Direct Action

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CLAMPDOWN

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Double standards

All the world's a stage – well, all of Britain's city centres are anyway. We are the most watched (CCTV'd that is) people in the world, and since the government has decided we don't need any privacy laws to protect us from uniformed voyeurs, as the '97 election song should have gone, "things...can only get worser" *(Big Brother Britain, 2004, p.6).*

The Labour Government, still trying to prove it is more Tory than Thatcher, now has its heart set on watching us, controlling us and telling us what to do and what not. If you want a quick list of current woes they are inflicting on mothers, fathers, workers, drinkers and people who stand in groups of two or more on the street, etc., look no further *(Welcome to the Clampdown, p.4)*. The general idea seems to be that if they keep us angry about how we are being treated at home, we will stop demonstrating about what they are doing in Iraq. They've got us multi-tasking.

Of course, all this clamping down wasn't New Labour's new idea (have they ever had one?). Governments, including British ones, have been doing it for years, and there are flashbacks within these pages *(Britain: A century of suppression, p.20; Our direct action past: The Scottish experience, p.23).*

But we wouldn't want to give you the impression that New Labour is all about clamping down. Actually, just for examples, there are at least six groups they haven't clamped down on at all; quite the opposite. First, despite promises that they would clamp down on company bosses getting away with murder, we are still no nearer to any meaningful corporate killing legislation. Second, there's the stinking rich, who are still creaming off millions of taxpayers money in subsidies *(Benefit cheats, p.7).*

Third, there's the gang masters and people smugglers, who they are positively encouraging through their racist immigration laws. To blame the Morecambe Bay tragedy on the gang masters is like blaming turkeys for Christmas: They wouldn't be there if it wasn't for the system that the government set up in the first place *(Death by clampdown, p.18)*.

Then, of course, there's the MPs themselves – still ignoring their election pledges, conniving, conning and bobbing and weaving their way into the bosses pockets for handouts to fight the next election. This brings us to the next group, the lackeys and doublespeakers who keep Tony's buns creamed. They make sure the right number of hospitals go private, jobs get axed, and schools fail. Incidentally, Ofsted inspectors have defined failure in their Inspection Handbook: "Teaching that is generally satisfactory with little that is much better, merits a judgement of unsatisfactory, owing to the lack of aspiration in teaching." This is, presumably, Blairspeak.

Blairporkies, on the other hand, often involve Iraq. As a demonstrator said outside the Hutton Inquiry: "Hutton only looks at a few of the Government's lies - lies that tragically led to one man's death. But the truth is that the road to war was paved with lies that have resulted in thousands of deaths and that these lies continue to affect the lives of millions of Iraqis. Blair lied - and continues to lie - about WMD and the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. He lied when he said that Iraq's oil revenues would be placed in a trust controlled by the UN. Now he's lying about democracy in Iraq…"

Anyway, for our final example of non-clampdown, it has to be back to big business; this time the asbestos corporates, who have had government silence and smokescreens to rely on for decades, while they made a killing and their workers unwittingly stored up a future full of pain and terminal diseases *(STILL getting away with murder: Asbestos epidemics 2004-2020, p.31).* The Labour clampdown is not total, it is partial – targeted at working class people, and neatly avoiding the rich and powerful.

So, while Iraqi's suffer an endless military offensive, we are suffering a charm offensive (and offensive just about sums it up). Tony Blair has brought us the dose of humility, the stitched up inquiry, the big conversation… what bollocks will we get next? He really must think we are stupid, if he thinks we are going to be distracted from the Labour 'class clampdown' by a few mealy-mouthed niceties and half-hearted finger-pointing.

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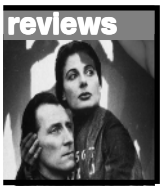

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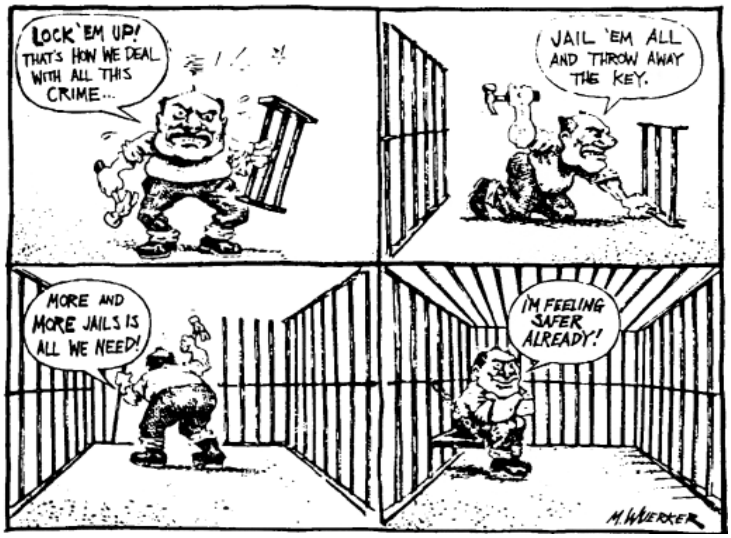
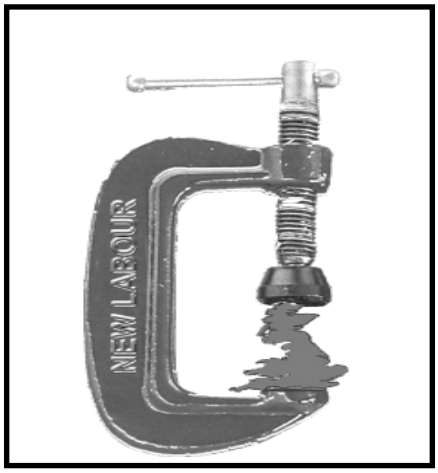
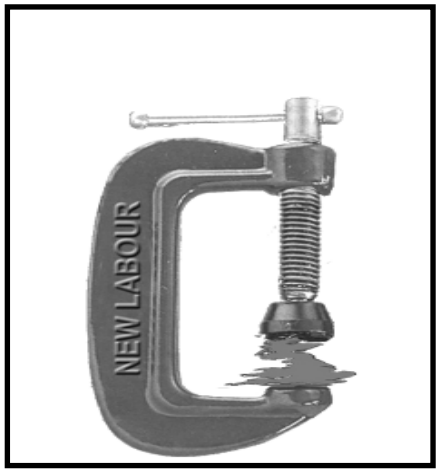


Welcome to the clampdown





The Financial times called them 'puritanical'... moralising missionaries showing us the error of our ways and 'improving' our behaviour until 'Little House on the Prairie' looks like Bolton on a Friday night...

Last December, I read a story in the Financial Times about how that 'thoroughly modern Mr Blair' ('Big Toe' to those in the know) and his equally modern mates, were going to clamp down on some of the disgusting behaviour the 'lower orders' get up to. They are on about making those of us who spend everything we get, save up for our 'retirement' (even though they've put the retirement age up to 125 so we'll all be dead anyway); making us join a gym so we keep fit and don't bother the NHS; stopping us 'binge drinking' (what happened to getting pissed?) and checking our bums everyday to make sure we've wiped them properly. This is on top of the stuff they've already done about hanging people whose kids don't turn up at school, curfews at 9.00pm and offshore prison hulks for any youngsters found in gangs of more than two. You probably know of a few more gimmicks.

It 'fits in' with the way they've already clamped down on the unemployed and hounded disabled people. Apparently, it is about the obligations we have as 'responsible citizens' in our communities...

It is in line with what's going on in the rest of the world too. In Nigeria they've got mobile courts, judges and jails that go around towns instantly incarcerating young men who get caught jay-walking (god forbid). Zero-tolerance is the name of the game; 'big Toe' copied his predecessors and called it being 'tough on the causes' of whatever. That 'cowboy of god' George Bush goes even further; if Muslims don't like them wholesome McDougalls dog burgers, or don't wear Nike veils then he'll blow the shit out of them like a good Christian crusader.

It seems like all the world's being clamped down on; 'top surgeons' are currently calling for castration for having a 'tab' and they're even looking for a sliding scale of penalties depending on whether you're caught smiling or laughing.

So, they are 'clamping down' on laughing, smoking, shagging, drinking ale (not red wine), being fat, not being fit, taking drugs, being old with no money, being disabled, hating school, hating working for some thieving 'entrepreneur', not reading the Daily Mail, talking on the street, not cleaning your teeth and farting. Oh, I nearly forgot, if you can't be arsed with computers (or ICT nowadays, 'the future') and business/ management speak, there's a penal colony being built on Mars. I'm dead.

But, we need to think a bit here and wonder what it's all about. When we used to actually make things, clamping down used to be what you did to a lump of metal, or whatever, in order to work on it. Drill it, shape it or change it in some way. You could say that's what they're trying to do. The Financial times called them 'puritanical'. So, they might be just like that nineteenth century Temperance lot, or some god squad trying to save our souls; moralising missionaries showing us the error of our ways and 'improving' our behaviour until 'Little House on the Prairie' looks like Bolton on a Friday night. That might be why they're pushing citizenship and arithmetic in schools. Or, they might be just trying to bore

Benefit squeeze on lone parents

Once again the government is attacking jobless lone parents, disabled people and the sick in an attempt to drive the "economically inactive" back to work. Lone parents are to be required to attend compulsory interviews, and in the longer term plans are being considered for placing explicit requirements on them to take jobs. In a gradual tightening of the conditions set on benefits, lone parents on income support will be required to attend a "work-focused" interview once every three months when their youngest child is 14 or over.

For those on incapacity benefit, the government is seeking a review of their medical records as well as introducing for the first time regular compulsory job interviews for some. Of course this is justified by the government who claim they are only placing the extra responsibilities on claimants to provide extra help to find work, combat discrimination and increase opportunities. These so called "pathways to work schemes" are in reality trying to force lone parents and the sick into minimum wage jobs that will see them worse off financially and with little or no hope of financial improvement; indeed, the only benefits here are for the Government's dodgy paperwork, and for Blair's grasping pals at the Department of Trade and Industry, who will certainly be cheered by the prospect of a flood of desperate minimum wage-earners into the labour market.

The government is also piloting a tougher regime for the long-term unemployed. In 40 pilot schemes, anyone who has been unemployed for more than 13 weeks will be required to look for a job up to 90 minutes' travel from home. They will be required to sign on every week, rather than fortnightly. In addition, those on unemployment benefits will be asked to increase the number of job applications they make.

