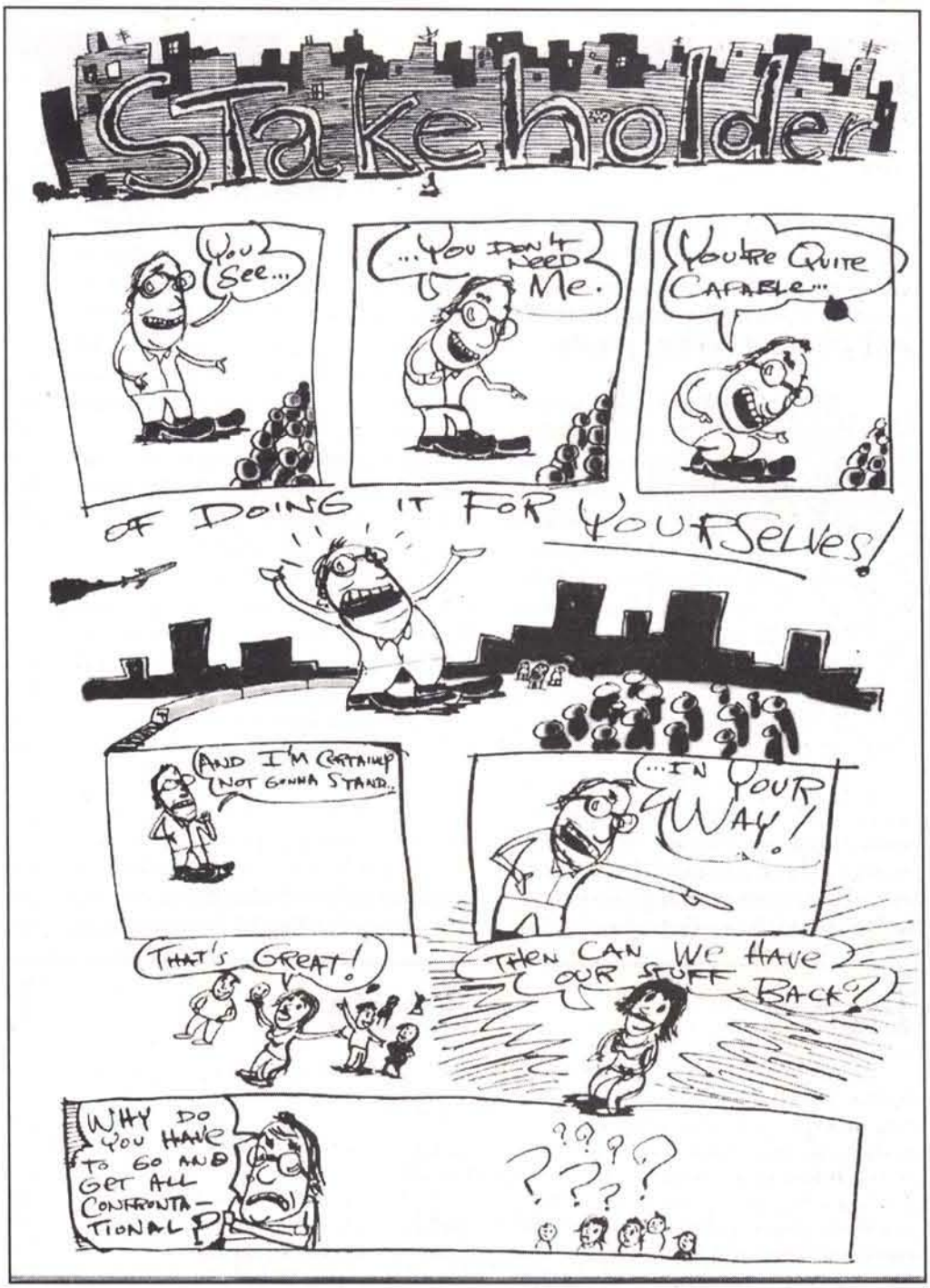
The phrase "special rights" is borrowed from the Religious Right in the United States, most famously in the homophobic video "Gay rights, special rights", produced by the Christian Coalition. The Body Shop's endorsement of the right to join a union, while opposing the point of union membership - organising for better pay and conditions, and to challenge exploitation - echoes the right's discourse on homosexuality. They say they don't hate homosexuals, as long as they don't have a sex life, build relationships with people of the same sex, or "flaunt" themselves. They also promote a "cure" involving heterosexual marriage and replacing self-esteem with Jesus Christ. The Body Shop wants to "cure" any potential desire for union organisation through "individual representation" and "consultation".

There is no suggestion that either Anita Roddick or The Body Shop is homophobic, but the ease with which they echo the Religious Right illustrates the authoritarianism the two have in common. It is impossible to separate human rights abuses from the causes of those abuses if they are to be combated effectively. It exposes Amnesty International's limitations that they are willing to be associated with a company which views union organisation in this light.

The association is hardly surprising, as Amnesty's approach is the classic liberal opposition to overt abuses, while not actively opposing the system, which needs and furthers such abuse for its own ends. Privileged liberals might hate Augusto Pinochet, but ultimately it is his ilk who guarantee their class privileges. The more the rest of us assert ourselves and threaten the very status quo which guarantees their economic and social position, the more extreme are the measures needed to control us.

Again, Body Shop management policy and Pinochet's former activities differ enormously in the degree of suffering they inflict, but the principle is the same - keeping the rabble in line. The relevance of social revolution, and of its preparation by militant anarcho-syndicalism, is reinforced by the exposure of "ethical business" as union-busters. Solidarity Federation would make no apology for being a "fringe organisation" which does not subscribe to the idea that "business" is good for workers.

(Figures are from the Body Shop's own annual report, and the Labour Research Department.)



Ma'm

Halloween brought a sizeable but very damp gathering of 4-500 people to Hyde Park in London, equipped with lots of fancy dress and a 6 metre high mobile Guillotine.

Yes, it was the March against the Monarchy (Ma'm). Prevented from approaching Buckingham Palace and accompanied by a massive police presence, the demonstrators marched down Piccadilly and on to Whitehall, pausing outside the Scotland Yard building at the spot where King Charles I was beheaded.

One of the intentions, to invite Prince Charles to try out the mobile guillotine, was not fulfilled, but despite this and the damp, the gathered throng seemed to have a good time anyway.

CNT vs. ETT

That's lucky! They've opened up an ETT on the upper floor and an unemployment centre on the lower floor.

In 1994, the Spanish government modified the law about employment agencies, opening the way for new levels of exploitation of working people.

Previously, all employers seeking workers through an agency had gone through INEM, a state run agency (equivalent to the Employment Service here), because the law required that contracts be directly between worker and employer. Since this change in the law there have been many *empresas de trabajo temporal*, literally Temporary Work Businesses, established, although many seem to be on a dubious legal footing as the law that created them is unclear. Certainly, Solidarity Federation's sister organisation in Spain, the CNT, regard them as acting illegally.

They have been fighting these ETTs because they are a further attempt to attack workers' pay and conditions. Workers hired through ETTs are usually paid less than the national agreements for that industry dictate, and they have fewer employment rights. There is also the possibility of blacklisting, as the ETTs offer themselves to employers stating they have "secure people". While this suits the bosses very well, it clearly is not in the interest of the workers, though with some of the highest unemployment rates in the EU, Spanish bosses know they can get away with attacking terms and conditions.

Typically, the main reformist unions (the socialist UGT and communist CCOO) not only show no interest in fighting the ETTs, but have signed a national agreement allowing a pay differential of up to 30% between directly employed workers and those employed via the ETT. With such an agreement, it is no wonder that ETTs are being used for permanent as well as temporary jobs.

The CNT's strategy is the opposite. They try to create as many difficulties for the ETTs as they can. They have stickered and occupied ETT offices. Where they have any strength in a workplace, they fight against the firm using ETTs and in favour of direct employment. Sometimes this is with other unions, but often they are complicit. The CNT has also managed to establish one union section actually in an ETT.

Earlier this year, an ETT in Madrid was firebombed, which the press tried to paint on the CNT. In June, the ETT *Agora* in Manlleu reported a CNT militant to the police for allegedly painting their building. The ETT didn't show up in court and the CNT are responding by raising the profile of their campaign and creating a public debate on the harmful role of the ETTs in the workplace.

The CNT in Burgos organised a bit of street theatre to commemorate their local ETTs, calling an ironic *Via Crucis* (a religious penitential procession) as the "penitent Workers".

France

On 21st October, some 275,000 high school pupils joined marches across France, demanding a better education system. In Paris, 5,500 uniformed and plain-clothes police were deployed against the 25,000 strong march. As riot police attacked during the latter stages, protesters replied with stones and bottles. The Interior Ministry later said 300 people had been arrested across France, 74 of them in Paris, while 85 people were slightly hurt in the second national protest in a week.

With French unemployment at 11.8 per cent, high school students claim they stand little chance of graduating or finding jobs after being crammed into overcrowded and dilapidated classrooms with outdated learning facilities.

Russia

As months of severe economic hardship turn into years (see previous reports in DA5 and DA8), miners' wives have gone on hunger strike to demand wages for their husbands.

15 women declared the hunger strike after the owner of the Kuznietskaya mine in Polisaievo declared that the trade union delegates fighting against privatisation and defending the re-opening of the mine would not receive their wages. These workers of the Unity Union have organised their own guards for the past year in order to safeguard the facilities of the mine and prevent managers dismantling and stealing the equipment. Provincial and local governments are now bringing further pressure against the workers.

US

As political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal sits on death row, the fight to free him intensifies across the USA and the rest of the world. As a single example, in Boston, Paul Cellucci, the Massachusetts republican candidate for governor and open supporter of the death penalty, took the stage at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel to celebrate his victory over democrat Scott Harshbarger. He got a bit of an unexpected surprise, his speech was suddenly halted by high pitched whistle-blowing and chants of "FREE MUMIA!" (which made it loud and clear on the live radio and televised coverage) by a group charging at the stage. Disruptions were also captured by swarming media people with cameras. Press interviews concerning the situation of Mumia Abu-Jamal were given to all too eager journalists after the event.

For background info on the Mumia case, see http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/inter.html or contact DA.

Ireland

Hundreds of workers walked off building sites across Ireland as 2 building workers were jailed for picketing.

As construction firms have replaced directly employed workers with contractors since the 1980s, workers have been forced into special tax arrangements for "self-employed" contractors. The result is most building workers are paid 'cash-in-hand' and are not fully insured. Average fines for employers for breaking safety rules are a mere £250. Unions are weak, and there has been a dramatic rise in safety problems. In the 1980s there were 6 deaths in 10 years; in 1995-1997 alone, under the new regime, 40 workers have been killed. The various Government departments, even over the tax issue, have looked the other way.

In the last 12 months, building workers have found an effective way to fight back. Because injunctions would be given by the courts if they took action through their unions, they formed an organisation called 'Building Workers against the Black Economy', which pickets firms that refuse to directly employ workers. A rapid series of victories in Dublin led to the movement spreading to other areas of the country.

At the end of October, one of these firms, Capel Developments, brought two workers to court - a bricklayer and a labourer. They demanded the workers be jailed as they refused to obey the court injunction forbidding them from picketing the site. The state judiciary complied, although police re-enforcement's had to be called to get them out of court through more than 200 building workers who had turned up to support them.

The workers organised a picket of Mountjoy jail, where the two were being held overnight. As part of the protest, they sat down and blocked the North Circular Road for over an hour. The following day, the two were in the High Court again. Over 400 people turned up to support them this time, most of them building workers that had walked off their sites that morning. Again the road was blocked. The case was adjourned, and they marched into the city centre to picket a building site that Mary O'Rourke (minister) was visiting. State TV reported walk outs and one hour stoppages at many sites across Ireland. Pickets at Mountjoy jail continued until the two were released on October 23rd.

All this occurred against a background of high profile exposures of political corruption involving banks, developers and retailers. In one case, former Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Charles Haughey has admitted receiving £300,000 from supermarket boss Ben Dunne, of the notorious Dunnes Stores group (which has had two major strikes in the past few years over union recognition).

Pie in the Sky

Robert Shapiro, chief executive of the genetic foods giant Monsanto, got a tofu creme pie in the face at the "State of the World Forum" conference in San Francisco on 27th October.

As Shapiro finished his keynote address on the brave new world of genetic engineering (GE), he stopped to engage a heckler on GE and corporate crime.

It was at this point that BBB Field Agents Custard and Lemon Meringue approached him and let fly with tofu creme and potato pies, the first of which reached its target.

The "Anti-Genetix" splinter faction of the Biotic Baking Brigade (BBB) claimed credit for the action, code-named "Operation Safe Harvest."

The BBB is aligned with Belgian pieman Noel Godin's International Patisserie Brigade, who have been responsible for pieing Bill Gates and many other deserving targets.

"The Biotic Baking Brigade doesn't just promise pie in the sky, we deliver" said a BBB operative named Apple, who co-ordinated the operation.

As Shapiro was hustled out of the room by his handlers, one of the moderators stepped to the microphone to introduce none other than Anita Roddick, the Body Shop global consumer conquistadora (you can actually shop for a better world!), who desperately needs some pastry treatment herself.

The vegan tofu creme pie symbolised the millions of acres of Monsanto's genetically-engineered soybean crops coming to harvest this season. The sweet potato pie was tossed in recognition of a New York Times Sunday Magazine cover story which detailed the fraud, deception, and legacy of poison Monsanto has given the world, using the GE "New Leaf Russet Burbank Potato" as an example.

Japan

Nine years after Japanese National Railways (JNR) was privatised, amidst growing protest by many citizens, the struggle for the jobs of many former JNR workers continues.

KOKURO (the largest among JNR workers' unions) suffered an 85% drop in membership as railway managers threatened to fire workers who opposed privatisation - the position of the union (and rail users and public across Japan). KOKURO now has only 30,000 members, with many having been sacked or forced to take other part-time or unskilled work. When JNR became the new company, JR, 7,628 workers were denied their continued employment, over 1,000 of whom have refused to acknowledge the unlawful firings. Local labour relations commissions across Japan have found in their favour and have ordered that the workers be returned to their former positions of employment. The JR companies have appealed to the Central Labour Commission, and the original decisions upheld. The Supreme Court has handed down a decision stating that it was illegal for the East Japan Railway Company to remove a conductor from his job for being a KOKURO member. Despite this, the JR companies have refused to comply and reinstate the workers concerned.

Meanwhile, JR management still openly discriminate aganist KOKURO members in workplaces and continue to try to bust the union.

US: Nike

Co-ordinated anti-Nike actions occurred across the US in October.

In Chicago, a demonstration was held in front of Nike Town. Newcomers were shown videos on Nike's sweatshops, and literature was distributed which focused on Nike's failure to honour its commitment to allow independent monitors into its plants.

In New York, a public Nike shoe hand-back and leafleting event was held at the Nike store in Manhattan.

In Minneapolis, the largest shopping mall in the US was the scene for a human billboard denouncement of Nike's sweatshop abuses.

In Oregon, Nike corporate property was damaged and the local Nike store was closed after anarchists and other anti-corporate activists rallied against the shoe giant in Eugene.

Korea

In the midst of the largest depression in 30 years in South Korea, thousands of unemployed and fired workers rallied in Seoul on September 12 to protest the illegal lay-offs and the role of the IMF and World Bank in implementing a structural adjustment program in South Korea.

The demonstration followed an international conference called by the independent Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU). At the time of the conference, more than 240 Korean unionists were either under arrest or wanted on arrest warrants for striking and union organising.

The US-backed Kim Dae Jung government has decided that striking over lay-offs is illegal and many unionists now face jail for striking. The KCTU has filed a complaint with the ILO that the Kim Dae Jung government has violated international labour rights that allow for freedom of association.