New Labour has become increasingly obsessed with those it judges to be "economically inactive". Their numbers have remained largely unchanged since Labour came to power in 1997, however the figures are regularly rejigged. It is easy for those who live with the certainty of a fat pension and a rich future to make the sort of decisions that crush those who are already vulnerable; yet in terms of true social and economic value to the community this is by far the most economically disastrous group of all: politicians.

us all to death and save on the pension bill.

Now we're onto money, that could be another reason. It could be just so the rich don't have to pay more taxes, and then they could go around smoking, supping, gloating and more. Maybe it's just so 'Big Toe' can waste even more of the taxes on a dozen flats and six kilos of top notch skunk for his brats. Get us all fit, teetotal, saving up and working hard and they can spend everything on the debauchery they're famous for. When everyone's great at adding up and using computers, when all the kids are standardised units coming out of school like zombies ready to be plugged in to some 'high tech' exploitation machine, then the state-paid missionaries can make even more money. But we'll all be chuffed, because we'll all know how good it is that the rich get richer, since it 'trickles down' to the bottom (yeah, right).

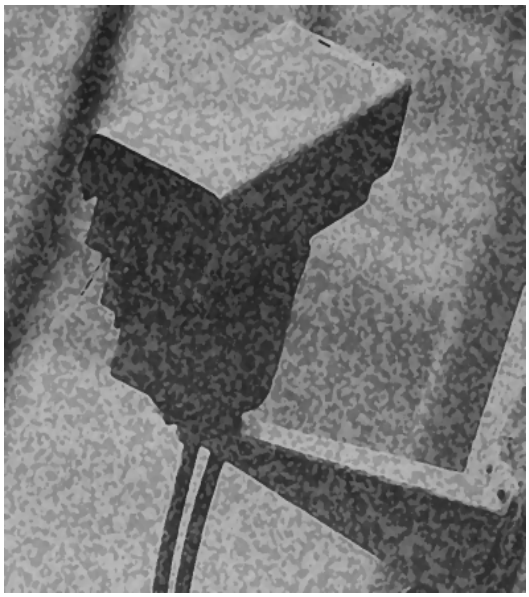
This is the problem; they seem to be getting away with 'puritanising' and clamping down on 'immoral' goings on at the same time as having gambling machines at bus stops and roulette wheels in the chippy. They 'tut-tut' at porno and perverts on the internet, then push the internet in schools. They push debt (like student loans and mortgages) to those who can't afford it, then slag them off and tell them they just have to work hard, quit smoking and drinking cans of lager, get a job and they'll be in paradise. 'It's the future', 'there's no other option', we all have to work hard for Great Britain Plc in the 'global economy'. The 'socially excluded' need moralising, then it will be 'jam tomorrow'.

This is where the clamp lies. Too many people feel powerless to oppose this nonsense, and that's how we're clamped in place while they crap all over us and constantly rip us off. That's what 'Clampdown Britain' is all about; the only way out is to take our own initiative and clamp them down for a change.

Maybe it's just so 'Big Toe' can waste even more of the taxes on a dozen flats and six kilos of top notch skunk for his brats. Get us all fit, teetotal, saving up and working hard and they can spend everything on the debauchery they're famous for.

Big Brother Britain, 2004

Britain is alone in being without any privacy law to protect people against constant surveillance



In Britain Big Brother is almost certainly watching you. More than four million surveillance cameras monitor our every move, making Britain the most-watched nation in the world. Of course there are no official government figures for the number of closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras in Britain but independent research has indicated that the number of CCTV systems has quadrupled in the past three years, and there is now one for every 14 people in the UK.

Estimates suggest that residents of a city such as London can each expect to be captured on CCTV cameras up to 300 times a day, and much of the filming breaches existing data guidelines.

The increase is happening at twice the predicted rate, and it is believed that Britain accounts for *one-fifth* of all CCTV cameras worldwide. Estimates suggest that residents of a city such as London can each expect to be captured on CCTV cameras up to 300 times a day, and much of the filming breaches existing data guidelines.

Civil liberties groups complain that the rules governing the use of the cameras in Britain are the most lax in the world. They say that, in contrast to other countries, members of the public are often unaware they are being filmed, and are usually ignorant of the relevant regulations. They also argue that there is little evidence to support the contention that CCTV cameras lead to a reduction in crime rates.

Despite this appalling rise what is most disturbing is that elsewhere in Europe and the rest of the world there is much more public awareness and discussion over the use of CCTV. In the UK we are alone in the world in not even having a debate about what it means for our privacy. In other countries people have been a lot more wary about CCTV and the wider implications of undermining privacy, freedom of expression and assembly. In Britain, such social and human rights are fast becoming alien concepts.

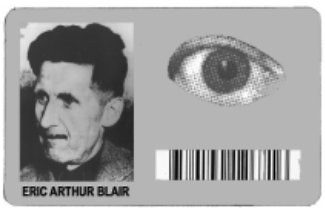
The use of cameras to film people in the street is banned in Germany, Canada and several other countries. But it is accepted practice in Britain, which is alone in not having a privacy law that protects people against constant surveillance.

The Data Protection Act states that the public has to be informed that CCTV systems are in operation, and be told how they can exercise their legal right to see their own footage. But civil rights groups said many councils, shops and businesses were failing to provide this information, and it is estimated that up to 70 per of CCTV camera operators are breaking the rules.

Shopping centre security guards use the cameras to track "socially undesirable" people, such as groups of teenage boys or rough sleepers, around stores, and then eject them even if they have done nothing wrong.

There has been a definite shift from formal and legally regulated measures of crime control towards private and unaccountable justice. Identifiable footage from the cameras is also passed to newspapers and television companies without people's permission, which is illegal.

CCTV is generally seen as benign rather than as Big Brother-style surveillance but it is not. It is about much more than crime. It enables people to be tracked and monitored and harassed and socially excluded on the basis that they do not fit into the category of people that a government, council or shopping centre wants to see in a public space.



To take action - Defy ID is an adhoc network for active resistance to increasing surveillance and the introduction of ID or 'entitlement' cards in the uk: www.defy-id.org.uk

Benefit cheats

Those nasty folk who are living off the state

You can read about it every week in your local paper. "We need to clampdown on benefit fraud" ... "another single parent found to have claimed benefit while working". A few thousand pounds over five years, and the outcry if they are not locked up for long enough. Don't worry about the social or monetary cost of taking the kids into care, as long as the dirty spongers get punished, etc...

Meanwhile, a million miles away, yet in the same country, Gerald Cavendish Grosvenor gets annual payments of around £326,000 in benefits paid through farming subsidies. Sir Gerald holds the title of Duke of Westminster and he inherited an 11,000 hectare estate near Chester. He is Britain's richest person, with an estimated fortune of £5bn, based largely on extensive property holdings in central London.

Poor Gerald also owns a development company called Grosvenor Estates, and is busy buying up the centre of many towns and cities in the UK, including Liverpool and Preston, so all the ugly old shops can be got rid of, bus stations demolished and old fashioned markets evicted. All this to make way for swish new shopping centres patrolled by private police forces to keep out undesirables like the homeless, claimants, benefit scroungers (unless you're a rich farmer) and various other riff-raff that make our cities so unsightly.

Sainsbury scam

Since 1994, David Sainsbury has bankrolled the Neo-Labour Party to the tune of over £11m. In 1997, six months after bunging Labour £1m to clear their overdraft, Sainsbury was made a Lord. By 1998, and a few million quid later, he was made a science minister.

As science minister, he has been busy promoting GM crops, biotechnology and vivisection. Sainsbury not only has a massive share in the supermarket chain, but also wholly owns Diatech, a biotech company, and owns the world-wide patent rights over the "translator enhancer" gene currently used in the genetic modification process.

Sainsbury also partly funds the Sainsbury Laboratory, which, since he became Science Minister, has seen funding increase by 400% from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC). Sainsbury appoints everyone to the board of the BBSRC and it has now spent more than £18m on research into GM-related crops.

Gerald isn't the only one...

Others who are literally living off the land include:

Duke of Bedford
Farm: Woburn Abbey, 5,400 hectares estate
Estimated subsidy: £382,000 pa
Estimated wealth: £370m

Lord De Ramsey
Farm: Abbotts Ripton, near Huntingdon, 4,451hectares spanning Cambs, Huntington, Lincs
Estimated subsidy: £377,000 pa
Estimated wealth: £34m

Duke Of Marlborough
Farm: Blenheim Palace, 1,600 hectares
Estimated subsidy: £369,000 pa
Estimated wealth: unknown

Edward Douglas Coke, seventh Earl of Leicester
Farm: Holkham Estate in Norfolk, 405 hectares of wheat & 486 of barley, 90 hectares set aside
Estimated subsidy: £245,000
Estimated wealth: £70m

Lord Iliffe
Farm: Yattendon estate in Berkshire, 1,300 hectares
Estimated subsidy: £331,000 pa
Estimated wealth: £150m

Sir Adrian Swire
Farm: Oxfordshire, 800ha
Estimated subsidy: £200,000 pa
Estimated wealth: £1,050m

Gerald Cavendish Grosvenor gets annual payments of around £326,000 in benefits. He holds the title of Duke of Westminster and he inherited an 11,000 hectare estate.

ON THE EDGE

ASLEF OFF THE RAILS

Shaun Brady, boss of Aslef (train drivers' union) has threatened to sack his entire staff if they go on strike, withdraw recognition from their union and hire a "scab" workforce on lower pay. These staff work at his HQ in London, and are members of the GMB general union.

He has warned them that sick pay will be cut to the statutory minimum, flexible working arrangements will be abolished, childcare vouchers will be withdrawn and disciplinary procedures toughened up.

In a classic piece of management double-speak, he said: "It gives me no pleasure to have to spell out the consequences of industrial action but there are serious issues, including financial irregularities, that have to be addressed in the running of this union and the membership would not thank me for failing to deal with them."

THANKS MA'M

A total of 23 people from the Movement Against Monarchy (MA'M) will get £3,500 each and a written apology from the Metropolitan Police. They sued Britain's largest force for unlawful arrest and false imprisonment after they were arrested during protests at the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations. 40 people in all were nicked for breach of the peace at the "Execute the Queen" protest at Tower Hill on the day of the St Paul's Cathedral thanksgiving service. Police packed them on to a passing bus and took them to police stations around the capital, where some were held for several hours, but later released without charge.

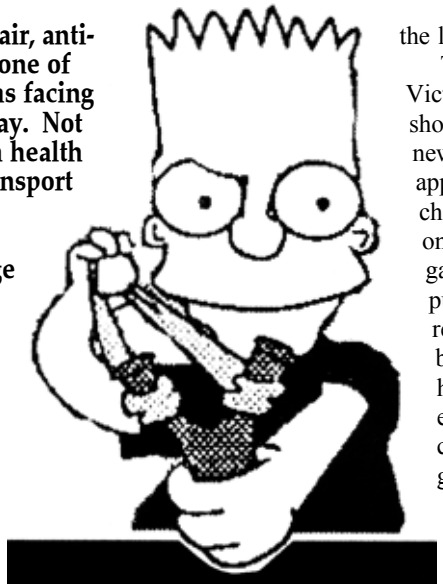
MA'M condemned the arrests as "the actions of a proto police state" and claimed that demonstrators had been detained while drinking peacefully in a pub. Police claimed they acted to protect public safety, and anyway, the protesters were unwilling to co-operate with officers and tell them of their protest route. No doubt they 'looked dodgy' too, which is of course an arrestable offence these days.

But not, it seems, one the Met can get away with.

Yob Culture

Just who is being anti-social?

According to Tony Blair, anti-social behaviour is one of the biggest problems facing most people inBritain today. Not poverty, not the run down health service, not the failing transport system, not the lying government itself. It is a catch-all phrase for a range of low-level criminality that makes other people's lives a misery. It includes noisy neighbours, abandoned cars, vandalism, graffiti and litter.



The government has made tackling ASB - or "yob culture" - its biggest priority, besides of course covering up its own anti-social behaviour in Iraq. It has set up a new anti-social behaviour unit in the Home Office, headed by the former homelessness tsar, Louise Casey, and introduced a series of measures culminating in the Anti-social Behaviour Act now in force. The Act gives police-style powers to private security guards for the first time, if they are officially accredited. At first, this will allow them to stop cyclists riding on the pavement, although, later this year, both security guards and the new community support officers will get further powers under the Act.

The police also now have new powers to break up groups of two or more teenagers. The children will not need to have committed any offence to be moved on by officers, if the area has been designated an anti-social "hotspot" by the local council.

This is taking the old Victorian adage that "children should be seen and not heard" to new extremes. Now, apparently, working class children should only be seen one at a time. Naturally, gatherings of public school pupils and other nice respectable children will still be encouraged. Poor kids, however, will be victimised even though they have committed no crime. Some groups have pointed out that the Act will target ethnic minorities whose cultures traditionally involve street-corner gatherings.

Begging will also become a recordable offence, further criminalising the homeless, and a range of on-the-spot fines are to be extended from adults to 16 and 17-year-olds for offences such as throwing fireworks and making hoax 999 calls. Furthermore, under the Act the Home Secretary can extend the fines in future to children as young as 10.

All these measures are simple, populist knee-jerk reactions that do nothing to tackle the root causes of social problems or 'yob culture'. They are simply there to punish, with no acknowledgement of why anti-social behaviour exists. In the meantime, they are having trouble in downtown Baghdad with organised gangs carrying guns and terrorising, shooting and torturing the local community – time for a global ASB Act no doubt, Tony...?

The Party's over

Firefighters are pressing their union to disaffiliate from the Labour Party in protest at the way they were treated during their bitter pay dispute.

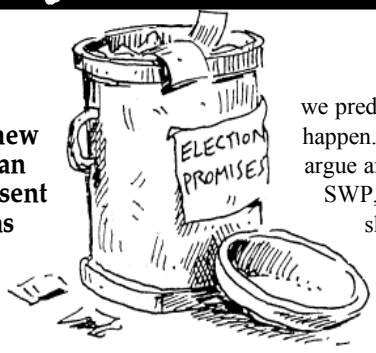
A number of branches of the Fire Brigades Union have submitted resolutions to its annual conference later this year calling for a split. The pressure is coming from branches including Strathclyde, Northern Ireland and Berkshire.

FBU branches calling for disaffiliation have complained about attacks on fire-fighters by ministers and unnamed Government sources during the long-running pay dispute. One Downing street official was quoted as describing fire-fighters as "Scargilites".

The conference is due to be held in Bridlington in May, and it is likely the executive will meet before it to decide its position. General Secretary Andy Gilchrist is a member of the Labour Party and says the union should remain inside Labour. The FBU gives £50,000 a year to Labour and, unlike other unions, has not reduced its affiliation thus far despite anger amongst members with the Government.

Meanwhile, the biggest rail workers' union, the RMT (Rail Maritime and Transport), has been doing the right thing by abandoning Labour, and very much the wrong thing by instead adopting links with trotskyist parties. In their recent Bill, the Labour government is now even offering money (bribes) to wayward unions to help them 'modernise'!

Respect coalition



In the last issue of DA, we reported how there were new moves on the left to form an electoral challenge to the present Labour Government. This has now come about with the launch of the RUC - Respect ("respect, equality, socialism, peace, environment, community, trades unions") Unity Coalition.

So, has this latest in a long line of attempts to break the stranglehold of the Labour Party got anything going for it? The RUC reflects the original Labour Party, being an amalgamation of Marxists, social democrats, liberals and religious idealists, that is seeking to gain votes by burying any radicalism under layers of compromise and fudge. Although the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) has not joined because of its policy of not joining any political party, it has encouraged its members to support it.

A leading member of Respect has already stated it is "not an explicitly socialist organisation" but it aspires to be a "left electoral alternative to New Labour that represents working-class people who have been disenfranchised." Replace the words New Labour with Liberal Party and it was being said a hundred years ago.

And what of the Socialist Alliance? When that was launched it was to be the new saviour of the working class, a new direction for the left to win power. Well we don't like to say "told you so" but we predicted right at the start what would happen. The various factions would argue and fall out, the strongest, the SWP, would take over, and it would slowly die a death. The SA managed one councillor in Preston, which, at the time, was hailed as great breakthrough. This councillor has now declared he will be standing as the Respect candidate in the forthcoming European elections, even before the actual formation of the Coalition. He is, however, also a member of the SWP, so small matters like rules wouldn't get in the way.

Respect is different in that it contains "gorgeous George" Galloway, apologist for Saddam and closet Stalinist. His expulsion from the Labour Party has meant he has had to find some new political allies. Who better than those political chameleons, the SWP? Of course he is claiming he could have stayed in the Labour Party but his principles wouldn't allow it (likely story).

How long this variation will last is anyone's guess. Current bets suggest it will likely implode or merge into yet another coalition. It must be getting hard for some activists to remember which meeting they are at and which line/name they are supposed to trot out. Whatever happens, for sure it will provide the Marxist left, both inside and outside Respect, with hours of fun as they argue over the direction of the new party/alliance/ coalition and manoeuvre and plot to gain any small advantage.

National shame of deaths from cold

In the winter of 2002/3 in England and Wales, 21,800 older people died as a result of the cold. The total figure for the past ten years has reached well over 330,000. Year on year, these figures spell out the same story of thousands of unnecessary deaths due to cold-related illnesses.

The Government calls these 'excess' winter deaths and, to our shame, the UK has the highest proportion of them in the European Union. Even in colder north European countries such as Finland and Germany, the number of excess winter deaths is proportionately much lower.

This year's mortality figures are not yet out, but they will no doubt be even higher, since nothing has changed to make it any different. Help the Aged has demanded more action to stem this disgraceful and unnecessary suffering, but there are apparently more important issues for this government than the deaths of 'unproductive' citizens.

The fundamental reason for winter deaths among older people is "fuel poverty", which is defined by government as having to spend more than 10 per cent of your income on maintaining a decent standard of warmth in your home.

In some of England's poorest neighbourhoods, 22% of older people living in poverty are forced to choose between heating and eating. Older people tend to live in older, less improved houses which are hardest to heat.

There is a lot of talk about the ageing population, but in today's capitalist society the elderly are seen just as a burden. Forget the fact they have probably worked fifty years and brought up successive generations of workers; they are seen as a drain on the economy. What happened to looking towards a society where old people are recognised as still having a lot to give and where they have earned the right to be looked after by the rest of us?

ON THE EDGE

Bribery pays

In the January vote over whether to ditch their manifesto commitment not to introduce variable tuition fees, New labour whips got all whipped up by Tony.

Austin Mitchell, MP for Great Grimsby, and one of those rotten scoundrels who thought Labour should stick to their pledges, revealed after the vote that he had traded his vote against university top-up fees at the last minute, in exchange for two favours for his constituency.

Mitchell, who once pledged to change his name to Austin Haddock to draw attention to the plight of local fishermen, refused to disclose the two favours. He told the THES that he had voted "through gritted teeth and very miserably" for the bill but could not turn down the offers.

Still no clampdown on corporate killing

The government first promised to clamp down on corporate killing in 1997. Sadly, while they have enthusiastically clamped down on our civil liberties, they have done nothing to curb the 'rights' of bosses to get away with murder.

Despite numerous Labour promises over the years to legislate against killer companies, the last Queen's Speech made no mention of a law allowing businesses to be prosecuted for killing people. Meanwhile, deaths at work continue as companies realise it makes sense to cut corners over safety when it is almost impossible to get punished by this 'business-friendly' government' when things go wrong.

At present, businesses can only be convicted of manslaughter if it can be shown that negligence by a senior manager is to blame (see previous DAs, e.g. DA28). This leaves large companies, where lines of responsibility are harder to establish, able to escape prosecution. To date, only five companies, all of them small businesses, have been found guilty of manslaughter, while numerous Government promises and proposals lie gathering dust in Westminster... (www.simonjones.org)

ON THE EDGE

BNRR ECO-DUMB

Britain's first toll motorway - the Birmingham Northern Relief Road - was built in part to divert heavily polluting trucks out of Birmingham. There's just one small snag. Midland Expressway, the private company who built the road, have decided to charge lorries £11 to use it. For 53-years the company can charge whatever price it likes to motorists (unlike other toll roads around the world). Because lorries damage the road up to 100 times more than cars, Midland Expressway want to attract cars instead. The company is also preparing a multi-million pound advertising campaign to urge motorists to use the road, despite the government's official policy of encouraging people to switch to public transport. Doh!