During the Hyundai strike in August, tens of thousands of workers occupied the plants and threatened to destroy the equipment if the police invaded. As a result of this militant mobilisation, the government did not intervene with police and this forced Hyundai to limit the lay-offs to 277 women ancillary workers. One of the demands of the Hyundai Motors Workers Union (part of the Korean Metal Workers Federation) was a demand for a reduction from the present 10 hour day and 52 hour week to a 35 hour week.

unemployed organise

The KCTU continues to defend workers fired for union activity and, alongside this, a new unemployed section has now formed. This has continued to attract members despite the government's declaration that it is illegal to recognise unemployed workers' unions. Meanwhile, in Korea, in the first 6 months of this year, consumption has dropped by more than 28%. And this, as they say, is only the beginning of the downturn in the economy.

Korea II

A National March Against Unemployment was held on October 17 simultaneously in the cities of Seoul, Ansan, Pusan, Taegu and Chonju. On the march, unemployed people declared joint action with workers and demanded reduction of working time, a new jobless fund, special legislation for basic living standards, fundamental reform of Job Insurance Law, reduction of military expenditure, and construction of welfare centres for homeless people.

Urgent Appeal

This year, particularly devastating flooding has ravaged Bangladesh. Workers from the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) have been among the over 25 million people affected. 700 Bangladeshis have been killed and 100,000 are jobless due to the catastrophe, while tens of thousands are endangered by disease and lack of basic needs. 1.5 million people work in the garment industry, and the NGWF are collecting materials and money for basic disaster relief - they have also demanded that the factory owners help too. The NGWF and families need solidarity, and more. This is not an institutionalised charity appeal - send your money direct to the NGWF.

Amirul Haque Amin (NGWF), G.P.O. Box-864, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Fax: ++880-2-9562562. E-mail: alamint@bangla.net.

Alternatively, Solidarity Federation, who have had direct contacts with NGWF for several years, are running their own appeal; send cheques and messages to; Solidarity Federation (International Secretariat), PO Box 1681, London, N8 7DN.

Nigeria

Media games in times of death

Di and Clinton sex saga shock make smokescreen news again (and by the way, 700 people died today in one village).

The day a fire caused by an oil spillage killed over 700 people in Nigeria, the BBC devoted just five main news seconds to the story. The same programme devoted 5 minutes to a non-story concerning Princes Di. Does this mean Di is 96 times more important than 700 deaths? The same programme had yet another lengthy (?!) story concerning Clinton's sexual 'exploits'.

The following day slightly more time was devoted to the story, with accompanying pictures of charred bodies being pushed into open graves by diggers. The story was vague as to how the fire had occurred, just a few references to oil being stolen by locals being the cause of the fire. The programme also carried a brief interview with a government official stating that, as the fire had started as a result of vandalism, the government would not be paying out any compensation to the victims. The impression given was the usual racist one presented by the western media in Africa as a corrupt inefficient people incapable of running their own affairs. The usual mention of western aid was thrown in for good measure.

The story behind the Nigerian oil fire is in fact one of efficiency. In Nigeria, the state and oil companies have combined to ensure that the profits from oil are shared between them, to the cost of the population as a whole. They have been so efficient, in fact, that in a country awash with oil resources, the majority of the people live in harrowing poverty.

Indeed, the poverty is so grave that people have been forced to resort to hacking holes into pipe lines to steal oil to survive. On this occasion, youths had opened a valve in a pipeline to siphon off oil. The valve jammed and, within hours, thousands of people had come with buckets and bottles to collect the gushing fuel. A short time later a spark set off a huge fireball killing hundreds and leaving over a thousand with horrific burns. Charred bodies were still strewn about the area weeks later.

The news reports described the oil industry as 'state owned' neglecting to mention that the oil industry has been operated by western companies for decades. The sight of charred bodies being dumped in holes is too negative to be associated with the glamour of western oil companies.

Local people however, are beginning to look for their own solutions. In November, local youths occupied over 20 oil flow stations in Ijaws, cutting off one third of Nigeria's 2 million barrels a day exports. They were demanding more say in the running of their local communities. What little news coverage there was, described the incident as 'ethnic clashes'. A local villager had a different interpretation as to the cause of the trouble: "...it is the only way we develop. The oil companies have been here 30 years and look at this place. The village has no power, no school, no clinic and no hope". Anyway must dash, the 9 o'clock news is on and there is a story about Fergies new chat show she is hosting in America.

Canada

In Toronto, arrests followed when demonstrators poured stage blood on one of the arches in Queens Park, to mark the third anniversary of the devastating cuts to welfare enacted by the Harris government on October 1, 1995. The cuts have led to deaths on the streets from hunger and homelessness.

Letter from America

News of the world from an Irish correspondent

I recently spent some time in Toronto as what in Ireland we would call a 'trainee', and what in America they would call an 'intern', and what I would call an indentured labourer. While there, my attention was brought to what is now a widespread phenomenon.

As you are more than likely aware, MuckDonalds give away promotional toys with their 'happy meals'. These are wee plastic dolls, usually of Disney characters. People no doubt accosted into submission by the TV brainwashed children are purchasing their happy meals for the moulded lumps of plastic and throwing the 'food' away. Now, probably the healthiest thing to do with MuckDonalds food is to throw it away, though this is pretty obscene in a city where you have to pick your way through the beggars. However, what the merest mention of these toys brings to my mind are the conditions endured by the people who make them. The Keyhinge Toys Co Factory, in Da Nang City, Vietnam, employs about 1000 people, 90% of whom are 17-20 year old women. They work 9-10 hour shifts 7 days a week for an average of 6-8 cents an hour - that's a 70 hour week for US$5.

Fatigue, poor ventilation and poisonous chemicals have taken their toll. In February 1997, 200 workers fell ill, 25 collapsed and 3 were hospitalised as a result of acetone poisoning. Acetone, a chemical solvent, inflicts symptoms of dizziness, unconsciousness, liver and kidney damage, and chronic eye, nose and throat irritation. After a 10 hour day, these teenage women do not have enough money for a decent meal, as a basic rice, vegetable and tofu meal in Vietnam costs around 70 cents.

Back in Toronto, a walk along a beach adjoining a yuppie-infested zone reveals a world best described as poseur city. Assembled everywhere are uniformed hoards of consumerist storm-troopers bearing their obligatory Nike tops, with the same earnest pride a Hitler youth would show his swastika. In poseur city, you are what you own, so wear the label where no-one can miss it. I always thought of the late teens as a time when you rebel, and assert individual identity and 'independence'. Perhaps there is a contradictory impulse at work here. A desire to belong, to conform. If so, this is an exclusive club, where only designer labels and (therefore) daddy's bank balance will gain you admittance.

What of the people who work to create Nike products? To find them, we must go back to Vietnam where, for generations, people bled for freedom from imperialism but made the mistake of putting their faith in the party that has most assuredly betrayed them. Nike employs almost 35,000 mostly women throughout Vietnam, and was hit by a serious strike wave in 1997. Investigations by the American based Vietnam Labor Watch discovered that workers were being paid on average US$1.60 for an 8-hour shift, while the shoes they make are sold at US$149.00 in the US. They noted that;

"supervisors humiliate women. They force them to kneel, to stand in the hot sun, treating them like recruits in a boot camp. In one plant, workers were allowed to go into the lavatory only once during a shift, and were limited to 2 drinks of water. The Taiwanese sub-contractor forced 56 women to run around the plant in the sun as punishment for wearing non-regulation shoes; 12 fainted and were taken to hospital. The next day, the factory was attacked by local people."

Direct action, just do it! Innumerable organisations are supporting the Vietnamese workers' fight, including United Auto-workers Local 892 in Michigan, US, one of whose members told me that buying Nike is supporting child abuse, pointing to their widespread use of child labour. The defence of the denizens of Toronto's wealthy suburbs is that old chestnut "they know not what they do" - it doesn't wash. As another of my Canadian experiences demonstrates, this fat parasitical vermin are well aware.

The 100-plus party entered the posh restaurant and, to the chagrin of its businessmen clientele, proceeded to occupy it while eating their fill and distributing free food to onlookers outside.

Thanks to a friend who acquired complimentary tickets, I attended a showing of "Rent", a musical built around the theme of homelessness, and specifically, people being forced out of their homes by a rack renting landlord who wishes to develop the property into an art studio for the bohemian rich. The show was good, especially as it repeatedly insulted the glitterati, who constituted the $100 plus per head audience. During the interval, I left the red carpets, balconies and chandeliers of the theatre to go for a smoke. Outside was a throng of suits doing likewise. Amid the diamond necklaces and gold cufflinks, there stood, as if invisible, a lone bedraggled figure clutching a piece of cardboard upon which was scrawled "homeless and hungry - please give generously", and did they? Did they fuck! It was as if one picture had been superimposed on the other; as if the bearded beggar did not exist. After the show, as I watched stretch limo after stretch limo pull up to collect the theatre's paying customers, I wondered at the mentality which pays $100 plus dollars to see a musical about the impoverished and does not give even recognition to a homeless person. I still wonder.

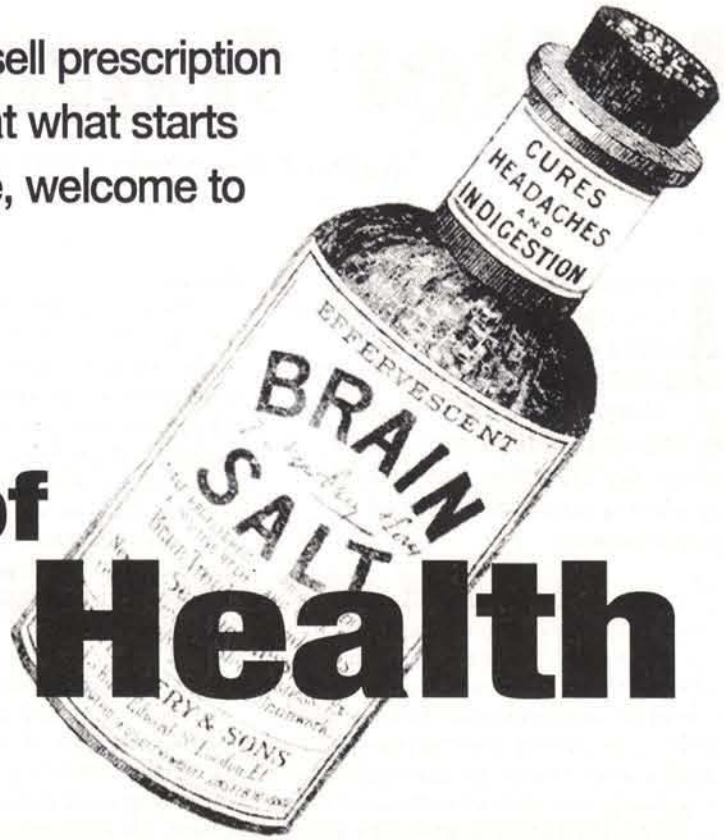
But in Canada, as in Vietnam, there is resistance. I had the pleasure of attending an Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) demo. It was in an area subject to gentrification, landlords raising the rents, forcing people out, and developing the properties into homes for professionals, thereby tearing a community apart and contributing to homelessness. While there, I was told of another OCAP action. In a visit to Montreal, they had joined forces with Comite des Sans-emplois de Montreal Centre to launch a raid on the Queen Elisabeth Hotel. The 100 plus party entered the posh restaurant and, to the chagrin of its businessmen clientele, proceeded to occupy it while eating their fill and distributing free food to onlookers outside.

These contrasts of privilege and poverty are, of course, not restricted to any part of the world. The situation in the US, the world's richest, most powerful and most unequal state, for example, is turning grimmer as welfare cut follows welfare cut and workfare makes its impact. Apparently, one fancy Manhattan restaurant for the well-heeled sold out of its entire supply of the 1900 Chateau Margaux, which sells at $10,000 a bottle. To purchase this bottle, one must spend more than the entire annual income of the poorest 5th of New York families.

On the night in 1381, before the peasant rebel army descended upon London, hedgerow priest John Ball delivered to them a sermon that is as apt today as ever:

"They are clad in velvet and satin, set off with squirrel fur, while we are dressed in poor cloth. They have wines and spices and fine bread, we have only rye and spoiled flour and straw, and only water to drink. They have beautiful residences and manors, while we have the trouble and the work, always in the fields, under rain and snow. But it is from us and our labour that everything comes with which they maintain their pomp. Good folk, things cannot go well in England, nor ever shall, until all things are in common and there is neither villain nor noble, but all of us are of one condition."

The US is 'leading the way' in hard-sell prescription drug marketing. Bearing in mind that what starts over there usually ends up over here, welcome to the future of health care...



States of Health

New health adverts are appearing on TV across America. No more wheezing victims claiming the benefits of cough syrups or sad people suffering with trapped wind. The new generation of adverts is about showing healthy people enjoying a newly wonderful life. Why are these people so happy and healthy? Because they are taking new wonder drugs -and there are now plenty to choose from.

So what's the big deal? Drug adverts that make exaggerated claims are hardly new. The big deal is that the drugs concerned are prescription drugs, only available through the doctor. Until last year, named prescription drugs could not be advertised on US TV. Now, under the guise of free market deregulation, the laws have been relaxed. Australia, South Africa and Latin America are set to follow suit. Huge pharmaceutical conglomerates such as Britain's Glaxo-Wellcome are pouring money and effort into a behind-the-scenes lobbying campaign to get the law changed in Europe.

This new direct-to-consumer advertising for prescription drugs is causing a marketing revolution in the US. Spending on prescription drugs ads is expected to top $1 billion this year, making it bigger than beer advertising. As a spokeswoman for one of the leading marketing companies gushed "...drugs ads are what cigarette ads and alcohol ads were ten years ago. Almost every agency is developing a health-care team to meet the demand from drug companies."

A large chunk of this new market is about so-called lifestyle drugs. Drugs of dubious or limited medical benefit are being marketed as if they are capable of transforming lives. Take the drug and you are buying into 'a whole new way of life'. And the latest trend.

But it is not just lifestyle drugs that companies are hoping to cash in on. Drugs aimed at people suffering from serious illnesses are now being branded in the same way as Coca-Cola.

bigger picture

The advertising of prescription drugs is part of a wider shift towards direct-to-customer advertising. Companies are increasingly aware that, even if their product is not sold direct to the public, it still pays to advertise. One of the pioneers of direct-to-customer advertising was the computer processor maker Intel.

The decision by Intel to embark on an advertising campaign was greeted with scorn by the rest of the industry. Why advertise goods that would largely only be bought by companies making computers? (Note, Britain is the only place with a big 'peripherals' and 'home build' PC market, due to artificially high PC prices). However, what Intel knew was that, faced with the bewilderment of constantly changing computer technology, consumers had no real way of evaluating what they were about to buy. Intel would provide something people could identify with and ask for when they were buying. The rest is marketing history.

It is a lesson not lost on drug companies. Even if your products are not bought directly, brand recognition is still vital for 'effective marketing'. The central aim now is to make once obscure prescription drugs into established household names. Hence the pressure to relax the rules governing advertising.

drug consumption

The drug companies were right; advertising certainly does pay. A study in the American magazine Prevention found that 90% of the 1200 people had seen a prescription drug advert and a third had visited their doctor as a result. Remarkably, 80% of doctors agreed to prescribe the drug. Furthermore, a third of patients who saw an ad for medicine felt better about its safety, were more likely to take it, and were reminded to re-order their prescription. All through prescription drug adverts. Little wonder that drugs companies, downsizing everywhere else, are reaching for the chequebook when it comes to advertising budgets.

The early advertising success is already altering the way companies operate. In the past, the drug companies ran clinical trials aimed at finding cures. Now, clinical trials aimed at improving brand recognition are becoming increasingly common. Brand differentiation is rapidly replacing drug effectiveness as the first priority of the drugs

industry.

In terms of the actual products, the changes are rapid. Packaging and promotion begin to take precedent over content, and research money is being targeted at finding ways to enable drug companies to make exaggerated marketing claims. The market is getting increasingly cut-throat.