(source: Schnews)

GM UPDATE

A new global directory on the massive and deceptive PR push behind genetically engineered food is now available free online from the British organisation GM Watch. The directory examines many of the key PR operators, front groups, corporate-friendly scientists, lobbyists, media scams and political networks that are active in this field. It provides extensive information on professional media manipulators, many of whom are active over a wide range of environmental, agricultural and trade issues.

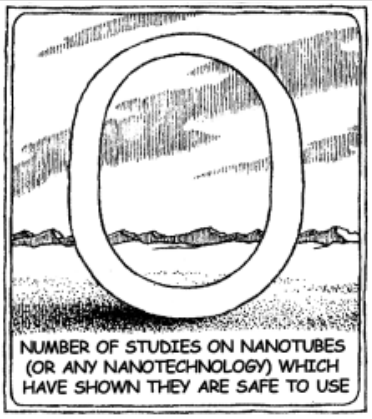
(Source: GM Watch)

FINGER FIGHT

After US customs started photographing and fingerprinting foreigners from some countries entering the US, the Brazilians decided that it was such a good idea, they would try it too. So, they started doing the same to all US citizens entering Brazil. The US Embassy in Brazil reacted predictably: "we regret the way in which new procedures have suddenly been put in place that single out US citizens…(We) will continue to raise our concerns with the Brazilian Government regarding equitable treatment for US citizens travelling to Brazil." One American pilot has already been arrested - when asked if he could be fingerprinted, he raised his middle finger. His company, American Airlines, has agreed to pay the $12,000 fine and apologise.

Na-no-futures?

Nanotechnology is here - things less than 1,000th the width of a human hair. People in California are trying to block construction of a nanotechnology factory, and no-one has even developed safety rules for nano products yet. Most people want a global moratorium until the risks are better understood – are we just technophobes?



In the US, government officials have called nanotechnology the foundation for the "next industrial revolution," worth a trillion dollars over the next decade. Last December, Bush hailed the technology and signed a $3.7 billion bill to boost the research. However, there's just one problem; after BSE, GM and countless other lies and gaffs, we are all wary. Realising the state of public perception, the industry and government are now funding sociologists, philosophers and other mugs to help dissolve and diffuse the public's distrust.

The official take on the struggle for public trust is that it is all down to the frightening tales that have been spun about nano in recent years. In 2000, Bill Joy, co-founder of the computer giant Sun Microsystems, wrote a chilling and widely read article warning that self-replicating nanomachines could eventually overwhelm the human race and digest the living world. Then came Michael Crichton's best-selling thriller "Prey", in which rogue nanoparticles wreak deadly havoc, and Dan Brown's best-selling novel, "Angels & Demons" in which the Catholic Church denounces nanoscience as evil.

However, the reality is not necessarily that different from Michael Crichton's scenario. Scientific studies have shown that nanoparticles can act as poisons in the environment and accumulate in animal organs. One recent study, sponsored by NASA and published in January, documents lung damage more severe and strangely different to that caused by conventional toxic dusts. Forcing mice to inhale nanotubes made of carbon atoms (which are already in factory production), the clever (sic) scientists managed to show that all types of nanotubes cause granulomas – lung disease precursers. And although each mouse got just one exposure, the lesions got worse over time, with some progressing to tissue death. Carbon nanotubes, they concluded, "can be more toxic than quartz, which is considered a serious occupational health hazard in chronic inhalation exposures."

Another study, at DuPont, involved scientists attacking rats with the nanotubes. 15% of the animals on the high dose died from lung blockages within 24 hours - an outcome the scientists had never seen for any lung toxin. Furthermore, inhaled particles do not always stop at the lungs. Previous experiments by University of Rochester toxicologist Gunter Oberdoerster showed that nanoparticles can make their way from a rat's throat into its brain. "Who knows how they interact with cells there? Maybe they do something bad and lead to brain diseases", Oberdoerster said.

Scientists in France recently found that nanotubes can easily penetrate living cells and even make their way into DNA. They were hoping to harness this capacity and use nanotubes as vehicles to deliver drugs into cells. However, in many instances, for reasons that remain unclear, the nanotubes themselves killed the cells.

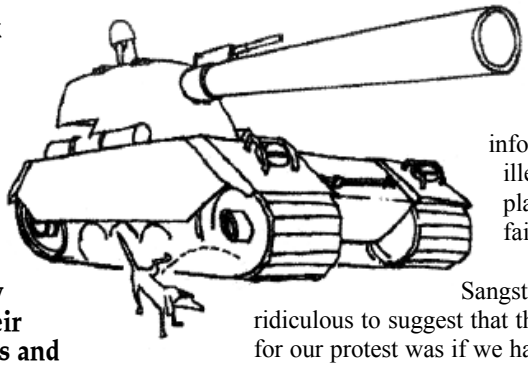
Scientists have known for years that tiny particles can, when inhaled, cause lung disease, cancer and other ailments. But the laws of chemistry and physics work differently when particles get down to the nanoscale – and even substances that are normally innocuous can trigger intense chemical reactions and biological damage when they are presented as nano specks. Gold, for example, is famously inert. But nanoparticles of it are extremely chemically reactive, with the potential to disrupt biological pathways. Vyvyan Howard, a University of Liverpool pathologist, put it simply: "The smaller the particles, the more toxic they become".

It is too soon to say whether nano will wean society from dirty technologies or simply produce its own versions of the asbestos, diesel soot and DDT debacles that are the legacy of the last industrial revolution. The problem is, government and industry don't care, and look set to blunder into more eco-disasters by ploughing ahead regardless of the real or perceived risks. Last year alone, hundreds of tons of nanomaterials were made in labs and factories. "This technology is coming, and it won't be stopped" said the US government's undersecretary for technology.

No one knows how much "nanolitter" is being released into the environment, and there are no disposal rules. Meanwhile, last summer, under contract to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Utah-based Sequoia Pacific Research Co. sprayed a "nanostructured solution" on 1,400 acres in New Mexico to try to stabilise the soil after forest fires destroyed the local vegetation. Company officials will not reveal the ingredients in their product, and undertook no environmental impact studies.

At the centre of the problem is that to some, lack of information means the blinkers are on. Just like in the early days of the atomic era, when experts similarly unburdened by data predicted that nuclear power plants could never melt down and that electricity would become too cheap to meter. Then we had Windscale, 3-mile Isalnd and Chernobyl, and it was too late to go back.

DSEi jailings

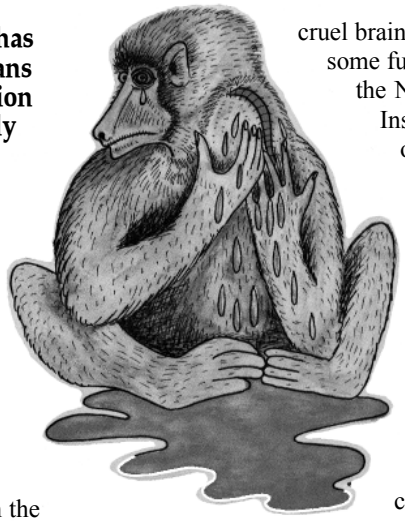


Four people who took part in a peaceful blockade at the Defence Systems and Equipment International (DSEi) arms fair in East London last September have been sent to prison for one day rather than go against their consciences and pay fines and court costs. The four were charged with obstruction of the highway when they sat down in the road at the entrance to the arms fair for approximately 20 minutes.

Announcing the guilty verdict, the judge said the defendants were "genuine, highly principled and motivated" and that the spirit of the actions they took were "important to a democratic society". However, he chose to disregard the evidence balancing the reasonableness of the obstruction with the seriousness of the protestors' concerns, the context of the protest, and the right to freedom of expression. Instead, he said that the only lawful excuse would have been if defendants had information on specific illegal activities taking place within the arms fair.

As defendant Emma Sangster, put it: "It is ridiculous to suggest that the only lawful excuse for our protest was if we had information that we could not possibly have obtained. The prosecution even argued that the fair could have been selling 'fruit and veg' for all anyone knew - a gross trivialisation of an extremely important issue… anybody who is not invited, including press, are not allowed in. However, we do know from information that came out after the event last year that illegal and unlicensed activities have taken place there." Before going to prison, Anne Kobayashi, aged 63, said: "This is a failed opportunity on the part of the legal system to take a courageous stand against the injustices and illegalities of the arms trade."

Primate change



Cambridge University has finally abandoned plans for a primate vivisection lab in Cambridge, ostensibly over financial risks.

The costs had risen from £24m to £32m, not to mention security costs and inevitable disruption by protestors. Deputy-PM John Prescott was unrepentant, after his role in the debacle was shown to be fatally flawed. The plan for the lab was rejected twice by the local Council, and it went to a public enquiry, where both the council and the police objected on the grounds that it was on a greenfield site and there would be costly disruptions and protests. Meanwhile, animal rights activists pointed out that the planned experiments were both cruel and bad science. The inspector agreed and stated that the centre should not go ahead. Then, in stepped Prescott to throw his weight behind the plan; he overruled the public inquiry inspector and gave the go-ahead in "the national interest", thus claiming exactly the opposite of the inspector's evidence-based conclusions.

So, it looks as though more sensible and less cruel brain research might get a chance at some funding after all. Later this year, the Neurosciences Research Institute at Aston University will open. They won't be damaging monkey brains to study Alzheimer's, but will instead study human brains, both living and post-mortem. There are a whole host of other methods to study disease, such as cell, tissue, and organ culture where human tissues are grown and experimented on; sophisticated computer modelling to study metabolism, screen drugs, and for use in education; and clinical research where diseases are studied in patients to identify the characteristics, symptoms, and possible causes. (source: Schnews).

Campaign and monkey experiments info.: www.primateprison.org
For more about the ongoing campaign against Huntingdon Life Sciences, the notorious vivisection lab near Cambridge, contact Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (0845458 0630): www.shac.net

ON THE EDGE

Outsourcing again

A few years ago Norwich Union and other financial bureaucracies decided to cut costs by building big call centres and shutting down local support and service activities. Now, they're cutting another 2,350 jobs and "exporting" the call centre work to India, sparking fury among workers but only a few words of sympathy from the Prime Minister. As for the Union bosses, they were so heavily involved in negotiations that they couldn't even be bothered to turn up and offer support. Amicus eventually released a statement saying the decision was "deplorable" and warned that 200,000 finance jobs could leave the UK over the next five years, vowing to help workers fight the move "by any means necessary". Unless, that is, something else comes up, or they are washing their hair that day.

Ignorance US-style

Sueing his school, 7th grade teacher Gary Cole explained that complaints by "a small group of fundamentalist Christian individuals" led to the creation of a curriculum "which never mentions religions other than Christianity and never teaches the history of civilisations other than Christian civilisations." He wasn't even allowed to teach the history of anti-Semitism, and he somehow was expected to explain the evolution of democracy in the Western world without talking about ancient Greece, or the influences of Indian, Japanese or Chinese cultures.

Meanwhile, a 7-year-old Lafayette boy was sent to a school behavioural clinic for answering questions about his parents. When a classmate asked little Marcus McLaurin about his mother and father, he replied that instead he has two mothers. His teacher's response was to send him to the principal's office.

On a behaviour report form signed by the assistant principal, the teacher wrote, "Marcus decided to explain to another child in his group that his mom is gay. He told the other child that gay is when a girl likes a girl. This kind of discussion is not acceptable in my room." At the behavioural clinic he was sent to, Marcus was forced to repeatedly write "I will never use the word 'gay' in school again."

Anarchists Against The Wall

Anarchists against the Wall is a group which formed in the run-up to last November's international day of solidarity against the wall (also the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall). On the day some 30 Israeli anarchists joined the Palestinian people of Zabuba village to tear down 20 metres of fencing.

On December 26th, part of the 'Alternative Protest Camp against the Apartheid Wall' at Deir Balut, near Ramallah, an Israeli anarchist was seriously injured by live ammunition fired by Israeli forces. No warning was given nor was there a threat to soldiers' lives. The incident occurred while around 100 activists damaged a gate in the wall close to the nearby Palestinian village of Mas'ha. Such gates have remained locked since the wall was built (despite promises to the contrary), and deny free passage for Palestinian farmers to their land.

The camp, based on joint Israeli-Palestinian resistance to the Israeli state's ghettoisation policy, was set up to highlight the land grabbing and settlement expansion that have followed in the wall's wake. In fact, the camp itself was in the grounds of the half-built Deir Balut village school. The school's construction was halted because land was confiscated for the wall – a far cry from Sharon's empty promises to evacuate the settlements.

Starting on December 31st, anarchist and ISM activists joined the Palestinian people of Budrus, also near Ramallah, to block work on a new section of the wall. Up to this point local people had already delayed the bulldozers for over two months. Failing to notice the media presence, attracted by the shooting incident at Mas'ha, the military again

responded with live rounds before retreating in a glare of publicity. Palestinian youths bore the brunt of military anger as the direct action continued during the following days despite a curfew and house to house searches for Israeli and ISM activists. The beatings, tear gas attacks, and point blank use of rubber bullets were widely reported by the Israeli media.

Building on the sudden 'discovery' by the Israeli media and public, after three years of Intifada, that the army fires live ammunition at unarmed demonstrators, and to mark the end of the protest camp, the people of Deir Balut, Anarchists against the Wall and others called a joint demonstration on January 3rd. This took place at an army checkpoint near Deir Balut, the scene of much vicious and systematic abuse of local Palestinians. For instance, just two weeks previously soldiers there had prevented a seven months pregnant Palestinian woman getting to hospital causing the abortion of her twins. In the event 300 Israeli activists were stopped by the army on their way to the checkpoint, leading to a sit down protest on the road, and several arrests. Nevertheless, about 400 Palestinians, Israelis and international activists marched to the checkpoint and held a peaceful demonstration covered by TV cameras.

http://indymedia.org.il/imc/webcast/71934.html

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Earth First – Action Update; http://host.envirolink.org/ef/
Corporate Watch; www.corpwatch.org
No Sweat; http://www.nosweat.org.uk
Hazards; http://www.hazards.org

Israel/Palestine

An Israeli sniper who shot International Solidarity Movement (ISM) volunteer Tom Hurndall in the head leaving him brain dead has finally been arrested after months of campaigning by his family. The army now admit that initial accusations of Tom being armoured and in camouflage and that the soldier was returning Palestinian fire, were lies. Mr Hurndall was shot eight months ago in a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip as he tried to help children out of the path of an Israeli tank. Opening fire on activists is becoming increasingly regular. Recently, the army shot and wounded two Israeli peace activists protesting at the construction of the Apartheid "security fence" through the West Bank at the village of Mas'ha which lost 97% of its land and olive trees when the wall was built.

Not that these tactics are anything new for the Palestinians - about one-fifth of all Palestinians killed by Israeli soldiers are children. On New Years day the Israeli army fired rubber bullets at people's heads during another demonstration against the wall, with ten people taken to hospital and deportation orders issued against four activists, including a Swedish MP.

As the Gush Shalom website says, the young soldier will probably justify his shooting by saying: "I only obeyed orders" - one of the most despicable sentences, remembered by any Jew from dark days.

Israel says the wall is being built because of security measures. So is it necessary to uproot 115,000 Palestinian olive trees and separate thousands of Palestinians from their land? Is it necessary to confiscate 37 wells that provide 4 million cubic meters of water? And isn't it telling that the Wall will annex the most fertile and rich land, leaving the Palestinians with only 40% of their agricultural land.

But not everyone is obeying orders. Five Conscientious Objectors (CO's) who have refused to serve in the Israeli Defence Force were sentenced this week to a year in prison on top of the year they have been held for refusing to serve in the army. The sentence is, in effect, an unlimited one as Israel intends to jail them till they agree to serve.

Support the objectors
www.refuz.org.il www.gush-shalom.org

Turkey

A strike by subcontracted workers at the Turkish Post Office's Bahcelievler Distribution and Handling Center in Istanbul has continued since October 17th last year despite police repression and the closure of their union, BÍS (Allied Workers Trade Union). They are demanding improvements in working conditions which include low pay, lack of paid leave and poor health and safety conditions.

The BÍS union, founded in August 2001 on the basis of self-management through the active participation of members, was closed down by the Labour Court in Istanbul on December 16th. Disguised as a failure to present the proper registration documents, this legal attack on the union is nothing other than an attempt by the state to defeat the strike. However, the struggle goes on thanks to the cooperation of another autonomous union, the Union of Energy and Electricity Workers. Meanwhile, BÍS asks for national and international protests against the decision to close it down.

Other unions and organisations have also expressed solidarity with the strikers. There have been rallies, demonstrations and benefit concerts as well as widespread coverage in the local press and on local radio. The strike and the issues that surround it have also been the subject of a documentary film, with English subtitles, called 'Ekmek Davasi' ('the Struggle for Bread', title of the BÍS journal).

Enquiries, messages of support, etc. to: BÍS Genel Merkez, Atatürk Mah. Íkitelli Cad. 6. Sokak, No: 8 Íkitelli, Küçükçekmece ISTANBUL, TURKÍYE Tel/Fax: +90 212 470 87 25 E-mail: birlesikiscisendikasi@yahoo.com or birlesikiscisendikasi@hotmail.com Photos at: http://www.geocities.com/birlesikiscisendikasi/haberptteng.html

Venezuela

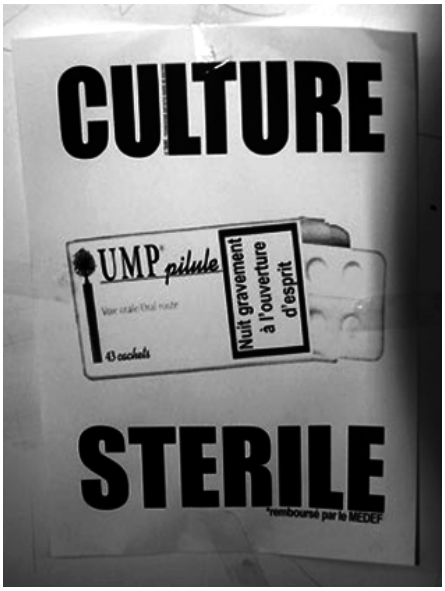
Latin American anarchists are networking. The Comision de Relaciones Anarquistas of Venezuela are circulating the new edition of the Latin American Anarchist Directory via e-mail. The Directory contains the basic data needed to identify and make contact with 180 groups and libertarian initiatives active in the continental libertarian milieu, offering an ample view of today's anarchist Latin American movement.

For more details contact mendezn@camelot.rect.ucv.ve

France+Belguim

500 people descended on the Paris métro armed with pots of glue, spray cans and colourful determination. More invaded the Brussel's metro with their own buckets of ideas. In Paris they split into groups of 40, radically repainting vulgar, buy-buy-buy advertising boards, transforming them with brushstrokes from private spaces for profits into public spaces of resistance. In Paris and Brussels subvertised advert boards screamed "No Adverts!", "Advertising Kills", "The Street is Ours", "Advertising is Hazardous to Your Mental Health." 130 stations were reclaimed and repainted in Paris while 7 were visited in Brussels. All 40 adbusters arrested were quickly released back into a subvertised Paris.

These actions of mass redecoration last November were called by Stop Pub ('Stop Ads') and other collectives in France. The aim was to 'reconquer public space' in the face of mass privatisation and repressive neo-liberal marketing. "Everything is seen as a commodity", said one ticketless adbuster, Gilles, "We don't want to be visually polluted." And to the hundreds of students, workers, artists, mums, dads and skaters that took part in these actions, the links between bigger adverts, less rights and more cops was clear. So the adbusters went calmly and non-violently from station to station, peacefully going about their decoration of vulgar car and clothes ads while chatting with the public and handing out info on the reasons for their actions. Métro passengers largely supported the actions, found them funny and in a few cases they even got their hands dirty doing some redecorating themselves.



Spain

Three years ago, European dockers got wind of the proposals for a port services directive which would further undermine the already disastrous state of dockyard working conditions across Europe. Eventually, in November last, against all odds and to the astonishment of many, the Directive was kicked out of the European Parliament.

Unfortunately, it is not over. The opponents of organised labour on the docks are still out there and will be back after our job security and decent working conditions. Earlier last year, the Spanish right-wing government presented new proposals for port legislation reflecting the anti-union spirit of European Directive. Negotiation between the various unions, the Government and the national port-owners association broke down early on and the workers were forced to embark on a series of strike actions. This resulted in a negotiated compromise on most aspects of the new plans. However, since the rejection of the Directive, the Government has announced that it will be riding rough-shod over the unions and push ahead with the new port legislation anyway.