A more convenient delivery method (e.g. tablets or pads rather than injections), or a combination which reduces side effects, anything is enough to let loose the marketing pack. Within days, the airways are flooded with adverts pummelling home the message that (BRAND NAME!!!) the new improved drug (BRAND NAME!!!) causes less drowsiness (BRAND NAME!!!).

The results so far are bigger profits. For instance, the makers of Clariton were able to steal a march over competitors through claims that a new version caused less drowsiness. The adverts hit the screens, and Clariton now sells for $1.90 a pill, even though equally effective drugs are available for just a few cents.

loyalty drugs

Media advertising of drugs has opened the door to a whole new world. Drug companies are now designing promotion packages aimed at exploiting the fears of the chronically ill and the aged. Omnicom, the US drug giant, has set up Acuity, a special division which will create special regimes to cater for individual patient needs. The main selling point is that they will encourage patients to take their drugs and, in addition, advise on special diets and programmes. Behind the caring gloss, there is a candid streak. Acuity themselves even boast that the caring programme is nothing more than a loyalty package aimed at ensuring that long-term sufferers stay with their product.

A particularly chilling aspect of the move to prescription advertising is the amount of information being gathered by the drug companies. The adverts offer free advice. The free phone calls and visits to web sites have provided information which amounts to a marketing gold mine. Drug companies will increasingly 'know their customers needs before they do'. In short, they will be able to manipulate people's health fears for profit.

patient power?

There was no mention of the word profit in the campaign to get the laws on drugs advertising relaxed. The slogan on every company director's lips was "patient power". They argued that prescription advertising would educate the public. With greater awareness of what's available, people would be able to make an informed choice, thus increasing the power of the patient and diminishing the power of the doctor.

The argument is, however, complete nonsense. Study after study has shown that private provision is less efficient and that it diverts money from health care towards shareholders. In Britain, under mainly state provision, spending stands at $1,347 per person on health care. Under the mainly private system in the US, this figure is $4,090 per person. Yet the quality of health care in both countries is about the same. That is, apart from the fact that some 50 million people in the US have no health cover.

In the crazy world of capitalism, such considerations count for little. Reality is swept aside by the power of free market rhetoric. It seems that the power of the drug companies to exploit the old, the sick and the vulnerable in the name of profit is set to increase.

Hard-hitting advertising creates and stimulates demand. This is what the drug companies really mean by patient power.

What about patient power in the sense of a person's right to control his or her own health? To advocate such a thing you would have to oppose all the current health care trends. What about responsibility for personnel and collective health being too important to be handed over to the state and big business? To advocate such a thing you would have to be nothing short of revolutionary.

virtual drugstores

Since the shift to large-scale media advertising coincides with new advertising technology, it is not surprising that multinational drug companies are spending increasing amounts of money promoting themselves and their products on the Internet. Internet-based drug companies can get around laws relating to drug advertising in individual countries. A rapid new market area is the sales of what would otherwise be prescription drugs over the Internet, often at massive profits. Perhaps the most famous example is the anti-impotency pill Viagra, which has been reported selling at upwards of £50 a pill. Often companies attempt to give themselves an air of medical authority by asking the customers some rudimentary health questions before demanding credit card numbers.

The World Health Organisation passed a resolution in May 1997 calling for tighter controls of the selling of drugs and quality of information provided on the Internet. However, practice so far suggests this is a non-starter. As use of the Internet continues to grow, it is likely that drug companies will devote more and more resources to its use to promote their wares simply because it is free from any form of regulation.

Choice-killing

On the Internet, a Christian web site lists dozens of names, with a black line running through the name of several people. The line indicates the name of people murdered for carrying out abortion in America. Another mark indicates those who have been injured.

In 1997, almost a quarter of America's 900 abortion clinics suffered attacks. Last January, a security guard was killed and a nurse injured when a clinic in Birmingham, Alabama was bombed. A gynaecologist, who carried out abortions, was shot at home by a sniper's bullet in Amherst, New York - one of 5 similar killings that have taken place in the last 5 years.

The number of doctors refusing to perform abortions through fear of injury is increasing. The pro-choice National Abortion Federation says that 84% of counties in the US now have no abortion clinic.

The Christian rights campaign to end women's right to choose is also meeting with increasing success within the main political parties. Last year, 31 states adopted laws that limited women's rights on abortion. Nevertheless, despite relentless pressure from the religious right, it seems that the right to an abortion, as enshrined in a Supreme Court decision 25 years ago, will not be overturned for the time being.

Strong support for the right to abortion among women remains high and runs at 54% of the population as a whole. However, given the ferocity of the campaign, a woman's right to control her own body remains under increasing threat across the US.

A service he did not advertise

When Media Bites

Media frenzy happened at Hillsborough. The police 'did their bit' (sic). And it led to one of the biggest media boycotts in Britain. Almost 10 years on, The Sun still doesn't sell on Merseyside.

On 15th April 1989, Liverpool were to play Nottingham Forest, with the winners going to Wembley for the FA Cup Final. 96 Liverpool supporters ended up going home in a coffin, and to this day, their families have seen natural justice denied. The victims who survived were accused of killing their own people, even though the TV pictures showed fans were the ones who organised the rescue operation whilst police, despite their 1st Aid training, mostly stood and looked on. Once the officers in charge 'froze' and lost control of the situation, the fans, despite witnessing death and injury, acted on impulse and without a chain of command, by ripping down advertising boards to carry the injured out of the ground. They did the job the police should have done.

Liverpool had played Forest the previous year at Hillsborough, and there were many complaints over the venue and ticket allocations. Liverpool's average attendance was almost double Forest's. The 1981 FA Cup semi-final at Hillsborough was saved from disaster only because several hundred fans were able to escape crushing by climbing onto the pitch.

The safety certificate for Hillsborough had not been amended since 1979, even though a perimeter fence had been installed all around the ground. An anonymous South Yorkshire Police Federation spokesman stated: "Many did not have tickets but they were demanding to get in. It looked as if mayhem was going to start outside, it was too late to postpone the kick-off because that could have caused disorder inside".

The first media comment on the unfolding disaster was when BBC Radio Sport commentator Peter Jones stated: "This should have been a show piece, this should have been a classic. At the moment, it is simple mayhem". The disaster was broadcast live on TV by BBC1's Grandstand. Dozens of photographers and journalists, commissioned to report on football, were instead covering a scene of devastation, injuries and horrific deaths. Their stories and photographs formed the basis of the initial international press and TV coverage.

At 3.40 pm, BBC's Alan Green reported from Hillsborough Football Ground when he said there were "unconfirmed reports that a door was broken down at the end that was holding Liverpool supporters". By 4.15, deaths were reported, but no numbers given. Graham Kelly, the Chief Executive of the Football Association, reported that he had spoken to police who "had not given the impression that they had ordered the gates to be opened".

A short while after, at approximately, 4.30 pm Alan Green gave a crucial report. Based on information from Graham Mackrell (secretary of Sheffield Wednesday FC), who had spoken to the police, he described events:

"At 10 to 3 there was a surge of fans at the Lepping Lane end of the ground. The surge composed of about 5,000 Liverpool fans, and the police say a gate was forced, and that led to a crush in the terracing area - well under-capacity, I'm told, there was still plenty of room inside that area".

Later in this report, it was stated that the gates were "broken down" and "large numbers of ticketless fans had arrived at the ground". The media's opinion seems merely to be that of the police's defence. As the bodies lay all around them, the officers in charge seem to have been composed enough to put their own self survival first. Their comments were made to deflect the blame, and police officers were certainly told to alter statements, to further back up the officers in charge. From the police/media's immediate groundwork of forming public opinions, we witnessed a media frenzy, in which the events of the day became another story to be played for all it was worth. But the stories backfired badly in Merseyside, where thousands of eye-witnesses came back from Hillsborough with a completely different version of events.

boycott

The Sun Newspaper, with a massive circulation on Merseyside, was the worst offender. The April 19th edition (see cover illustration) was burned in the streets by working class people. I witnessed my town centre, where crowds of people had set fire to copies taken from newsagents. Local Councils were forced to ban the Sun from local libraries, etc., a ban that is still in place 9 years later.

The boycott mostly spread by word of mouth, and some people almost came to blows when some unsuspecting person walked into a house or pub with a copy - the 'Scum' quickly became the term by which it was referred. The Merseyside boycott is widely reported to have cost the 'Scum' £10 million per year. The Hillsborough Campaign intends to step up the action in the run up to the Sun's planned special apology issue on the 10th anniversary, in April 1999.

For more info on the Hillsborough Supporters Campaign, write to: 134 Oakfield Rd, Anfield, Liverpool LO4 0UG.

Nobody wanted Hillsborough to happen.

But when the police made serious errors of judgement, they were able to call on the press to faithfully report stories about the tragedy. These conflicted with the accounts of people and reporters at the scene, and with the live TV pictures. The police, in a move to avoid the blame, orchestrated a major cover-up campaign that extended well beyond the wildly untrue press briefings and collusion over changing of notebooks and accounts of officers at the scene. While the state's inquiries to date have established these facts, there has been no justice or admission of blame from the police, and the Labour Government has now decided that the matter is closed (see DA8).

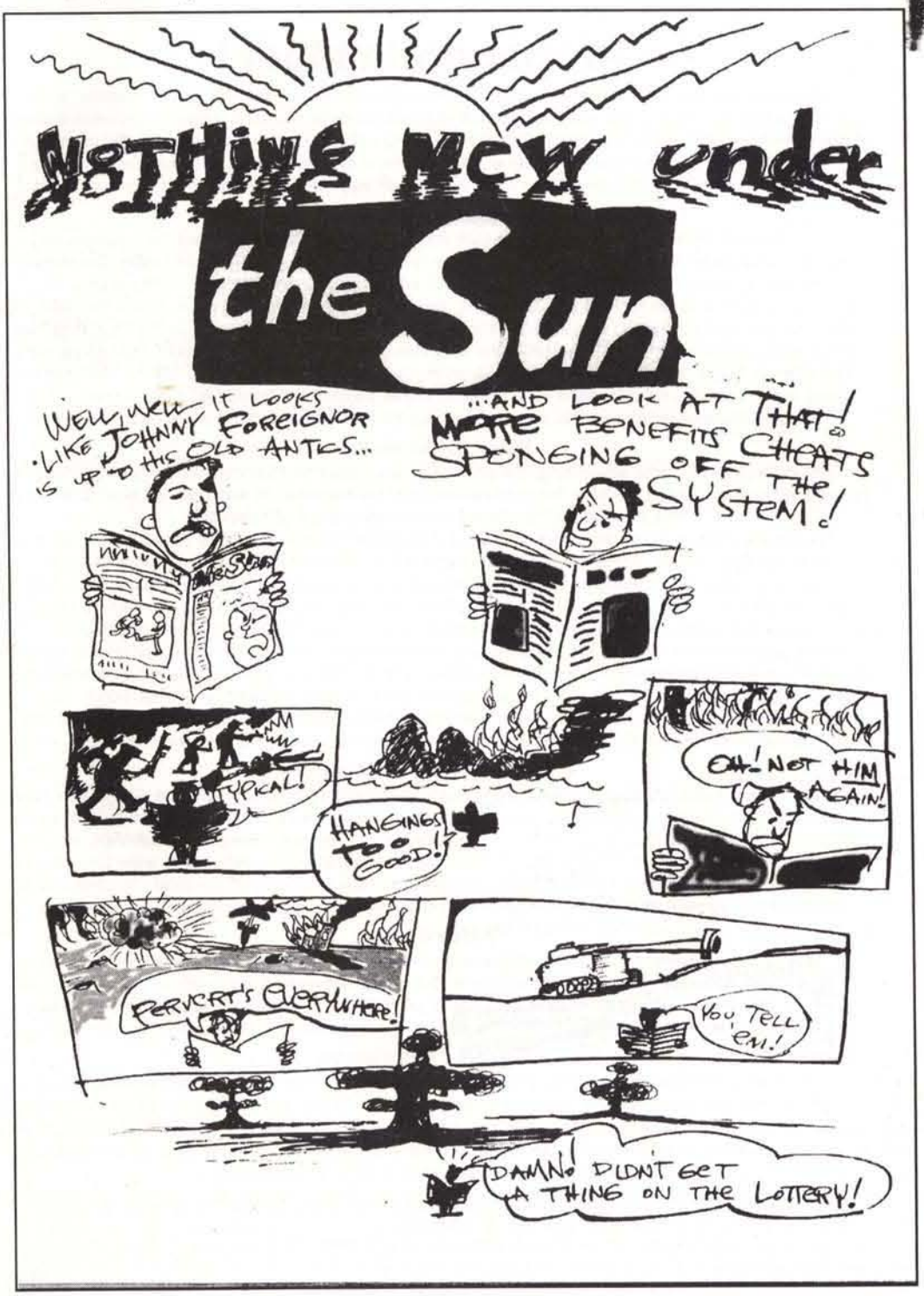
THE Sun THE TRUTH

•Some fans nicked pockets of victims

•Some fans urinated on the brave cops

•Some fans beat up PC giving kiss of life

DI GRIEVES FOR LEE, AGED 14: Pages 2 and 3



The Independent Newspaper suggested the disaster was caused by "the passion which engenders in people who allow excitement to get the better of them". The Daily Post: "The gatecrashers wreaked their fatal havoc" and "this was yobbism at its most base".

It was the Sheffield Star that first reported serious police allegations about behaviour of Liverpool fans attacking rescue workers and robbing the dead, etc. The Sun, Daily Star, Daily Express, Today, Daily Mail, The Times and the Telegraph all unquestioningly featured allegations by South Yorkshire Police Federation, plus anonymous police statements. The headlines of 19th April read: "Dead fans robbed by drunk thugs" (Daily Star), "Vile fans fought us as we tried to help the dying" (Daily Mail), "Police accuse drunken fans - Police saw sick spectacle of pilfering from the dying" (Daily Express), "Police hit back at fans" (The Times), "Liverpool pickpockets pounced on the dead" (Yorkshire Post), "Yobs in sex jibes over girl's corpse" (Sheffield Star), "Heavy drinking amongst fans who besieged ground" (Daily Telegraph).

the MediaBites FAQs

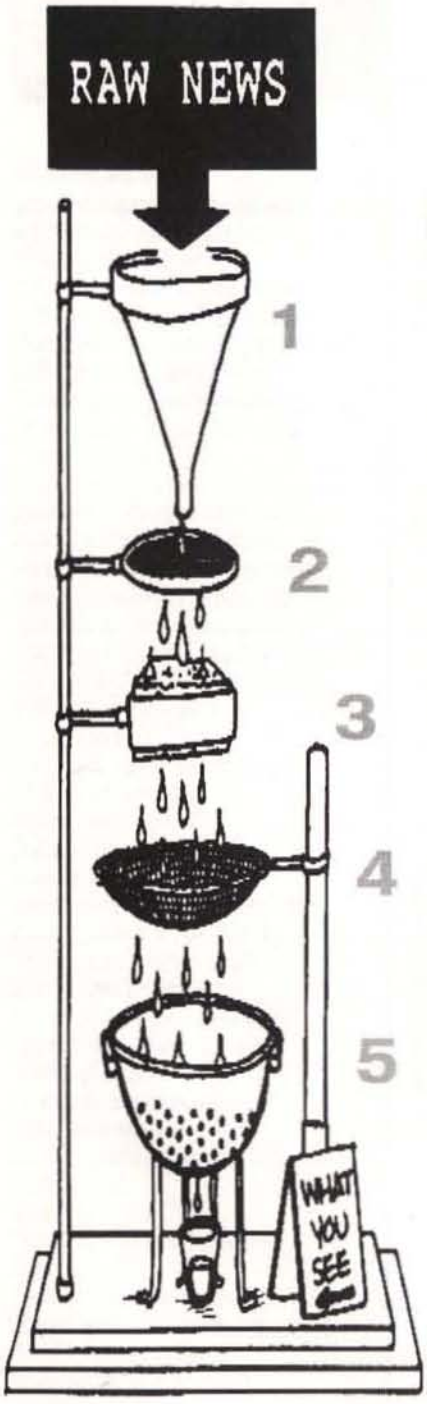
This Issue's FAQs are drawn from 'Chomsky for Beginners'(ISBN 0863 162339) and summarise some ideas Chomsky has developed on media

How many people own the media?