So, it is back to the picket lines. At the same time, in Gijón on the north coast, negotiations between the local union and port management concerning redundancy and manning scales at the bulk terminal broke down and dockers have been on strike since the 15th December. The dispute has become a bitter struggle with clashes with the police who help bring in scabs. Dockers have responded by occupying the gantry-cranes and the fight seems to be escalating all the time.

Greece

To complete the facilities for this year's Olympic Games the Greek authorities are desperately cutting more and more corners. Increasing casualisation with longer and more frequent shifts mean health and safety on building sites has gone out the window. Many workers are non-Greek, some with no papers, some with temporary permits that last only as long as the job. In this position who's going to complain about safety conditions? The current death toll is around 50.

The preparations for profit also include a massive increase in 'security' measures, the proliferation of new fast-food joints, and the obliteration of the working class character of huge parts of the city.

A wide range of groups in Athens and all over Greece are now involved in campaigns, demonstrations and direct action, with the clear aim of disrupting the Games.

'We consider that the Olympic Games of 2004 are not only a Greek matter but an international one. So we call every movement against neoliberal globalisation and every militant, to consider the Olympic Games of 2004 an important opportunity for mobilisation and to make Athens in August 2004 a place of meeting and demonstration of those movements for a new internationalism, for another meaning of Sport, for a real coming together of the peoples of all the World.'

See http://www.anti2004.net/english.htm for some background info. Also see http://www.resistance2003.gr (the site is all in greek at the moment, but they're working on translations).

Argentina

In the northern province of Santiago de Estero, Argentina, the local government has banned all types of public meetings that don't have prior consent. Anyone not complying is subject to 1- 30 days imprisonment or a fine of 10-20 days pay. The new law is the state's response to a series of peaceful demonstrations and a memorial service to mark the first anniversary of the brutal torturing and murder of two young girls by an ex-policeman. Witnesses in the case have received death threats from the governor of the province. It seems the local authorities and police are closing ranks to suppress protests against violence, corruption and impunity, and using the same old tried and tested clampdown routine. http://argentina.indymedia.org/features/santiago/

Saipan

Saipan is the largest of a chain of fourteen islands in the Pacific Ocean known as the US Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. It is home to a $1 billion garment industry, with about 30 garment factories employing more than 10,000 workers, almost all young women from China, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Bangladesh and other Asian countries.

The workers live and toil in deplorable conditions, working up to 12 hours a day, seven days a week, and earning $3.05 an hour or less, often without overtime pay. With promises of high pay and quality work in the US, workers agreed to repay recruitment fees of thousands of dollars. Many workers also claimed that they signed "shadow contracts" waiving basic human rights, including the freedom to join unions, attend religious services, quit or marry. These circumstances trap Saipan garment workers in a state of indentured servitude.

Five years ago, Sweatshop Watch, Global Exchange, Asian Law Caucus, Unite, and Saipan garment workers filed three separate lawsuits against dozens of big-name retailers and Saipan garment factories alleging violations of US labour laws and international human rights standards. Last year, a settlement worth $20 million to the workers was approved with 26 retailers and 23 Saipan garment factories. The settling retailers include: Abercrombie & Fitch, Brooks Brothers, Brylane LP, Calvin Klein Inc, Cutter & Buck Inc, Donna Karan International, Dress Barn, Gap Inc (Banana Republic, Old Navy), Gymboree Corp, JC Penney Company Inc, J Crew Group Inc, Jones Apparel Group, Lane Bryant Inc, The Limited Inc, Liz Claiborne Inc, May Department Stores Company, Nordstrom Inc, Oshkosh B'Gosh Inc, Phillips-Van Heusen, Polo Ralph Lauren, Sears Roebuck and Company, Talbots Inc, Target Corp. (Target, Mervyn's, Marshall Fields, Dayton-Hudson), Tommy Hilfiger USA Inc, Warnaco Inc and Woolrich Inc.

This January, the last of the three lawsuits came to a close, without a major victory against the only company to hold out against the 2003 settlement; Levi-Strauss. Nevertheless, this allowed back payments for up to 30,000 Saipan workers, including those who sewed Levi's, to be distributed and an independent monitoring program of Saipan garment factories, including those that produced Levi's, to commence.

Mexico

Tarrant Apparel Group (TAG) has been coming under serious pressure to obey Mexican law and rectify human and labour rights violations (see DA28), as the battle to get justice for the sacked union activists continues. While Levi Strauss are no longer involved, other TAG clients, including The Wet Seal, Federated Department Stores, Abercrombie & Fitch, Candie's and Tommy Hilfiger have all refused to accept their responsibility to the Ajalpan workers.

The factory shut down for several weeks over the new year period, leaving approximately 450 workers without pay. Since then, the plant has slowly begun to bring back workers in blocks. Both Limited Brands and Levi's have contacted the US Government regarding the human and labour rights violations at the factory and are considering joint approaches to encourage the US National Administrative Office to seriously consider the CAT and United Students Against Sweatshops' North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation submission.

Meanwhile, Martin Barrios, Coordinator of the Human and Labor Rights Commission of the Tehuacán Valley was attacked and brutally beaten by an unknown assailant. Barrios suffered serious injuries to his face and skull as a result of the apparently planned attack, and the Commission believes the attacker was paid to carry out the assault in order to intimidate Barrios, his family and other members of the Commission. During the past year, the Human and Labor Rights Commission of the Tehuacán Valley has defended the rights of hundreds of workers who were unjustly fired from various blue jean factories owned by TAG as well as workers from other smaller Tehuacán maquilas. It has succeeded in pressuring Tarrant and local labour authorities to ensure that fired workers received severance payments that are at least close to what is required by the law.

Fax/write demanding a full investigation into the attack and prosecution of those responsible: Lic. Melquiades Morales Flores, Governor of Puebla, Fax: (011) (52) (222) 213-8805. Copies: Maquila Solidarity Network, e-mail: info@maquilasolidarity.org Campaign for Labor Rights, e-mail: clr@clrlabor.org TARRANT APPAREL GROUP: Gerard Guez, Chairman of the Board and CEO Office: 3151 E. Washington Blvd., Los Angeles, CA, USA 90023. E-mail: corazon.reyes@tags.com (Addit. source: Maquila Solidarity Nwk.)

Poland

The US Empire has begun discussions with key European allies about overhauling US global military deployments. Building on NATO's eastward expansion and the Polish state's support in Iraq, unofficial negotiations are underway that are expected to lead to a new US base near Poznañ in western Poland.

For Poznañ AntiWar Coalition (PKA – Poznañska Koalicja Antywojenna) the best way to stop the base is to mobilise the local community of Kshesin, the anticipated site. Pro-government media have already made much of the supposed benefits for Poland while Prime Minister, Leszek Miller, has already stated that 'Poland is ready to allow US bases on its territory'. PKA is opposed to the base first and foremost for political reasons. However, to make their message as clear and effective as possible they want information about present American bases around the world. To compete with government propaganda PKA want to focus their counter-arguments on four aspects of the base.

Firstly, the government is sure to hype up the issues of investment in the local area, new jobs for local people, and of course profits for Polish companies that build and service the base. However, in Germany for example, the use of local civilian staff is relatively low, because the bases prefer US

companies. PKA require reliable information on this, if possible supported by examples of already existing American bases.

Secondly, in terms of the environment, PKA is looking for examples of the adverse ecological impact of bases, including anything due to normal everyday working such as planes taking off and landing. This is especially important because Kshesin is close to a National Park.

Thirdly, in the social arena, PKA is especially interested in the relationship between US soldiers and local communities, including instances of crime and the occurrence of accidents. An example of the latter is the infamous cable car incident in Italy, about which activists in Poznañ only have incomplete information.

Fourthly, government propaganda will suggest that Poland will be safer because of the base. However, given the US Empire's criminal activities around the world, US installations are particularly prime targets for attack, meaning the local community risks becoming the accidental victim. Therefore PKA would also like information on such attacks that have occurred in the past.

In addition any information about other matters, even the most seemingly insignificant, would be greatly appreciated, as would notes and descriptions of previous campaigns against American bases anywhere in the world.

Please write to: rudabestia@o2.pl or P.O. Box 5, 60-966 Poznan, Poland.
PKA details: www.antywojenna.prv.pl

Spain II

Up until recently, workers in Spain who suffered disabling workplace accidents had, at least, the right to a meagre compensation that allowed them a salary for the rest of their lives. But, in the last few months, several court rulings have changed this, placing the onus of working under dangerous conditions on the workers themselves, instead of on the employers who set up the dangerous conditions. In short, the judges have decreed that workers should refuse to work under dangerous conditions. Obviously, if workers refuse to work they get sacked, but this small fact was ignored by the courts.

On average, three workers every day get killed in workplace accidents in Spain, and another thirty are injured. In response to this disgusting turn of events, the anarchosyndicalist and syndicalist organisations in Madrid have been holding joint demonstrations and protests.

www.nodo50.org/sobrera

Pakistan

The All Pakistan Federation of United Trade Unions (APFUTU) has contacted the IWA (anarchosyndicalist international) over the plight of the workforce at Lone China Ceramics, Gujranwala. Eight hundred workers and their familes face poverty and starvation after being locked out by owner Muhammad Aslam Lone, an ex-Pakistan Peoples Party member of the National Assembly. No reason was given and wages owed have not been paid.

APFUTU requests letters of protest to:
Mr. Mir Zafar Ullah Jamalui, Prime Minister of Pakistan, Prime Minister House, Islamabad, Pakistan. Fax: +92-51-920 8890. E-mail: Primeminister@pak.gov.pk
Mr. Abdul Sattar Lalika, Federal Minister of Labour, Ministry of Labour & Overseas Pakistanis, Block-B, Pak Secretariat, Islamabad, Pakistan. Fax: +92-51-920 3462 E-mail: seclab52@hotmail.com. Pakistan High Commission, 35 - 36 Lowndes Square, London, SW1X 9JN. Tel: 0207 664 9200 Fax: 0207 664 9224
Please also send copies to APFUTU at apfutu2001@yahoo.co.uk.

Thailand

269 workers (209 women and 60 men) from the News From Nasawat Apparel Factory in Mae Sot were arrested after walking out of abusive working conditions and seeking refuge in the Wat Chumpol Kiri temple in December. They were supported with food and bedding by other migrant workers, local support groups and Thai NGOs. During this time they had started to complete labour protection complaints forms (kor ror 7) to start legal proceedings to claim wages owed to them for the past two years of underpaid and exploitative working conditions.

More info.: http://www.nosweat.org.uk/article.php?sid=756&mode=thread&order=0

India - World Social Forum

The World Social Forum is the alternative version of the World Economic Forum. The 4th World Social Forum (WSF) took place at Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India in January, attended by 100,000 people from 132 different countries representing over two and a half thousand different organisations. While the world's greediest hide behind walls of barbed wire and riot police to do their backroom deals at the WEF, activists get together in open and democratic groups to develop real alternatives to capitalism at the WSF.

It is the first time that the WSF has been held outside Porto Alegre, Brazil. Mumbai was an appropriate location, since it has borne the brunt of India's economic liberalisation policies, with millions losing their jobs. Despite the 'benefits' of globalisation, 300 million Indians subsist on less than a dollar a day, many living in roadside shantytowns similar to the ones outside the Forum conference grounds. 100 million Indian families live without domestic water and hundreds of thousands of children work in cottonseed production and sweatshops. The WSF catered for these children with a special conference of 2,000 children's representatives.

As jobs are lost from America and Europe's call centres, leaving thousands on the dole, 50,000 young Indians are employed in the new outsourced call centres in Mumbai. Stress and physiological problems are rampant among these workers, who earn a mere $160 per month on all-night shifts. Workers in both countries are losing out in global capitalism's race to the bottom.

There was also a strong Dalit presence at WSF. Dalits are India's untouchables. They make up 25% of the country's population and are usually condemned to the most boring and menial work. "This gathering gives me hope that we will be able to live our lives in dignity and peace someday," said Vidi Thillana, a Dalit woman attending the forum. "It might not happen in my lifetime, but if we continue to stand in solidarity and gain inspiration from everyone else, my children will have the opportunities that I am fighting for."

The WSF is also about what one delegate called "an international alliance to battle the multinationals." Over 500 protesters marched under the banner of the People's Forum against Coca-Cola to condemn the company's operations in India, where three communities are experiencing severe water shortages as a result of Coca-Cola's operations. The Dalits and indigenous people are playing a key role in the protests. Unlike top-down activism, their campaigns are primarily village-organised, with national globalisation activists providing access to press and linkages with other affected villages. "Coca-Cola's actions are symbolic of the vulgar arrogance and criminal power of corporations that are looting people of their basic needs, water in this case," said Medha Patkar, coordinator of the National Alliance of People's Movements. But people are fighting back. Last April, Coca-Cola was targeted for boycott in protest against the US-led invasion of Iraq. As a result of that protest, sales dropped 50 percent in the state of Kerala and elsewhere.

The WSF isn't of course without its problems or critics. One complaint is that some of the groups involved are just papering over the cracks. Indian author Arundhati Roy told the crowds, "It is no good just saying jeetenge, bhai jeetenge ["we will win, we will win"]. It is time we did something." The problem is not just getting people to listen - but to make sure that rather than trusting leaders who once they get in power forget all their good words, we instead work together in our communities to take control together.

For more on the WSF see:
www.india.indymedia.org
For more on Coca-Cola
www.IndiaResource.org
www.colombiasolidarity.co.uk

Korea

2,500 foreign (migrant) workers are protesting throughout Korea against the government's new foreign labour system. In one protest, 100 migrant workers have been staging a 2-month vigil in a makeshift outdoor camp through the cold winter.

The Industrial Trainee System(ITS) in Korea is notorious for its exploitation of migrant workers. Under the scheme, many South Asian workers are being sent to Korea ostensibly to get training, but in fact as cheap labour. After 3 years, the contract says, 'trainees' must go back to their country. If they don't, they become a 'illegal migrant workers'. The Korean Government came up with the scheme to obtain cheap labour but also prevent the migrant workers from gaining any rights.

As trainees, they are not entitled to privileges enjoyed by regular employees, yet they are not really 'trainees' because they perform the same jobs that regular workers do. And even if they do the same jobs just as well, they receive much less than the normal wages. They do not have any bargaining power with employers; neither do they receive protection from local unions or state regulatory bodies.

Recently, the Government has attempted to tackle the 'problem' by issuing ultimatums to 'illegal' migrants, which invite them to apply for extra stays, or get out immediately, depending upon how long they have been in the country and what they have been doing. In the course of the subsequent crackdown and deportations, a number of 'illegal' migrant workers have gone into hiding to avoid the manhunt and inevitable abuse.

More info http://www.labournet.net/world/0311/korea2.html
Send protest letters to the President and to the Ministry of Justice from the KHIS(Korean House for International Solidarity) homepage: http://www.khis.or.kr/main_sendmail_eng.html

Iraq: workers' resistance

When it comes to resistance against the Iraqi occupation, coverage in the press, on radio and TV gives the impression that there's only one show in town – the Al Qaida/former regime loyalist bombing campaign. However, the US/UK vision of Iraq as a complete free trade area with the cheapest labour and the greatest profits in the middle east, is also increasingly under attack from organised labour.

A measure of the occupying regime's worry over such developments is given by their resorting to harassment of worker activists. In late November and early December US forces rounded up and arrested groups of union organisers. The Union of the Unemployed has led a campaign for jobs and unemployment benefits resulting not only in harassment and arrests by the authorities, but also in threats and fatwahs by religious parties. In November, two leaders were again arrested, and released the following day. In December, US soldiers stormed the headquarters of the Iraqi Workers Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), confiscating files, detaining eight members of the executive board, and blacking out the union's name on the front of the building. Although they were released the following day, no explanation was offered to any of those arrested. Both unions have been organising since last summer.

US funding is aimed only at lining the pockets of western investors. Hence, billions are pumped into repair work to pipelines and ports for oil exports, into preparing state enterprises for privatisation (and more lay-offs) and, of course, into maintaining the overwhelming military presence. Meanwhile, huge piles of war rubble lie untouched in the streets of Baghdad and 70% of the workforce have no jobs and no income. Hunger and homelessness are rife, while US corporations count the profits.

Those who do have jobs face harsh working conditions - among them complete lack of health and safety, shifts over twelve hours long, and monthly earnings of $60 and downwards. In addition, new unions face Saddam-era laws, enforced enthusiastically by the occupying authorities, forbidding workers from forming independent unions in state enterprises (where the majority of employed Iraqis work). This is backed up by an order issued last June which threatens those who 'incite civil disorder' with detention as prisoners of war. Despite such blatant repression, union organisers remain overwhelmingly opposed to privatisation and committed to the struggle for workers' welfare.

In the Basra area, workers in the oil and electricity industries have gone on the offensive. At the Southern Oil Company (SOC), Iraq's largest and most lucrative oil company, US corporation Kellogg Brown & Root (KBR), which operates the no-bid contract to reconstruct oil installations, has been booted off site by the union. The SOC Union represents 10,000 workers, whose backgrounds range from communist to membership of religious parties. Ignoring the occupation's use of Ba'athist era anti-worker laws, SOC Union members have been rebuilding independently since last June. They have used their own worn tools, spare parts from old equipment or from the local market, and skills learnt during reconstruction after the devastation of 1991 and the subsequent thirteen years of sanctions. By such means, pipelines, water pumps, combustion burners, crude oil pumping stations have all been reconstructed since the fall of Saddam.

In December, the SOC Union started to act against the low pay regime imposed by the occupation since last June. They threatened strike action backed up with armed resistance in the event of troops taking over the pumps. Pay rates included a minimum wage of US$40 a month, less than half that recommended for a sweatshop worker in a free trade zone in neighbouring Iran or Jordan. The occupying authority was quickly forced to return all oil workers to the higher pre-June emergency pay levels and to agree to implement the Union's own proposed wage structure. By late January, backed by the solidarity of oil unions throughout Iraq, the SOC won a doubled minimum rate and many other concessions on pay structure.

January also saw a series of actions by Basra's electricity workers. At the Najibeeya power plant, for instance, workers occupied the administration building and attacked the boss himself. This man, Hammad Salem Rghadbaan, formerly an influential Ba'athist, has relied on the occupation's anti-worker decrees to keep down wages, to discriminate against women workers and enforce long shifts without safety equipment.

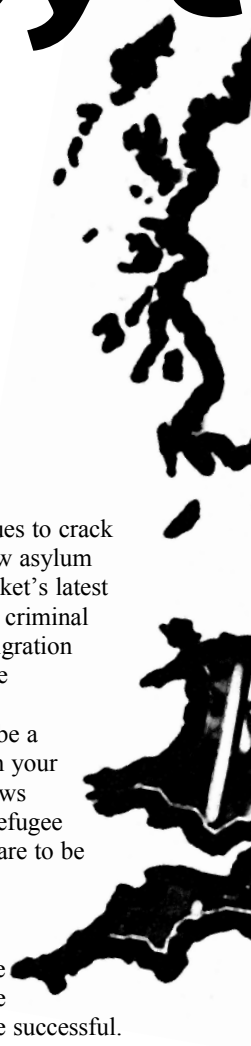
In coordination with the SOC Union, the electricity sector union took up the demand for a new wage structure as well as demands for equal pay, status, training opportunities, and other improvements for women, including full childcare facilities. They made it clear that refusal to meet these demands would lead to an escalation of the localised actions into a total shut down, which would also cut off gas and oil production within days. As in the oil industry, an interim agreement to return to emergency wage levels was negotiated. At the time of writing, talks continue over a new wage structure for the electricity industry, but electricity workers are confident, buoyed by the positive outcome for the oil workers.

Blunket's latest bill will:

- **punish refugees for behaving like refugees, by making it a crime to arrive in the UK without a passport**
- **make people-trafficking a crime, but do nothing to protect the victims of traffickers nor to address the real causes of trafficking**
- **further undermine the refugees' 'credibility', making it easier to label them bogus and reject their applications**
- **withdraw all financial support and housing from 'failed' asylum seekers with children, so children will be taken into care when their parents are forced into destitution**
- **give even more powers to immigration officers to enter, search, seize and arrest without warrant**
- **create a single tier appeal system, removing access to appeals to a second tribunal (at the moment, 20% of second tier appeals are successful) and denying refugees access to the higher courts**
- **make it a criminal offence for someone to refuse to co-operate with their own deportation**
- **introduce electronic tagging of asylum seekers**
- **changes to NHS rules will deprive 'failed' asylum seekers of health care**

In December, a traveller on London Underground reported a seemingly new occurrence. One evening before Christmas, outside Victoria station stood a line of about forty police and immigration service officers, stopping people of Arab or south Asian appearance, hassling them for ID, visas and other papers. Those without papers were taken away, many doubtless going on to detention centres for 'processing' or to await deportation. This type of racist immigration sweep may be relatively recent, but is on the increase, and is one more signal of Blunkett's vicious determination to further victimise asylum seekers.