Media ownership is growing increasingly concentrated. In 1982, 50 corporations controlled most of the major media outlets, by 1993, this was down to 20 and dropping. With the rise of the Internet and cable TV, the market has fragmented somewhat, creating a trend toward decentralisation. However, across the western world, the so-called 'free' marketeers -the giant monopolists, are hard at work finding ways to tie up the new media as the technology develops.

How come ownership determines content?

Propaganda is not the media's only function, but it is a large part of it. And, to state the obvious, nothing will appear within the media system that contradicts the purposes of the owners. But how do they do it? After all, if the owners posted signs saying, 'anyone who reports news critical of our Magnificent Corporation or sympathetic to the working class will be fired, shot or imprisoned', even in a society as passive as we have become, a few of us might lose our heads and strongly object. So how do the owners of our media control its content while managing to remain 'invisible'?



Propaganda Model

Chomsky and Herman have sketched out a 'Propaganda Model', describing the 'invisible' forces that ensure that the mass media will play the role of propagandists, transmit biased information instead of news, and do their master's bidding without even being asked. The media merely 'mobilise' support for these special interests that dominate state and private activity through 5 'news filters'. These remove all 'undesirable elements' from ever finding their way into your living room ...or your mind.

Filter 1 - Money

In the early 19th Century, a free press took root in England that represented the interests and identity of working people in a way that had been unknown before but, by mid-century, the small papers had pretty much died out and were replaced by much larger entities. As the market for newspapers grew and the technology developed, the cost of competing also grew, to say the least. In 1837, the cost of establishing a profitable national weekly paper in England was under £1,000, with a break-even circulation of 6,200. By 1867, the estimated start-up costs of a London daily paper was £50,000. In 1920s America, newspaper companies were selling at from £6m to $18m. The cost to enter today's media markets make even these amounts seem like school kids' lunch money. This massive financial requirement is an enormous hurdle for anyone wanting to get 'into' media.

Filter 2 - Advertising

Before the rise of media advertising, the price of a newspaper had to cover its costs of production. But with advertisers to pay the bills, the publication could be marketed at less than the cost to make it. This put papers that do not sell advertising out of business.

Advertising distorts media because it makes a publication accountable to its advertisers more than to its readers. Media with advertising can undercut the price of media without. More revenue increases the ability to compete, to produce, to promote. Also, advertising in publications that cater to the affluent makes more money because the affluent have money to spend. So advertisers avoid publications that represent the interests and support the worldview of the working class because their readers are of modest means. Programmes that raise concerns over environmental or human rights issues that are consequences of the corporate system are not likely to be well-received by advertising-reliant media. Television networks know what will sell to their advertisers and what won't. Big advertisers avoid media outlets who produce anything that creates doubt over the way big business operates or handles disturbing or unpleasant realities that may disrupt the 'buying mood'.

Filter 3 - Information control

Many Government agencies are terrifyingly helpful when it comes to supplying us with media: New Labour is a big investor in producing 'news'. A study done on a major news programme showed a breakdown into categories of the 'experts' who appeared. 40% were Government officials; almost 12% were from conservative think-tanks, 10% from the academic community, 2.5% were consultants, and 4.2% were foreign Government officials. Journalists made up 25.8% of the total. In other words, the 'experts' are recruited from the same official sources that 'leaked' the news in the first place.

Filter 4 - Flak

'Flak' is negative reaction to media statements in the form of letters, phone calls, petitions, legal actions, speaches, and other forms of punitive action. Flak can make it very difficult for an organ of media to function. The capacity to generate flak is proportional to power. The corporate and state bodies generate flak directly, to threaten the media, but they also use agencies to do it for them.

Filter 5 - Evil Empire

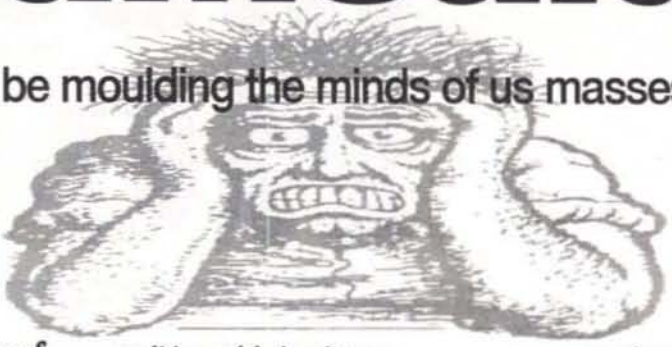
Chomsky calls this anti-communism, but since the Soviet Union fell in 1988, a new symbol of common hatred has been 'needed' by the western powers to fill the gap and to provide an evil empire. Saddam Hussein has certainly partly served this purpose, but a more reliable and malleable image has been that of Islamic fundamentalism, Muslims, or Middle Easterners in general, who are portrayed as rabid extremists and terrorists as a general cultural trait.

The Fantasies they want you to have:

FANTASY 1: Our country is not owned, run, and controlled by a handful of rich people.
FANTASY 2: Our media are not owned, run, and controlled by a handful of rich people.
FANTASY 3 (the most dangerous of all): Our opinions are freely formed, not coerced, conned, or manufactured in accordance with the designs of a handful of rich people.

MindMoulding

Media might be moulding the minds of us masses, but how?



Media is a crucial means of societal information exchange. Information is money and power. Little wonder then, that media is so important to the power bases of capitalism. But what role does media play and how do they 'get away with it'?

We come into a society, with social relations already in place. In adjusting to it, while at the same time, being constantly bombarded with stimuli designed to 'socialise' us, we become largely what this environment makes us. That is to say, our development is influenced to fit society's values. This social conditioning to a large extent determines what we call "public opinion" and, as such, could be said to be the very basis of so-called democracy. To continue, it must be reinforced.

Capitalism requires that we are barred from managing our own affairs and that information is controlled by a specialised class. Meanwhile, an illusion of 'democracy' is portrayed. Our heritage, or culture, consisting of ideas, mores, customs, techniques and social habits passed down through the generations, gives rise to an ideology that perpetuates the very system it arose from.

ideology

Ideology is a belief system, organised around certain values, upon which a particular economic or social order rests. Its function is to represent the status quo as normal. It bolsters the class system, by indoctrinating repressed classes to accept their subordinate position. It projects what are in fact partisan, conservative and specifically capitalist values as true of all times and places, and thus natural, inevitable and unchangeable. Its whole social function can be summed up as a myth, fabricated and manipulated by rulers to dominate the ruled. It is a system of mass misrepresentation that is indispensable if people are to be formed, transformed and equipped to continue the conditions of their existence.

Ideology, therefore, shows how ideas are directly related to the material conditions of society, and how they are an active political force, rather than mere reflections of the world we live in.

Our social environment affects our behaviour, just as our physical environment does. Of course, there is socialisation in all societies. Much is acquired by imitation, persuasion and suggestion, but much is also acquired by conditioning, by the modification and control of behaviour through the social environment. From childhood to death, people are conditioned to believe that the present society is the only form possible, and superior to anything else.

legitimacy

Behavioural responses are built up through experience and outside conditioning. If certain ideas are consistently rewarded they are reinforced, acquiring new significance. Continued reinforcing reduces and eliminates other, random responses. However, should an abrupt or radical change result in previously reinforced responses being no longer appropriate, an increase in random responses follows in a search for what is now appropriate. This is part of the legitimisation process.

'Legitimacy' is notoriously difficult to define, especially in societies that claim to be democratic but function in an authoritarian manner. Fundamentally, it means acceptability by the people, but how is this achieved? In overtly authoritarian regimes, compliance is achieved through fear. In liberal democracies, the methods are far more subtle and sophisticated. Compliance not only subjugates the individual but also ensures that those who control society remain in control. There is a sense of history that ensures conformity to society's values, which are never put forward for reasoned consideration, but are merely indoctrinated into, and internalised by, the individual.

This submission to authority very often occurs in spite of blatant contradictions, by-passing reasoned analysis. To question such implanted ideas and values requires some insight or observation to cause the individual to stop, observe, think and formulate judgements.

deviance

Whereas one person is totally conditioned and succumbs to the bombardment of values of the dominant ideology, another, having acquired some insight from knowledge or experience, may resist. On the whole, though, mores, customs, values and procedures are often so entrenched that those who do question them, in turn bring themselves into question as somehow abnormal and 'deviant'. However, it must also be borne in mind that capitalism, may deliberately foster 'ineffectual deviance' to divert rebellious energy into dead-ends.

The family, school, church, workplace, neighbourhood and, of course, the media, all contribute to this process. The most potent of these influences, the media and the education system are in the hands of the most powerful sections of society. The education system indoctrinates impressionable children in their expected roles, values, morality and perceptions. They are taught their place in the hierarchy ensuring a regimented workforce to produce profits for capitalism. Those who would keep society exactly as it is expect schools to preserve the status quo. This is the hidden curriculum. Independent thought and moral, political and creative imagination are actively discouraged. As a result, when these children become adults, their reasoning ability tends to be restricted by the parameters already set by the system.

Sometimes a person or group may emerge as a threat to social values and ruling class interests. When this happens, all the forces of the establishment are mustered in its defence. Those advocating change are vilified, and have their views distorted; there are reforms to modify demands and thereby regain the initiative without resorting to physical repression; those resisting change

(cont'd on page 24..)

Mogul Rock

The British pop music press used to be fairly easy to designate into its various categories; there were the glossy mags for teenie boppers, the more serious magazines for the middle of the road types and the inkies - papers - for the pop fan who was a bit more serious about their music than the teenie boppers, but less staid in taste than the typical glossy reader. These people (and I was one) were catered for by three weekly tabloid newspapers; Sounds, Melody Maker and New Musical Express.

Of the three of them one is no more; Sounds went bust. The two main indie/alternative orientated papers Melody Maker and NME remained, in the same building owned by the same people, but seemingly at each other's throats. It was not so much a battle of ideology, aesthetics or genre as a battle of floors. As the '90s progressed, the circulation of both these papers began to fall and they began to lose readers and their way. The arrangement had always been nice and comfortable; certain bands were big and still vaguely credible, other bands the labels wanted to be big and were putting money into them. The papers survived off big features on these two, leaving a little space for the enthusiasts amongst the journalists to rabbit on about their passions. The main problem was they never really recovered from the indie/alternative post-punk scene coming out of the shadows and into the bright lights of the mainstream charts or from the onset of the dance scene.

When alternative style music (always a misnomer) became more mainstream, and the daily and weekend papers began to take it more seriously, the inkies began to lose their exclusive access to the market and readership. Then appeared a new breed of monthly glossies led by Vox and Select, who were staffed by almost the same stable of journalists. This coincided with the increasing development of dance music as another major 'alternative' to mainstream pop. The inkies were extremely late to take dance music scene seriously, by which time there had been a whole host of dance music magazine launched. We get to the situation where the music press has expanded greatly in the number of titles, but collapsed in the standard of journalism and range of coverage.

... the music press has expanded greatly in the number of titles, but collapsed in the standard of journalism and range of coverage.

Dance music is covered by a number of usually monthly magazines with titles such as M-8 (Loaded for the repetitive beat generation - not a compliment), Jockey Slut, Muzik, and Wax - my personal favourite for its attempts to not stick half-clad women on every page, its exhaustive but not exhausting reviews, and its sensible approach to wider issues such as Reclaim the Streets, drugs, drinks, star DJ greed and the like. The alternative glossies seem to have stagnated, with Vox being missing presume defunct at the moment. There has been a seeming blossoming in teenie bopper mags, though this is assumed from looking at the shelves in newsagents.

The two remaining inkies seem to be on a headlong slide to oblivion. Melody Maker has abandoned whatever standards of journalism it had and sought a younger readership, though quite why this should tie up with such trite writing I am not sure. The Maker does, however, have one advantage over its stable mate; it is a bit cheaper. I have always had a bias against the smug NME, which seems to fancy itself as a bit intellectual. Whilst it has had some outstanding journalists I always got the feeling that there was an editorial line in which passion for music was seen as a bit suspicious. It was okay to like music, but to get all hot and sweaty about it was just not on. You just knew that half of them had Alan Parsons Project records, and could actually listen to them with out disembowelling themselves to end the terror of the tedium. Despite all this, I still get at least one inkie every week - normally the one with the free CD.

hard pressed

So what is the role of the music press in selling music? Well, frankly, they do not compare to the influence of radio or TV. What the music press would claim to do is allow established bands to communicate in greater depth with their fans and provide a much wider source of information than other media. They also would claim to have a role in hunting out new and exciting talent.

Now, if bands what to communicate with their fans they could put appropriate sleeve notes in their records. Established bands go through the tedium of being interviewed by the music press purely to remind the world that they exist and that their exciting new product is out there. The press regularly claims it uses these big name features to attract readers to attract advertisers to allow it to cover new and exciting music - a claim which is most suspect. The suspicion lingers not because the music press haven't championed new bands, they have done and still occasionally do, but because a lot of these bands are already signed to big labels, or big labels pretending to be little labels. These bands are getting the backing already. It surely isn't a coincidence that these new and exciting bands also seem to have an advertising budget?

When the music press does get excited about new bands who don't appear to have label backing, what do we get? Romo!! Melody Maker's (or rather the admitidedly usually quite reliable Simon Price's) attempt to resurrect and update early eighties new romantic ideals with really shite music. Where is Romo now? (Come to that, where was Romo then?) It did

briefly attract a few fanatical followers, but apart from that it attracted almost universal derision. I just dug out the free tape, Fiddling while Romo burns..., and wow, was it really that bad? With the possible exception of Hollywood's Lights, camera, revolution, which is too silly to be bad...

The sad thing is the music press don't even provide the Romo level of service any more. The Maker is trying to tell us that the only bands that matter are stuffed with teenagers. Otherwise, they are trying to foist Alan 'Cloth Ears' McGee's latest sub-Oasis dirge merchants on us. Oasis are/were a good band, Noel stole well and put together fine and memorable tunes, but the rest of them don't even know who to rob.

those new bands

So, the music press hardly ever breaks new bands. It is almost always the band, then, if they are lucky enough to get signed, the label, that breaks new bands. At best, the press is just one sub-channel. So much is dependent on labels. You won't get on TV or daytime radio without one: Bis on Top of the Pops was a one off. Labels, with the exception of some of the smaller truly independent labels that still struggle to exist, want to make as much money as possible and don't really give a monkeys for the music. They want to sign bands that they can sell hard, and if they don't sell they drop them straight off.

There are now two approaches for a label signing a 'new' band. Firstly, a label signs some obscure band with a mass of hype and big notes advances and the music press dribbles along drinking the free drink and giving the new little darlings big publicity. These bands are frequently shallow reflections of whatever the latest thing was. Thus, Nirvana were followed by a feeding frenzy in which labels sought to sign up any noisy guitar bands who had ever found Seattle on the map. Oasis, as mentioned above, spawned some of the worse sins against music lovers ever. This is all reflected in the music press as they swim wildly with the current, trying to be just one step ahead of those not quite in the know.

Chumbas & Blaggers

The other option, is where big labels wait for bands to work up a following, get themselves established and, when they have proven they can make money, wave the Wonga at them. Thus, bands struggle along for years with barely a hint of press, gathering a lot of friends and supporters by putting out good records and playing live well. Then, all of a sudden, they get snatched up by some big paying label and they are media darlings for a few months. Two examples that spring to mind are Chumbawamba and the Blaggers ITA, both of whom signed to that arch bogeyman of a label, EMI. (though the latter seemed to blow it when they beat up the aforementioned Simon Price). Indeed, EMI seem to like signing 'political' bands - Gang of Four upset a few people when they went to EMI, and New Model Army didn't really upset that many people when they did.

'This lead leads to my manager'

independence?

As to the question of whether it is possible to exist outside all the commercial hooha, well, bands do. Chumbawamba existed for years almost completely ignored by the music press, which, given some of the embarrassing nonsense they are prone to spout in interviews, was probably a good thing. Obviously, now they have gone big label so they are in the swim with the rest and have become legitimate music press material. Other bands remain outside through choice. The Dutch band The Ex have been around for eons with barely a quarter column in the music press, allowing them to get on with their lives not worrying about what will be said, whether they sell more or less record. Of course, the down side is it is bloody hard to find out owt about them.

alternative media

There are alternatives to the music press. In your local Cyber Cafe, you can now pick up information on all manner of obscure bands from all over the worldon the Internet. I had a great time recently chasing down recordings by Bright, a chilled post-rock band from the States. I also tracked down Usura from Spain and stuff coming out on dance labels such as Dust2Dust and Fused and Bruised.

Small labels and bands can develop mailing lists with which to keep those who want to know in touch. Arch-druid, ex-Teardrop Explodes front man and prime candidate for barmpot of Britain Julian Cope regularly sends me postcards of stone circles detailing his latest.. er.. exploits.

fanzines

It's also common for small labels and specialist mail-order type places to send out occasional bulletins. These lead nicely onto fanzines, and fanzine culture is still going strong. There are clearly still plenty of single-minded obsessives producing pages of densely typed waxings on their favourite bands and why every oneelse is crap. Fanzines brought us lots of punk and post-punk in the late seventies, jangle pop in the eighties, riot girl in the nineties. You still get them at some gigs, where tired looking people wander up to you with a stack of folded paper asking for a quid. These are peoples attempts to circumvent the power of the labels and their dominance of the music press. This reflects what happens on wider social issues. Information about environmental issues, strikes, protests and the like are generally not spread through the pages of the Guardian and the Mirror. Instead, information is spread though word of mouth, mailing lists and ad hoc networks, alternative papers and journals and, increasingly, through the Internet.

...the music press swims wildly with the current, trying to be one step ahead of those not quite in the know...

As with the spread of political and social ideas, the use of alternative sources for the spreading of music information falls down in a number of places. The biggest is the range and spread of people you can reach. Not everyone has a computer and very few people go into bookshops and pick up radical newspapers. Likewise, not many people go into obscure little record shops and pick up fanzines. Selling at a gig/demo only reaches the already active/interested.

pressing on

If you want to reach a wider audience is it worth trying to play the mainstream game, and seek to minimise the distortion and twisting that that involves? This does rather bring us back to cosying up to the stinking giant that is Music Inc.

Not exactly. The mainstream have the resources and access to information and breadth that is not available to small low budget alternatives. Music media is, after all, a microcosm of the wider media. It is nearly all owned by the same corporations, who control access to bands and advertising revenue, and so control what goes onto the pages. The journalists are simply journalists - often lazy and ill informed, or at best, know the score with their career, and swallow whatever press releases come their way.

As a consequence, they tend to stifle imagination and variety rather than encourage it. The music press, like the mainstream press, does tolerate the odd spirit of hope, but this is the exception, and in any case, is hope enough?

The reality is that fanzines andvarious non-commercial information networks exist. Alternative media can, is and will develop. Until it does, the corporate mass-media have a strangle hold on information. We need the music press, but to rely on it for all our information on music would be to voluntarily put on the blinkers they have prepared for us.

letters

Send letters to: DA-SF (letters), PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2 4YR.
All letters are welcome but space is always very short. Make yours incisive, brief and questioning if you want it printed.

GE food fads

Dear DA,

Why all the fuss about genetic engineering? In DA8 it was asserted that the use of GE foods is an experiment 'to find out whether they are safe or not'. This ignores the fact that virtually all food in the world today has been 'genetically modified' by millennia of selective breeding. If anything, modern micro-biological techniques, being more precise, could be **safer** than more traditional methods.

Nature itself constantly performs 'genetic experiments' - mutations - totally blindly and recklessly on a far vaster scale than humans are ever likely to. This menace to our existence has been in progress for 3 or 4 billion years now. Do GE opponents propose to put a stop to it?

It's true that GE, like everything else, is in the hands of corporations who put profits before ecological or human safety. But such arguments apply to all agricultural technology, including the much touted organic ones. For instance, your correspondent, PC, urges the use of seaweed as fertiliser. Have they thought through the consequences of its large-scale use? It seems possible to me that the annual removal of millions of tons of this material might have an extremely damaging effect on coastal ecosystems. We don't hear about crops being grown with seaweed being destroyed. I wonder why?

Until GE opponents come up with something like a reasoned scientific case for their attitude, I'm inclined to suspect that it is based on technophobic superstition, not facts and arguments.

In solidarity,

JW

Psychiatry

Dear DA,

I would like to add my sentiments to those of PD (DA8) in requesting more analysis of the role of psychiatry in DA.

I have never seen a psychiatrist, but my general view is that I haven't missed much. I can accept that mental health describes how your brain is functioning, but malfunction is surely impossible to measure? What is the difference between a person having pain and calling themselves sick? Or between a psychiatrist complaining of a person's misbehaviour and calling him sick?

Much of what we call 'mental illness' arises from the fact that people can act as if they were 'sick' (deviate from the norm?), but with no bodily illness. Today, we consider it uncivilised to treat this behaviour as if the person were not ill, so we call them mentally ill. Someone once said that illness is like a defective TV receiver, while mental illness is like an objectionable TV programme. 'Sick' is often used metaphorically - we have 'sick' jokes, 'sick' economies, 'sick' environments, etc. But only when we call minds 'sick' do we mistake the metaphor for fact and send for the doctor.

A person might feel emotionally rough, but they would rarely voluntarily call themselves 'mentally ill' - they would (rightly) view their difficulties as problems in living. In short, illness is the presence of disease; mental illness is the presence of stigmatising labels.

JK

(cont'd from page 21..)

may be portrayed as 'right thinking' and maintaining a sense of social order and propriety.

The media, especially, manipulates information to deliver subliminal and misinforming directives in the guise of news. Language plays a very important role, for, in addition to objectifying reality and acting as the medium of all social communication, language is also the basis of conceptualisation. Now, if false, or emotionally coloured, meanings are given to certain terms, a distorted picture can be presented. In fact, through such use of language, persuasion, distortion, ostracism, gossip, and ridicule can become very powerful community based methods of social control.

"Meaningless statistics were up one-point-five per cent this month over last month"

The technology of TV is ideal for this. It has a captive passive audience who cannot interrupt, and who are 'willingly receptive'. Therefore, it can create 'norms' designed to legitimise the status quo. It is not only news programs that implant ideas and condition responses but 'entertainment' programs too, soaps especially. The stories may be fictional but the situations are perceived as reflecting everyday reality. This is, however, false. They merely stereotype, rather than reflect, life. Those who wield power in society are conscious of what a powerful tool for moulding and manipulating public opinion this is. The media's format of aggression and seduction is designed to mesmerise and captivate the largest possible audience while the state and capitalist corporations hide behind a web of dis-information, laws, censorship, and false explanations.

When we consider the nature of power in modern capitalist society, its ideology and its legitimisation, we can only conclude that people do not get the society they want, but rather the society they have been led to believe they want.

The ideas and beliefs which people have enable the system to persist. This being the case, it becomes imperative to understand the role played by ideology if we are ever to change society. Nevertheless, as human beings, we are rational animals with the ability to question and reason, to seek grounds for belief. It is this that has facilitated our progress. The real social revolution begins in the minds of the people, changing their values, beliefs, perspectives and the way in which they relate to one another. To merely change the structural organisation of society, would simply result in enabling the system to reproduce itself again under another name, creating the same relationships between people as before.

Media Justice?

Feeling powerless? Cynical? Fatalistic? All down to mass media? True, apart from their job as spin doctors in manufacturing consent, the media skilfully distort information to undermine our will to resist exploitation. The desired result is a passive, pessimistic and compliant workforce. And reality?

The way news and current affairs are presented, "restructuring" and downsizing are natural, necessary, even desirable, instead of euphemisms for squeezing working people harder. Higher interest rates, more unemployment and health rationing are all inevitable and unavoidable. Poverty in Britain, if mentioned at all, is confined to an invisible "underclass". Poverty abroad is the result of natural disasters, ethnic conflict or corrupt dictators -never because of massive debt to the rich world or IMF-imposed conditions or proxy wars for western powers.

Free market, low inflation, pay restraint - leave it to the "experts". Just get on and do your bit. The media never question why things have to be this way. Journalists rarely dig below the surface of a story. We are a receiving culture, powerless to influence the "big picture". It's all out of our hands. It's just "the way it is".

That's the message constantly rammed home. You'd think that the social and economic structures we live with have always existed, never changing, natural and immutable. The media employ social Darwinist theories to present the world in a particular way. The message is that rapacious competition is natural, and that we are all too brutal and selfish to be trusted to run our own lives. We need experts to do this for us - politicians, businessmen, scientists, analysts, judges, the police and, of course, journalists.

The media, according to John Pilger in *Hidden Agendas*, employ a *"propaganda of western power whose narcissism, dissembling language and omissions often prevent us from understanding the meaning of contemporary events."* 'Omissions' refers to self-censorship used by journalists who have an unspoken agreement that digging too deep is taboo. As a result, reporting lacks context and history.

In *Inventing Reality*, Michael Parenti writes that journalists *"rarely doubt their own objectivity even as they faithfully echo the established political vocabularies and the prevailing politico-economic orthodoxy. Since they do not cross any forbidden lines, they are not reined in. So they are likely to have no awareness they are on an ideological leash."*

It's not just news and current affairs that back up these feelings of powerlessness. Game shows which humiliate contestants, sneering sitcoms, (sur)'real' crime shows, 'style' magazines of idealised images of men and women, the vacuous drivel of satellite TV - all purvey the narcissism Pilger describes.

Even supposedly serious articles and programmes have their "hidden agenda". Whenever ancient history is discussed, there is an assumption that a strong central authority must have ruled the society. Stonehenge, for instance, could only have been built by a totalitarian tyrant with something approaching mass slavery. Yet, as none of the megalith builders left written records and there are no contemporary accounts, we could interpret the evidence another way. We know that Neolithic people lived in highly sophisticated, agriculturally advanced communities. They must have produced large surpluses of food to be able to free up the great numbers involved in construction work. We know that building went on over large areas of Europe over thousands of years. They shared expertise, information and a culture which was remarkably widespread and enduring. We could also speculate that, as much building material was brought over long distances, there must have been support from many different communities. Maybe the Neolithic monument builders were living in a society where mutual support and communal solidarity were the norm. Yet, the conclusion is so often the opposite. In a recent Channel 4 documentary, *The Lost Civilisation*, the archaeologist goes looking for an "ancient people who were able to *impose* their will over large areas of the earth".

Despite the best efforts of the media to smother us into docile submission, there are plenty of examples of people who refuse to accept the "official" version of how life should be and propose more logical and fair ideas. These aren't high profile ego-driven 'thinkers', they are ordinary intelligent people like you and me, working out how it could be. They are you and me.. ..and DA, this very magazine, specialises in publishing the written results of our work. Meanwhile, Kate Sharpley Library carry on rescuing our hidden history of struggle, and shedding some reality on the past.

Of course, there are plenty of people and publications with their eyes open to the media process. Even some of the commercial media's own touchstones sometimes let in a chink of light. In the United States, where it has reached an advanced stage of Orwellian development, attitude surveys reveal a picture at odds with the accepted view. Overwhelming majorities believe that government is "run for the benefit of the few and special interests, not the people", that the economic system is "inherently unfair", that "business has gained too much power" and so on.

As Noam Chomsky has observed:

"..the sheer resilience of social democratic attitudes is particularly striking in the light of such relentless brainwashing projects on which billions of dollars are spent every year on marketing the 'capitalist story".

(*Index on Censorship*, 3, 1997).

We are a long way from the media's caricature of selfish, greedy people, and this is no revelation. One hundred years ago, Russian anarchist, Peter Kropotkin, published *Mutual Aid*, a scientific study of human and animal development which rebuts the Darwinist belief that human nature is basically selfish. Darwin's ideas dovetail nicely with today's mass media messages about social and economic development. For media darlings, like Richard Dawkins (in the best-selling *The Selfish Gene*) and Melanie Phillips, the rule of nature ensures the survival of the fittest economy in a free market. Phillips, a *Times* journalist and writer for the Social Market Foundation, has argued for a return to "traditional" roles for men and women, using Darwinian influenced psychobabble to support her notions.

Kropotkin argued that co-operation and a "collective sense of justice" is at the heart of human society. It is, and always has been, solidarity and mutual aid which has ensured the growth and vitality of society. What he called "sociability" is the greatest advantage in the struggle for life - in both humans and animals. His studies showed that the general direction of human history was towards liberty, despite what authority might impose.

Further progress is inevitable as society naturally develops towards securing a life of "well-being for all". The real barrier to further progress right now is capitalism and the accompanying drive to ever-higher selfishness, not to mention the Darwinian 'survivalist' nonsense that underpins the more pseudo-theoretical side of it. Media is not some mythical machine co-ordinated by an Orwellian fat controller, it is a reflection of the tacit acceptance of those in the business. They accept the twisted logic of our world, and re-emphasise it continuously.

So, do you think Kropotkin was right? Or hopelessly unrealistic, misguided or naive? I must admit I have my doubts sometimes. It's hard to be as optimistic as Kropotkin. But then, maybe I've been consuming too much media garbage...

Recommended reads:

Hidden Agendas
John Pilger.

Inventing Reality: The Politics of the Mass Media
Michael Parenti

Mutual Aid
Peter Kropotkin

Britain's Media - How They Are Related

Granville Williams. Campaign of Press & Broadcasting Freedom. 1996. 92pp £8.99. ISBN 1898 240043.

Investigating links and overlaps among owners and controllers of the media can throw necessary light on their various deals, lobbying and political machinations. Men like Rupert Murdoch, Silvio Berlusconi (former Italian Prime Minister and leader of Forza Italia Party) and Michael Eisner (Walt Disney Corp) wields enormous power both overtly and covertly, both as media barons and, in some cases, high profile politicians.

Williams exposes the tremendous power these men and corporations are able to exert on governments, and also how they are able to influence people. The power of the media is growing, and it is less and less subject to control of anyone, including the state. No-one is able to effectively contest their power. However, in spite of everything, radical ideas do circulate in modern society, even if by word of mouth. Small circulation media like DA face a gigantic task getting a word in edgeways.

Williams outlines 2 theories of what should be the function and role of the mass media. One is the usual market-lassez faire view, where readers and viewers become consumers, and where information becomes "infotainment". The other point of view sees the media as a liberating force, which should be working for human progress. This viewpoint has lost ground recently, and is latent in the book. It is firmly linked to social democracy, that is to say, a commitment to full employment and economic growth to underpin the health and welfare services. The state would intervene in the market for the public good, through public industries, quangos and state bodies. This definition of social democracy has been swept aside by he likes of Blair and Co. Consequently, no-one with any power now contradicts the advocates of market forces, in the present political climate.

In his final chapter, Williams presents "policies for a democratic media", which would, if enacted, require the active support of a radical social democratic government. All this, of course, leaves us nowhere, because it is not going to happen. In fact, presently, they are utopian.

We have a problem. What is to be done? The only way forward is that we have to look at radical alternatives which do not rely on 'Old Labour' style social democracy. It is a long haul, but my utopian scheme stands more chance than a return to 'Old Labour' social democracy. We need more grassroots community magazines, and a further investigation of the potential for new forms of media like the Internet, to escape from the stranglehold of the media tycoons.

State regulated press is no better than the current market based one. Arguing for monitoring or regulation leads nowhere. We need our own press and media.

Seizing the Airwaves: a free radio handbook

Ron Sakolsky & Stephen Dunifer (eds.)
AK Press, Edinburgh/San Francisco, 1998,
ISBN 1 873176 99 6, £8.95

I always pick this kind of book up with a degree of fear. Will it be a bunch of isolated no hopers who reckon that 'libertarian' radio is going to rid us of capitalism and the state? Whatever you might think about the power of radio waves, this book is a long chalk from that.

US based, the variety of essays here is truly fascinating and, far from being pie in the sky, they actually represent real things going on and real possibilities for resistance. Accompanied by original graphics, each chapter is free standing and focuses on a different aspect. A snappy introduction by the two editors frames what is to come and pulls it together.

The book combines stories on black activist radio, the history of radio and air wave regulation by corporate interests. It even has an interview with an Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) radio station. With this book, you really get a sense of the importance of radio to very diverse communities, whether they are workers' groups, Latinos or other oppressed groups. With titles like 'If you can't communicate, you can't organize, and if you can't organize, you can't fight back', or 'We have to make sure the voiceless have a voice', there's plenty for all here. My only criticism is that the book is overwhelmingly focused on America and the American reader. Whatever the focus, however, there's a lot of lessons to be learned. Our claims are many and freedom to use the air waves is one of them. This book shows how empowering that can be.

Shattered - Spot the Poet

AK Press, 1994. ISBN 1 873176 58 9

Kissing it all - Steve Pottinger

AK Press, 1996. ISBN 1873176 32 5

Poetry. No, come back, please. I promise it's not any of mine. 'Alternative' poetry has had a rough press and is much frowned on (or maybe it was just my poetry?). Anyway, these two books are collections from what I am assuming to be the same person, first clue is the best poem in Shattered, 'Thailand', appears on More Talk Less Rock spoken word compilation from AK under the name of Steve Pottinger (see DA6 for review). Generally, *Shattered* suffers in comparison to the later *Kissing it all*. Both address more or less the same topics of friends on glue, drugs and no hope, life with no future and not much present. Neither book is jolly, though there is some humour here. *Kissing it all* is arguably a much more accomplished book, the content shows consistently more quality control, more thought - in sum, more experience. Its all in lower case - ee cummings style, which must make it easier to type (unless like me, your computer automatically puts in capitals after full stops - bloody annoying that). Anyway, here is a short piece, just as a taster (I know poetry is banned from DA, but what the hell):

euro96 (Pottinger)
somewhere someone's playing football.
the dss office queue is long.
the fat girl in front of me screams
at her small child
I think it is because she can.
someone leaves.
we all take one step forward.

there is, I understand,
much talk of a feelgood factor.

Hank Dogs "Bareback"

CD, Hannibal HNCD1413

When I first saw the Hank Dogs, they were singing a version of Woody Guthrie's "This Land" with the words changed. This distinctly non-nuclear family from the badlands of South London have crafted a haunting record of harmonies and unlikely subjects. My personal favourite has to be "18 Dogs", a tale which draws heavily on country motifs but with a grit missing from most contemporary American country.

..have you ever heard a country band singing about ghosts being paid for sex?

From the song titles and the tree-hugging inside cover, you could be forgiven for thinking that this is a bit of a new age record. But pass it by and you'd be missing out on some fine acoustic songs. The country undertones are there most of the time, but there's more. I mean, have you ever heard a country band singing about ghosts being paid for sex?

Before Writing

Gunter Kress. Routledge. ISBN 0 415 138051. £13.99.

This book is a trumpet blast for a radical change in education. Kress defines school as a place where teachers insist that the world can only be known through the abstractions of written language. The book shows in many ways how children express and exchange meaning, possibly on their way to full literacy. Basically, he argues that education should pay more attention to these exchanges, because the societies of children's future will use other methods of communication and technology other than written texts. It's a book that certainly makes you think. But, hang on, where did I leave that book now? On the desk or on the TV set? Whatever, I've always thought that 'word of mouth' is an underestimated means of education and propaganda. Maybe someone at home will pick it up and leaf through it, perhaps the TV will stay off one night this week...

Wag the Dog

Entertainment

Now out on video, Wag the Dog may not be the only Hollywood attempt to cash in on the 'caught with his trousers down' story of the year (or is it years now?), but it has to be up there in the cynicism stakes. Robert De Niro and Dustin Hoffman bodge through spinning and variously deflecting a 'Pres & girl scouts' scandal. That's about it for storyline, but the best thing about the script is the unmistakable message that you can't trust anything politicians say. More particularly, anyone who wants and can afford to get elected to high office in the US is definitively related to that greenish film you get on the surface of a stagnant pond.

the best thing about the script is the unmistakable message that you can't trust anything politicians say

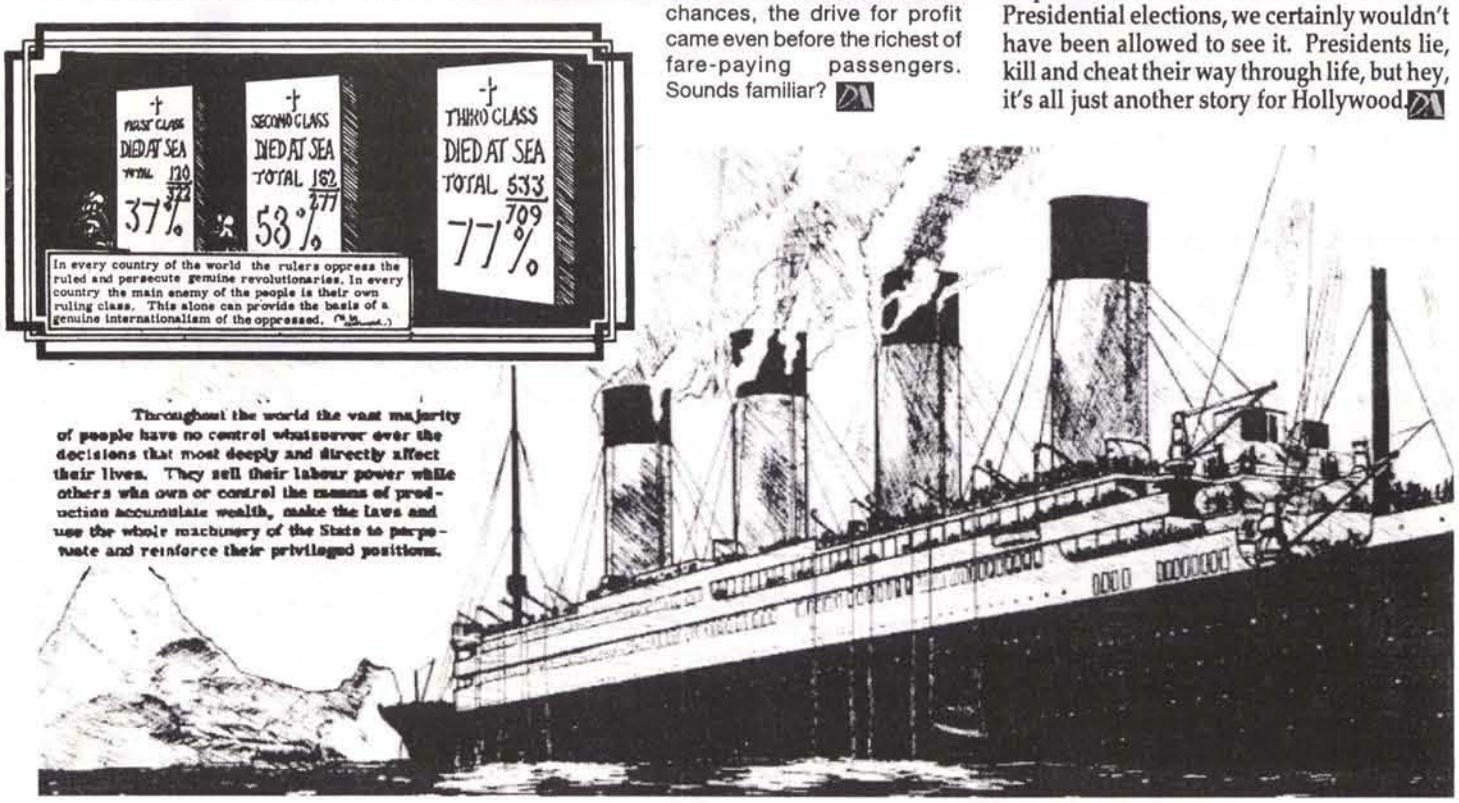
The perennial weakness of the film is that it never gets beyond cynicism. Worse still, there is an implicit assumption that the American public could be distracted from the Presidential philandering by a political media machine combined with fictional war in Albania - as if carnage in some out of the way place could possibly upstage such a story. Of course, Wag the Dog was prophetic as it was out for months before Clinton actually did bomb Afghanistan and Sudan (and Iraq, again...).

Maybe the saddest thing about Wag the Dog is that cynicism gets you nowhere - if this film had any hope of making people think again before voting for the most impressive media circus in the 2000 Presidential elections, we certainly wouldn't have been allowed to see it. Presidents lie, kill and cheat their way through life, but hey, it's all just another story for Hollywood.

Instead of a Review...

Cameron's Titanic, now out on Video, needs no plugging - it has been the most hyped and highest grossing film in Cinema history. It has taken $1,800,000,000 at the box office alone. The real story is that class helped determine whether you survived or not and that, 86 years on, nothing's changed in this respect.

Interest in this most legendary of ocean disasters remains high, it is a shame that this is fed with a tacky storyline. More relevant is the reality that stokers had been fighting coal shute fires below decks for weeks, as the rich ordered their caviar 5 decks above. The fires had not stopped the Titanic getting a certificate of sea worthiness, and they continued until they were finally extinguished just days before the collission with the iceberg - by which time a patch of the steel hull had turned weak and brittle from the heat. Clearly, while class determined your survival chances, the drive for profit came even before the richest of fare-paying passengers. Sounds familiar?



Get a life

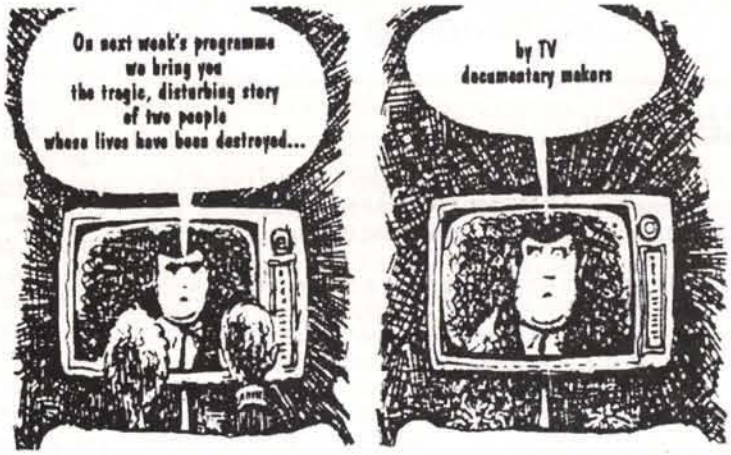
Get a Life! The Little Red Book of The White Dot.
The Society of the White Dot
£12.99, Bloomsbury
The Society of the White Dot: WWW.Whitedot.org

We all from time to time feel we may be watching too much telly, but why? Obviously, somewhere along the line, there is a sense that TV is getting in the way of things, preventing us from getting on with the things we either ought to be doing or feel we should be doing. TV can often take precedence over everything, it doesn't control our minds (though we should mind the control). Just turn it off, detractors of the box tell us, but the switch seems hard to find.

I recently gave up watching telly. Not for any other reason than I watched too much of the damn thing; the pattern is familiar: after coming in from work, once washed, changed and fed, two to four hours sat in front of the box. As years go by, who can't feel regret for not filling the gaps with something other than TV? The statistics are scary - as statistics are meant to be. The average person will watch four hours a day and ten years in total in a lifetime. Okay, so everything accumulates and no one wishes to be faced with a sum total of everything they do. I suppose I could have had a fortnight in Blackpool with the accumulated time I spend masturbating.

Granted, giving up telly is extreme, even odd. And I'd be the first to admit they show some good stuff. For someone like myself, watching television after a hard day's work could be explained away by having no money or energy. So when I gave my box of troubles to some poor sap, those four hours each night had to be replaced with something, the problem was what? Withdrawal isn't fun. At first, I went through a smug period, however this was brief and very quickly replaced with disbelief that I could ever feel smug over an act of apparent madness. Then lots of boredom, then finally action. Freedom doesn't come easy. If you're bored, the best thing is to look for something interesting to do, the worst thing to do is to turn on the TV.

The Society of the White Dot are trendy anti-television propagandists who like to portray television as a narcotic. Some people dabble, others are hardened users, gnarled sixty-something's blowing their retirement money on a bigger and better screen. Without looking too deeply into its more insidious side, TV can be a good or bad waste of time. It may be only four hours a day wasted, but think of the other eight wasted for most workers. Somewhere along the lines is a happy medium, it's whether you can control it or not. This ex-viewer can't and, with wrists like mine, I can arm-wrestle over the off-switch.



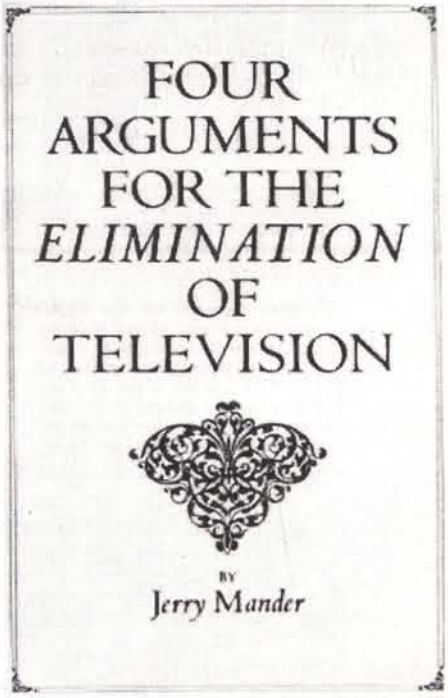
Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television

Jerry Mander. ISBN 0688 082742. Quill, New York. £8.95

Mander stresses that 15 years in advertising strengthens his argument, since he was once dazzled by the power of the media, and then grew horrified of it. He likens the prospect of reforming TV for useful purposes "as absurd as speaking of the reform of a technology such as guns". Indeed, the text is littered with pseudo-military and monster-like terminology, not to mention a healthy dose of mind-control paranoia.

The core of the problem with the book is that it is basically composed of anecdotal commentary, which, though readable, is presented in a way which is presumably supposed to be somehow 'scientifically' valid and, therefore, all the more convincing. However, I should concede here that the book is 20 years old now, and there were quite a few such pseudo-science books in the late 70's as I remember. If, like me, you are *already* paranoid about and readily hate (but still watch) TV, then it reads OK and it will probably deepen your views (and your paradox). Maybe 20 years has brought me to the point where I can only concentrate for a single sound-bite at a time, but anyway, *Four Arguments* is a chunky volume and it wasn't devoured in a single session. Still, it is nicely divided and subdivided into bite-size bits so it can be left on the coffee table for occasional dipping purposes (between soap operas, perhaps?)

So, what of these four arguments, then? Well, basically, they are: 1 - It alienates us from and creates false boundaries to how we see the world; 2 - The state/external control and commodity/need creation thing; 3 - It causes psychological and physical health effects (it suppresses natural behaviour, hypnotises and generally makes you unwell); 4 - It is only effective at transmitting highlighted blasts of detached information - in other words, by its technological nature, all TV is the worst sort of advertising. This summary does a gross injustice to the author's almost 400 pages (incl. references..), but it's the best I can muster in a sentence. In short, I gleaned numerous facts and anecdotes, which I use whenever I am trying to recruit others to my homespun TV-paranoia. If you want to strengthen your arsenal of anti-TV weapons too, look no further.



Sojourner Truth: A life, a symbol.

Nell Irvin Painter.
ISBN 0 393 02739 2. Norton&Co., NY/London. £21.

OK, prepare yourself for gushing eulogy on the subject of this stunningly detailed biography.

The woman who was to become Sojourner Truth was born Isabella on the estate of a Dutch slave owner in Hurley, New York state, around 1797. Her father had been taken from the Gold Coast, Africa, and her mother had twelve children, all but two of whom were sold to other plantations. Isabella was herself sold at the age of nine to another plantation. She was torn from her parents, only able to speak Dutch and sold to English-speaking farmers near Kingston, New York. She later married another slave called Thomas, and had five children.

New York state passed an emancipation law which came into effect on 4 July 1827, when Isabella was thirty years old. However, her owner, John Dumont of New Paltz, thought that he was entitled to another year of her service. Isabella, of course, did not share this opinion and one day took off with her younger child. She found refuge with a family of Quakers.

When her son Peter was five, he was illegally seized and sold to a slave owner in Alabama. Isabella fought the authorities to regain her son. However, the authorities did not seem to understand all the fuss being made over a black slave child. Eventually, despite the authorities' stance, she won back her son Peter. It was during these hard battles that she felt the strength that was in her. She was now free and she went to New York with Peter. Isabella's experiences in New York were not happy. "Truly", she said, "here the rich rob the poor, and the poor rob the poor".

One day, in 1843, she collected up her things and said good-bye to the woman she worked for and headed out into the country to preach her new message - battling for her people's freedom. She carried a white satin banner which had the inscription "Proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof". Whenever she set up her banner large crowds gathered to hear her message.

During the 1850s, Sojourner Truth, as she was now called, held a series of abolitionist meetings in the north of Ohio. At one meeting, a white man stormed up to the platform and said "Old woman, do you think that your talk of slavery does any good? Why, I don't care for your talk any more than I do for the bite of a flea". "Perhaps not", she answered, "but the Lord willing, I'll keep scratching". This woman, born to slavery, with little or no education, was a formidable opponent in argument. Parker Pillsbury, another abolitionist, said "I was much in her company for several years in the anti-slavery conflict, and often seen her engaged in what seemed to be unequal combat with the defenders of slavery and foes of freedom; but I never saw her when she did not scatter her enemies with dismay and confusion".

THE ZONG. Captain Collingwood of the Liverpool slave ship *The Zong* threw 132 live slaves overboard in three days. He said it was an act of mercy because disease had broken out on the ship and there was no more water on board. But he really did it because he thought the insurance money would be worth more than the sick slaves. When the insurance company refused to pay, Granville Sharp wanted the captain tried for murder. He failed to bring the case to court, but the captain's action shocked many people's consciences.

SOJOURNER TRUTH
A Life, A Symbol
NELL IRVIN PAINTER

Sojouner Truth is an amazing character. This book has inspired me to read about her further. I particularly admire the way she linked the questions of slavery and abolition to that of women's rights: *"I think that 'twixt the Negroes of the South and the women at the North all a-talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon".*

She continues in this vein: *"That man over there say that women needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever help me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me any best place, and aren't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me - and aren't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man (when I could get it), and bear the lash as well - and aren't I a woman? I have borne five children and seen them most all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a woman's grief, none but Jesus heard - and aren't I a woman?"*

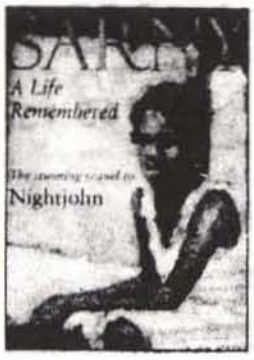
Sojourner Truth is a powerful testimony to the strength and nobility of the human spirit. Her devastating critique of slavery and injustice springs fully from her own experience. Born a slave, she could give true witness to the luring reality of the system. She turned her cruelly abused childhood into the foundation stone of a campaign against slavery, inequality and injustice. The fact she was flogged from childhood gives fullest meaning to her later words *"and now, when I hear them talk of whipping women on the bare flesh, it makes my flesh crawl".*

Sojourner's passion for life and freedom is deeply moving, and in so far as I have heroes, she is one of them.

Sarny: a life remembered

Gary Paulsen. Macmillan Press. £3.99

Based on the real experience of slavery, this book is written as a first-person account by a slave. It is a sequel to *Nightjohn*, which has been re-issued recently, and it provides a graphic description of the lives, trials and tribulations of slaves in the 'Deep South' at the time of the American Civil War.

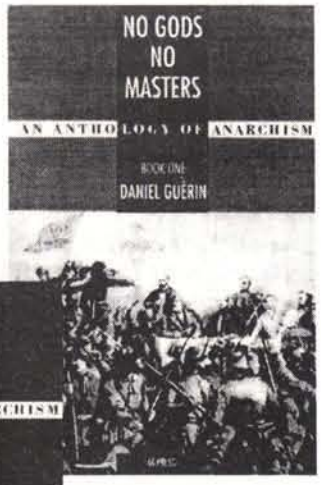


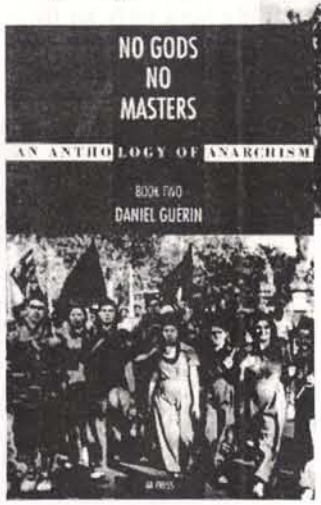
The protagonist, Sarny, sees what seemed to be an unchallengeable system beginning to break down. Her cruel owner is killed and she sets out on her journey from slavery. She has a mission, firstly, to rescue her own children who had been sold to another slave owner. Here, the book seems to be drawing on the experiences of Sojourner Truth (see above), but it was no doubt a common fate of slave families.

Sarny also has the long-term aim of bringing literacy to the freed slaves. The book is aimed at the 11+ age group, and it tells in a moving and powerful manner the terrible and cruel nature of slavery, which, lamentably, still pervades much of the world today.

No Gods, No Masters: An anthology of anarchism.

Daniel Guérin. 2 Vols. ISBN's 1 873176 64 3 & 1 873176 69 4. AK Press. 1998. £11.95 each





These two volumes are a translation of the French anarchist Daniel Guérin's large anthology of anarchist figures, theories and activists. It appears here in English for the first time, long after several of his other works, e.g. *Fascism and Big Business*, and *Anarchism: from theory to practice*. Guérin's anthology is an extensive survey of most of those anarchists and libertarians that we might expect to see in such a book. The first volume begins with a short foreword by Guérin on the origins of the use of 'no gods, no masters', which goes back to a group of activists of the nineteenth century, including Auguste Blanqui, Kropotkin and Faure, and has more or less been in the anarchist vocabulary since.

Guérin groups together in this first volume writings on and by Max Stirner, renowned for his individualism (some would say he was not an anarchist at all; Guérin seems to agree and calls him a 'forebear'), Proudhon, Bakunin, Cesar de Paepe, James Guillaume, and Kropotkin. Most of Guérin's selection is fairly standard anarchist material, such as Bakunin's 'God and the State', Proudhon's 'Property is Theft', which is fine as far as it goes. Volume two is a bit more exciting, as it reproduces some of Malatesta's writings, Makhno's writing on the Russian revolution, even some of Durruti's speeches from the Spanish Civil War. There are also a few relatively unknown anarchists who pop up in this volume such as Emile Henry, a French anarchist terrorist.

If you like this kind of anthology, where you can open it up on almost any page and finds something that grabs your attention, then that's fine. But, in some ways, I was disappointed by the two volumes. They are not particularly accessible to someone who is just beginning to explore anarchist ideas or even to those who have read a fair amount. Usually, there is no introduction to each writer. Cesar de Paepe, for example, has no biography attached, even Bakunin does not. You might say that's up to Guérin (who is now dead), but the whole reads strangely from another time and place. It's up to the publisher to commission a really good introductory essay, framing all the writers in the book, making them accessible, and suggesting further reading. With Guérin's anthology you just land in it with no map to find yourself around. The translator, of course, could have provided some sort of prologue, and it's odd that he hasn't.

Overall verdict: nicely produced, good selection of anarchist material, especially important new unpublished material, but inaccessible and, for the nineties, a bit outdated. Why doesn't AK commission some more up to date writing on anarchist theory and practice?

CARF

No. 46, Oct-Nov 1998.
80p bi-monthly. ISSN 0966 1050
Sub £7.50 to:
BM Box 8784,
London WC1N 3XX

CARF is a left independent anti-racist magazine. It concentrates on reporting resistance against racism and has been going for a good long time (since 1977, in fact). The remit spans violence, fascism, Police harassment, racist legislation and anti-immigration/asylum/refugees, etc...

This particular issue has a spread on media, particularly focusing on the use of the Internet and mainstream negative images of black people. It also has excellent short articles on new anti-terrorism legislation, the need for (and accounts of) direct action against tightening immigration laws across Europe, and the usual campaign reports, including a piece on the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry.

While it isn't a chunky bi-monthly (16 A4 pp), it is well-researched, well-written, and packed with info. Highly recommended for anyone wanting to keep up with state and other racism and the resistance to it; there are also contacts for when you want to get involved further.

So, don't expect lengthy analytical 4-course marathons with side orders of rhetoric and dogma; do expect accessible, bite-size snacks interspersed with full but easily digestible helpings of critique and commentary. Well worth it.

Pro-Worker Voice

ITUN Secretariat,GEFONT, PO BOX 10652, Kathmandu, Nepal. June 1998.
e-mail: gefont@mos.com.np

Pro-Worker Voice is subtitled the "Annual Publication of the ITUN Secretariat, Kathmandu, Nepal". The ITUN is the International Trade Union Network, established by an international conference in 1994 in Kathmandu, hosted by the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT), who now co-ordinate the secretariat. The conference agreed the "Kathmandu Declaration", which apart from a few words in support of the Nepalese Communist Party's success in the 1994 elections, is one I would largely agree with. There is an editorial called "Think Globally, Act Locally" from GEFONT, which talks about their efforts to oppose privatisation, positing globalisation of solidarity against global domination of capital. Other highlights include reports from May Day rallies around the world.

The ITUN brings together many militant and syndicalist unions in the Asian region, which is important. That said, parts of Pro-Worker Voice are disappointing, particularly what amounts to Stalinist apologia in articles on China and Vietnam. China is referred to as a 'Socialist Market Economy'; Blair-speak if ever I heard it. East-west tensions referred to in a further article on Hong Kong's unions post-unification are not between capitalism and socialism, but between two rival powers asserting their regional dominance. Worse still is an article by Do Duc Ngo, of the Vietnamese General Confederation of Labour, which baldly states "the reality of ten years renovation in Vietnam shows that market economy does not stand in opposition to socialism, especially for countries which are in transition to socialism". That might be true if you define socialism as 'rule by people who claim to be socialists', but is patently untrue if you define it as anything to do with workers' control of production. The advocates of such 'market socialism' are totally opposed to a society which combines personal freedom with economic well-being, under the control of all.

Nevertheless, Pro-Worker Voice does shed light activism we hear little of in the west. Despite the differences, it suggests to me that anarcho-syndicalists in the west could usefully engage with fighting unions like GEFONT, KCTU (S. Korea), KMU (from the Philippines) and the Garment Workers in Bangladesh. Maybe we can both learn from each other and work together on certain projects.

On the Slide

The next 10 years will see major global economic change. We will witness the passing into history of late 20th Century 'rampant' market economics. In its place, there are signs of a more cautious capitalism emerging. To make sense of it all, just look back...

For the last 25 years, the word inflation has become part of our every day lives. The need to control inflation has been the number one policy aim of western governments and the central economic message put out by the media. But all is about to change.

Already, a new word is starting to creep into the politicians and media's vocabulary; deflation. As growing concern about deflation turns to economic reality, we will all pay the price. And the real solutions lie well beyond the grasp of the current hierarchy.

Even the prospect of mild deflation is alarming. The reality is that, despite the current western powers' obsession with inflation, economies can function quite happily with low inflation. Up until Thatcher, post war governments argued that inflation at around 6% or less was a price well worth paying in return for the prospect of full employment. Deflation however, is a totally different animal. Should prices begin steadily falling for any length of time, capitalism is headed in only one direction - a downward recessionary spiral.

Recession might hold some passing attraction - the prospect of seeing sweaty stockmarketeers in blind panic as their money mountains shrink. But as the squeeze sets in, any pain they feel will be nothing compared to what the rest of us will be forced to bear.

To see how this situation has come about, it is necessary to first outline a couple of fundamentals. Firstly, left to its own devices, the free market has always been prone to deflation. It is the result of oversupply of goods - or, if you prefer, inadequate demand resulting from overproduction. The worst case of deflation recession in capitalist history was the depression of the 1930's.

Secondly, as prolonged recession sets in, our leaders, currently still besotted with free market theories, have no answer or cure. According to free market orthodoxy, 1930's style stagnation should never happen. Free market theory holds that the market is self-regulating. Should unemployment rise, wages will fall, so profits will rise, so capitalists will start employing people again. The same theory applies to all aspects of human endeavour in free market theory. Price falls, demand rises. It's all so beautifully simple.

The slightly less simple fact is that market theory has little to do with how the economy operates in reality. The theory states that supply will always equal demand - that purchasing power will always equal the amount society produces. The basis for this is a quaint Victorian picture-book image of capitalism. Since capitalists only produce in order to purchase other goods, so people only sell things in order to buy something else. Follow this line, and you find that an increase in supply must always be associated with a rise in demand. Capitalists always use their profits gained from increased production to buy more goods. Supply creates its own demand and so the economy will always be in balance. The role of money in this orthodox free market theory is therefore pretty limited.

should the capitalist feel that investing his or her money is not a good bet right now, they are at liberty to go and place their wealth in a box under the mattress

reality bites

Putting the picture-book aside for a moment to take a quick glance at reality, and things soon start to go amiss with the theory. Let us just suppose (and this may be hard to comprehend) that the main aim of the capitalist is not to make goods but to make money. Immediately, a wheel falls off. Capitalists have money, which they invest to turn into more money in the form of profit. Demand no longer necessarily equals supply. In other words, should the capitalist feel that investing his or her money is not a good bet right now, they are at liberty to go and place their wealth in a box under the mattress. In doing so, they are taking demand out of the economy (at risk of labouring the point, the balance of money being spent on goods with money spent on production is lost).

Once demand starts to slip, prices start to fall. This trend is bound to be detected sooner or later by other capitalists, who will also start storing their money under the bed. They therefore cause prices to fall further. Less investment means less profit, so capitalists squeeze the people who do the work. Lay-offs result, and less wage packets means demand for goods falls further. At this point, it becomes

obvious that worry about the future causes people (consumers, capitalists, etc.) to act in a totally different way than free market theory predicts. As prices fall, instead of buying more, people buy less. Not surprisingly, as the clouds gather, they put money aside for a rainy day.

As profits fall and gloom rises, the banks panic and start to call in debts. They are quite happy to lend money when they know they are guaranteed a fat profit, but why should they take the pain in the bad times? The banks thus add to the downward spiral as sure as night follows day. Depression is an inevitable result of belief in faulty free market theory or, more cynically, starting to really believe in your own rhetoric.

insert more money

This gloomy sequence of events is what happened in the 1930s, and the free market had no effective means of getting the economy moving again, beyond cutting interest rates. It was this catastrophic failure of the free market that paved the way for John Maynard Keynes' theory of demand management. He argued that, far from being self-regulating, capitalism could get stuck in permanent recession. To prevent this, the state should intervene to stimulate the economy, for example, through public works programmes that would create employment, raise wages, and so create demand. This would increase profits and the capitalist would begin to invest again.

Keynesian economics remained influential amongst successive post-war western governments. After the poverty of the depression and the horrors of the war, western government used as a rallying cry the idea that the state would regulate the economy to ensure full employment. There would be no return to the free market polices of the pre 1930s.

Until the 1970s that is, when spiralling inflation and rising unemployment began to cause panic among western elites. Keynesian demand management met its match in "stagflation" - the phenomena of rising prices and rising unemployment. State-priming demand when prices are falling is one thing, but to try it when prices are rising simply hikes inflation up further.

We were back to the 'trickle down' economy of the pre-1930's. And we simultaneously arrived at the "fuck you" society.

insert less money

Enter Milton Friedman, with the idea that state intervention is the cause of all our ills. He argued that state intervention could not control long-term unemployment, and attempts to do so caused inflation. The solution was to control public spending, to ensure the supply of money in the economy matched the wealth it created, thus preventing inflation from occurring. Low inflation became the state's new number one priority. Monetarism was born.

Friedman's arguments were very seductive to free market capitalists in Britain and the US, who had long held a deep mistrust of the state. Indeed, in reality, Friedman simply recycled free market thinking. He argued that a 'natural' rate of unemployment existed in every economy - roughly the point at which wages fell so low that workers refused to enter the labour market. State attempts to lower unemployment below this natural rate caused inflation. In a nutshell; state invests; demand is stimulated; prices rise; profits rise; unemployment falls; wage demands rise; wages rise; profits fall; unemployment rises. Result; unemployment dips but quickly returns to previous level; but prices have risen in the process. As the cycles of state action to reduce unemployment continue, unemployment stays the same and prices go up and up.

The seduction of monetarism to free market capitalists was the logic of how unemployment could be reduced permanently. Higher productivity. This could only be achieved by higher skills or by lowering the level of the lowest wages at which workers were willing to work. It was the latter which was so attractive. To do it, they simply had to reduce social welfare benefits, remove regulations protecting wages and conditions in labour markets, and break the bargaining power of the trade unions.

game over

As inflation spiralled out of control in mid-70s Britain, first the Callaghan government abandoned Keynes, and then, with much more conviction, the free market zealot Thatcher pounced on monetarism. Friedman had a theory that allowed the Keynesian state-interventionist model, with its left wing undertones, to be abandoned with a clear capitalist conscience. From now on, rather than borrowing money to stimulate demand, the state would cut public spending to control inflation. Unemployment - the key to market 'efficiency' - would be tackled by supply side measures. Basically, through forcing workers to work for less.

Again, reality was quick to bite, and monetarist theory fell apart. Thatcher's government had to resort to ever-higher levels of unemployment to squeeze demand out of the economy, in order to control inflation. Nevertheless, right wing leaders in Britain and the US stuck to rigid monetarist policies. Unemployment became the price worth paying to deal with inflation. Jobs became scarce. This also provided an opportunity to launch a pre-meditated attack on trade union power. Rapid deregulation saw the little protection there was for workers stripped away. Welfare was slashed. Now the free market beast would be allowed to function properly. Low wages would be fought over by the workforce, unable to refuse to accept any paid work.

behind the logic

It is important to note amongst all this apparently economic capitalist logic that political ideology was an ever-present driving force. As a low-pay economy began delivering profits and low inflation to capitalists, Thatcher launched a personal and ideological onslaught. It became good to be greedy. After all, greed created wealth, to the benefit of the economy. We were back to the 'trickle down' economy of the pre-1930's. And we simultaneously arrived at the "fuck you" society.

The right wing backlash began to penetrate all aspects of daily life. The women's place was in the home, sexual freedom somehow caused crime, and family values should be brought back.

As recession and stagflation gave way to growth and low inflation, the right became triumphant. Falling unemployment in the US was increasingly compared with mainland Europe, where unemployment remained high. If only Europe would cut social security and deregulate the labour force, Europe's unemployed would also be able to find work at $2.50 an hour. It was even argued by the more enthused monetarists that capitalism's structural tendency to 'boom and bust' had been solved. It was as if the 1930's depression (which had come about when economies were based on free market theory and society was run on 'family values' etc...) had never happened.

save the rich?

By the early 1990s, the storm clouds were unmistakable. First Mexico, then Thailand were followed rapidly by the rest of Asia into a tumbling wave of economic collapse, as international investors pulled out. The free market crowd was quick to blame state intervention for the crisis. All the victims must not have stuck to free market theory in some way or other. They only had themselves to blame.

However, for all the free market bluster, the reality was that governments rushed in with public money to bail out private international financiers. Free market governments must not intervene to alleviate poverty and improve wages, but they can rush in to rescue the world's richest financiers who had made countless millions doing nothing but speculating on markets and Mexican government bonds. There are, it appears, limits to free market doctrine after all.

So here we are, Asian collapse has been followed quickly by Russia, soon to be followed by Latin America. The virtually permanent economic crisis of the last five years has finally proved too much to bear for international finance. The last few months has seen a mass exodus of money fleeing to the safe haven of treasury bonds (the capitalist equivalent of putting the money under the mattress). This has caused a growing liquidity crisis. In other words, the economy is setting solid as mud, since banks and capital markets are unable or unwilling to lend money.

As the rain-drenched rivers turn to desiccated mud, the fear is that this drying up of credit may push the mighty US economy into recession. Suddenly, the world economy may be plunged into a slump (1930s ring any bells?) In response, there has been an attempt to co-ordinate interest rate cuts across western capitalist economies to try to stimulate the world's economy (which may not sound like a free market thing to do - indeed it isn't). The problem arises as to what to do if this fails. Cuts in interest rates have failed in ailing Japan, where rates have been slashed to virtually nothing, to no avail. They also failed in the 1930s - it took a world war before the slump was reversed then...

last stand

The question is what is left in the free market armoury to try? US markets have been deregulated, union power all-but destroyed, and social security has been slashed. It is hard to see how wages can fall any further in response to rising unemployment. The truth is that all the conditions that free market theory desires for the market to deliver are already in place in the US. Interest rate cutting is the only free market theory answer to rising unemployment and impending recession. Déjà vu. 1930s.

Even if massive world recession is delayed, there are signs of growing disillusionment with free market theory. Modern monetarism grew directly out of conditions of spiralling inflation. Despite the short-lived triumphalism, it was a failure. True, free market ideas did engineer a world recession to crush inflation. But did they ensure steady near-full employment? In the 1970s, the fear was that British unemployment would reach a million. After 20 years of cutting benefits and driven-down wages, the free market pundits cannot escape the fact that unemployment has continued to massively outstrip predictions based on monetarist theory.

..before we go out and celebrate the end of the free market nonsense, let us put the prospect of demand management into some perspective

For more information about issues raised in Closer Look articles, write to DA. The next DA is on the theme of global development. Bargian sub and contact details are on p.9.

new game: insert

Just as 1970s inflation gave rise to free market polices, with inflation replaced by spiralling recession as the number one worry, can it be that Keynsian demand management will make a comeback? Already, Japan is embarking on a public works programme in an attempt to stimulate growth. Likewise, Malaysia has embarked on a massive public spending spree.

In Europe, there are certainly signs that governments are growing tired of free market orthodoxy. The Austrian chancellor Vicktor Klima recently argued that stable prices, growth and employment are not contradictory. Germany's new Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine is already arguing that Central Banks "should give the same importance to jobs as they do to ensuring price stability".

However, before we go out and celebrate the end of the free market nonsense, let us put the prospect of demand management into some perspective. While state intervention may seem more attractive than the gross inequality of the free market, it is not a 'solution' by any stretch of the imagination. Firstly, the rise of stagflation exposed the myth that Keynesian demand management was capable of regulating the inherent instability of capitalism. Secondly, even for the short post-war period when it did appear to work in the affluent west (who then still had colonies and even more overpowering dominance of the world economy than now), it still amounted to not much for the vast majority of working people.

Capitalism by its very nature is unstable and prone to crisis. We are hopefully, and at last, beginning to see the start of the fall from grace of free market orthodoxy once again. This is a cause for celebration. But the answer does not lie in resurrecting Keynes or any form of greater regulation of capitalism. The state cannot make capitalism palatable. The answer lies in its eradication and replacement with a system run by people for people, rather than by a few capitalists for massive profits.

ONE owner ONE vision ONE voice

It is common knowledge that the majority of the world's media is owned by a very few corporations and individuals. These control our access to the wider world to a large extent, and their agenda is a capitalist one - for the benefit of the corporation. Voices of independence are tolerated, and possibly encouraged, to give a veneer of freedom of expression, but one that is only allowed if it is not too influential.

The media covers a multitude of sins - all forms of communication or artistic expression could be said to add up to media. The popular image is of the newspapers and magazines, possibly including TV and radio, but it clearly includes films, books, plays and the 'arts' in general. Apart from direct experience and through second hand information from acquaintances' direct experience, our knowledge of the world and beyond invariably comes to us through media of one form or another.

Modern western mass-media is crowded, dense and fast moving. However, for people who live(d) in smallish villages without such mass-media technology, most news would be brought to them by participants or observers of those events. Certainly, in the past, with low literacy, there was not much call for written media, and wider news was brought to people orally.

Now, in the west at least, there is literally masses of information and news all around, some of which is delivered to our homes in a variety of diverse media. Our lives are generally dominated by it - the information age may be a cliché but it holds a bit of truth. Conversations often revolve around events not in our own lives, but those as portrayed by newspapers, TV, magazines, films or radio.

Our reality is not in danger of being defined by the media, it is in danger of being only the media. The big problem of this, given that a medium is but a channel of communication, is that we are being defined by external events which are brought to us by others, by people who have their own agenda and who have their own priorities - the priorities of the media corporations.

The fact that we are privileged to have a mass of information readily available should be something to celebrate; the fact that we can know what is happening around the world almost instantaneously should be seen as a cause for acclaim, but it is not. Why? Because the role the media plays in western society is not one of empowerment, not one of enhancement, but one of capital returns. If it sells, sell it; if it attracts lots of advertisers, then sell it a bit cheaper.

Capitalism will sell anything, it will 'turn rebellion into money' quite happily (but only as a small niche market).

The mass media is like populist politics, it seeks to attract and influence the largest number of people in the shortest possible time. It therefore appeals to that well worn phrase 'the lowest common denominator'. In reality, 'the lowest common denominator' really means the editors' idea of the least challenging rubbish they think people will swallow, wrapped up in lots of easy to digest pieces of general interest that keep people entertained but not informed. Large amounts of sport, pages of TV gossip, celebrity trivia; it's all fairly harmless in itself, but it seeks to hide the fact that the media generally has nothing to say except that of its master's voice.

As our lives become increasingly orientatedaroundthe corporate media, rather than it being a tool of communication, it is becoming a tool of incorporation. We are being incorporated into a world made by those who control the media.

Our reality is not in danger of being defined by the media, it is in danger of being only the media

Who is Solidarity Federation?

Solidarity Federation is the new solidarity movement. Formed in March 1994, it consists of a federation of groups and individuals across England, Scotland & Wales. The basic foundation of Solidarity Federation is the Local.

Getting down the Local

People are getting together to form Locals – Solidarity Federation groups. Locals put solidarity into practice. In time, each Local will have a premises as a base for solidarity action in the local community. Locals are organising or getting involved in local campaigns across a wide range of issues – both in the community and in workplaces. Issues are wide-ranging: defending our natural and local environment and health; opposing racism, sexism and homophobia; in fact, anything which defends or contributes to our mutual quality of life. It all forms part and parcel of the building of a solidarity movement.

Direct Action

Apart from being the name of this Quarterly, Direct Action is the tool which Locals use in all their work. At a basic level, this can be simply the spreading of information through leaflets, local bulletins and public meetings to raise awareness and involvement locally. However, Direct Action is not limited to spreading information. It means a physical presence in defending and promoting a better quality of life. Fundamental to Direct Action is the reality that we can only rely on ourselves to achieve our goals. While we reserve the right to take opportunities to fight for improvements to our quality of life now, the solidarity movement must always remain independent from those we are demanding from. Solidarity Federation will accept neither leadership, charity, nor guidance from government or business – instead, we must couple our principle of solidarity with the practice of self-reliance.

Aims and Principles

The Solidarity Federation is an organisation of people who seek to destroy capitalism and the state. Capitalism because it exploits, oppresses and kills working people and wrecks the environment for profit world-wide. The state because it can only maintain hierarchy and privilege for the classes who control it and their servants; it cannot be used to fight the oppression and exploitation that are the consequences of hierarchy and the source of privilege.

In their place, we want a society based on solidarity, mutual aid and libertarian communism. That society can only be achieved by working class organisations based on similar principles - revolutionary unions. These are not Trade Unions only concerned with "bread and butter" issues like pay and conditions. Revolutionary unions are means for working people to organise and fight all the issues - both in the workplace and outside- which arise from our oppression.

We recognise that not all oppression is economic, but can be based on gender, race, sexuality, or anything our rulers find useful. Unless we organise in this way, politicians - some claiming to be revolutionary - will be able to exploit us for their own ends.

The Solidarity Federation consists of Industrial Networks and Locals which are the nuclei of future revolutionary unions and centres for working class struggle on a local level. Our activities are based on Direct Action - action by workers ourselves, not through intermediaries like politicians and union officials; our decisions are made through direct participation of the membership. We welcome all who agree with our aims and principles and want to work to achieve social revolution. We recognise that the class struggle is world-wide, and are affiliated to the International Workers' Association (IWA), whose Principles we share.

Networks

Solidarity Federation members who work in the same work sector have formed Networks. Their purpose is to promote solidarity amongst workers. Networks also use Direct Action to fight for better pay and conditions. Networks form the basis of a completely new labour movement, nothing like the Trade Unions, which are weakened by having to abide by ridiculous laws, and by hierarchical power structures and self-interested paid officials. The fundamentally different nature of Networks fits their fundamentally different aim.

Where to?

As Locals and Networks grow, they practise community and workers' self-management. Eventually, industries will be run by producers and consumers. In other words, by workers (in Networks) and people in the wider community (Locals) who want the goods and services they provide. And this is no flight of fancy or text-book dream. As the solidarity movement grows in members and influence, so does the scope for action. Both the Locals and Networks have already established a reputation and are showing real results in membership & effectiveness.

Global Solidarity

Capitalism is international, so we need to be organised globally to oppose it and build a viable alternative. Nationalism and patriotism lead to pointless and false divisions, used as tools to fuel economic and bloody wars. Solidarity Federation opposes these in favour of a movement built on global solidarity.

Solidarity Federation is the British section of the International Workers' Association (IWA), the anarcho-syndicalist association. This gives it essential international solidarity and experience from much larger sections such as the CNT (Spain) and USI (Italy). Founded in 1922, the IWA has a long history of solidarity in action; by the 2nd World War over 5 million people worldwide were affiliated. A combination of war, fascism, and soviet 'communism' all but destroyed the movement, but after the Spanish CNT re-emerged in the late 70's, the IWA had a new lease of life. Today, there are sections ranging from a few dozen to thousands of members, and growth is rapid. At the last IWA Congress in Madrid, another 7 new sections were affiliated from South America, Africa, Ireland, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Getting Involved

A global solidarity movement can only gather strength as many more people who share the same aims get involved. Contacting Solidarity Federation offers the possibility of contributing to this growing momentum. It is not like joining a club, union or political party – rather, it is an opportunity to channel your efforts for change and, at the same time, benefit yourself from the experience.

It might just be worth it. Contact details are on page 9.

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