Death by c



The media and politicians have tried to blame the Morecambe Bay tragedy on gang masters and people smugglers.

But, put simply, if it was easy to travel to Britain, there would be no money to be made.

The beaches of the Mediterranean are littered with the bodies of the victims of the clampdowns. On one day in November 2002, nearly 100 people drowned trying to cross into Europe by boat. Kurdish refugees are blown up by landmines on the Turkish-Greek border. People are crushed under lorries and trains, or suffocate in sealed cargo containers. 'Failed' asylum seekers are asphyxiated as they are restrained during forcible deportations. 'Illegal' workers are killed in appalling working conditions. Detention without trial or the threat of return to persecution push others to take their own lives. Between 1993 and 2003 at least 3,750 people died as a result of "Fortress Europe" - and the death toll continues to mount.

On 5th February, 19 people drowned in Morecambe Bay while picking cockles. They were all Chinese and were mostly deemed to be in the UK 'illegally'. As a result, there was a welter of publicity and demands for 'something to be done' about illegal working and exploitative gang masters. Never did the mainstream media address the real cause of this tragedy. These 19 people were victims of the same forces that kill hundreds every year - the 'developed' world's need to exploit the world's poor, while at the same time trying to keep them away from 'our' front door.

The media and politicians have tried to blame the Morecambe Bay tragedy on exploitative gang masters and criminal people smugglers. Undoubtedly, such scum exist ,and they profit on the back of those desperate to escape poverty and persecution. But they are the symptom, not the cause. Simple market forces are in operation. If it was easy to travel to Britain, there would be no money to be made. The harder it is to migrate legally, the more lucrative it becomes to provide a service facilitating 'illegal' entry.

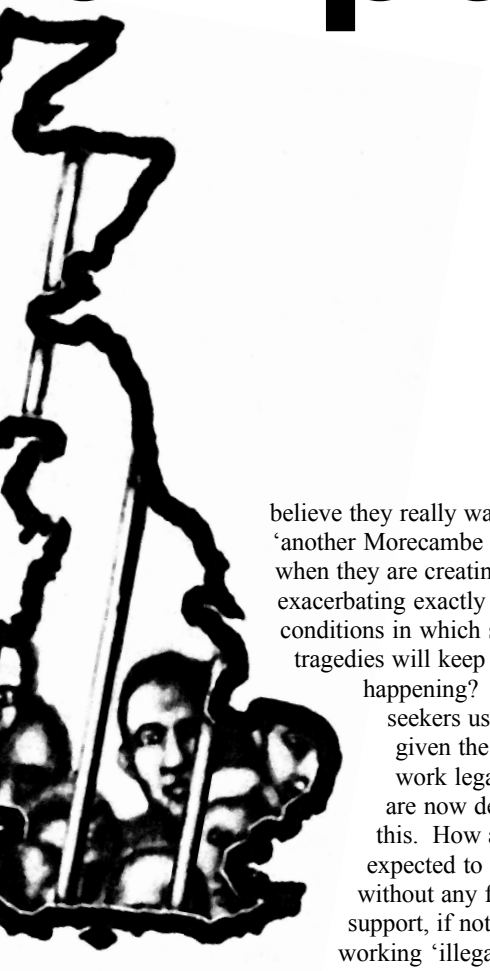
And still New Labour continues to crack down hard, with its 3rd major new asylum bill since it came to power. Blunket's latest plans increase the trend for using criminal sanctions against refugees. Immigration officers are to be given even more powers, asylum seekers will be electronically tagged, and it will be a crime to refuse to co-operate with your own deportation. Immigration laws make it almost impossible for a refugee to enter Britain legally, and they are to be punished for this by making it a crime to enter without a genuine passport. Asylum seekers who lose their first appeal will lose the right to appeal further, despite the fact that 1 in 5 second appeals are successful.

Already at least 10,000 people are living without any form of financial support. These are single people who are deemed 'failed' asylum seekers, and people who did not claim asylum 'immediately' on arriving in the UK. And, guess what? The government has made it much harder to claim asylum. Refugees can now only make their claims in person, at the port of arrival or at the Home Office. Every day, long queues snake around the Home office building in Croydon; people who will have no access to food or money until they reach the front of the queue, and perhaps not even then. Immigration officials admit in private that it is 'only a matter of time' before people die in that queue.

Blunket is happy forcing families with children into destitution. All financial support and housing will be removed from them if their case is refused and they lose their appeal. To 'protect' children from the worst effects of this, social workers will be expected to take them into care until the family is deported. Parents will face a choice – return to persecution, lose their children, or take their chances by going underground and working illegally.

How can Blunket and co. expect us to

lampdown



The worse the immigration laws, the more lucrative it is for people smugglers.

Blunket's policies are creating thousands of vulnerable, destitute people; ideal for gang masters and bosses.

believe they really want to stop 'another Morecambe Bay', when they are creating and exacerbating exactly the conditions in which such tragedies will keep on happening? Asylum seekers used to be given the right to work legally, but are now denied this. How are they expected to live without any form of support, if not by working 'illegally'? Blunket's policies are creating thousands of vulnerable, destitute people, a situation ripe for exploitation by gang masters and bosses.

Media reaction to the Morecambe Bay tragedy centred on either the role of gang masters or the question of how so many 'illegals' came to be here (depending on how liberal the journalist fancied themselves as being). The message of their reports is clear - there is no place for this kind of slave labour in modern, New Labour Britain. The sub-text to this is also clear – slavery and exploitation of '3rd world' workers should stay in the '3rd world', where it belongs. Despite the fact that large parts of Britain's building, agricultural, hotel, catering and manufacturing industries depend on the exploitation of 'illegal' workers, unless death on a large scale happens, the media don't want to know. People don't want to read about the working conditions of the people who pick their fruit, pack their fish, clean their hotel rooms, make their microwaves and sew their jeans. It might make too many people start to ask awkward questions about the real price of commodities and of a consumer culture; about the human costs of driving economies by conspicuous consumption.

At home or abroad, it's the same story. The world's poor are there to be used for the benefit of big business. Supply chains now demand 'just in time' delivery of products. There's no money to be made in keeping a well trained, well-paid, full-time workforce. Modern trans-national capitalism needs a ready supply of workers, to be hired and fired at will, to be worked as hard as possible for the lowest wages possible. The buzz word is flexibility, and what workforce is more flexible than 'illegal' immigrants? What do minimum wage and working time directives mean to people who know that to have any contact with the 'authorities' means deportation? The more draconian the immigration laws, the more exploitable people are.

The 'flexible' model holds true for sweatshops in the developing world too, where long hours, low pay and appalling working conditions are the norm. These are places where people's traditional economies have collapsed under the forces of global capital, and now they have no option but to work in such conditions. The world over, the new norm is the increasingly arms-length relationship between those who make the money and those who do the work. Contracts are 'outsourced' from companies to subcontractors to employment agencies to gang masters. Bosses at the top of this food chain can deny responsibility for workers, while continuing to rake in the profits from their labour.

As ever, those with the power and the money want to keep those who do the work divided and set against each other. They don't want us to remember who the real 'us' and 'them' are. Rejecting the false distinctions between legal and illegal, bogus and genuine, local and immigrant is part of the solution. The rest is simple; we need to fight for a world free of immigration controls, but also free of the economic pressures and inequalities that make people take such enormous risks in order to seek a 'better' life in the first place.

UK examples of some DEATHS BY CLAMPDOWN

- **June 2000 - 58 Chinese people found dead at Dover, suffocated in a container lorry**
- **October 2001 - Zhang Guo Hua dropped dead in Hartlepool, after stamping the word Samsung on microwave ovens for 24 hours on end**
- **May 2002 - Shiraz Pir committed suicide after discovering he faced deportation**
- **December 2002 - Mikhail Bodnarchuk hanged himself by his shoe laces at Haslar detention centre. He was due to be deported that day**
- **July 2003 - Satish Kumar Bakshi, Islam Uddin Ahmed, and Soran Karim, killed when the minibus full of agricultural workers they were travelling in was crushed on a level crossing in Worcestershire**
- **August 2003, Israfel Shiri died after setting fire to himself in Manchester. His claim for asylum had been rejected, and he had been denied medical treatment, housing, benefits and the right to work for over a year**
- **August 2003 - Hekmat Karim Salih found dead in a Spanish lorry entering Britain after being crushed by metal containers**
- **Christmas Day 2003 - Roman Kobitovich found dead in a cupboard in The Cafe Royal, one of London's smartest restaurants, after apparently suffering a fall.**

LINKS:
Death By Policy – The Fatal Realities of Fortress Europe – death toll recorded by United at: www.united.non-profit.nl
National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns: www.ncadc.org.uk
Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers: www.defend-asylum.org

Britain:
A century of suppression

The historic decision of the unions to form the Labour Party led to a century of compromise and sell-out that has brought us today's "New Labour" Thatcherite government.

Ever since the rise of capitalism and the modern state, governments have sought a compliant and aquiescent workforce. So, they have initiated various methods of control over everyone they see as a potential threat to the status quo.

In the early days, this control was fairly crude. If persuasion, threats or starvation wouldn't work then the military were brought in to shoot any potential troublemakers. As society changed and the working class began to organise, newer, more subtle, methods were needed. Combination Laws were passed, making it illegal for workers to join together to press their employers for shorter hours or better pay. As a result, trade unions were effectively made illegal.

At the same time, if the state felt particularly threatened, it soon resorted to the old methods of violence. In the early 19th Century, as the working class became more organised and vocal in its demands, the state introduced various legislation to combat militancy. The idea of the "Grand National Holiday" or general strike, the rise of Chartism, and the strikes of 1842 shook the British State, and it reacted with massive displays of military force and persecution, including wholesale arrests, imprisonments and deportations.

With the rise of trade unions, it seemed as if the workers were becoming better organised and more able to challenge the state. However, the union leaders were soon incorporated into the mechanisms of control of the state and sought compromise. The historic decision of the unions to try and gain a political voice in parliament by forming the Labour Party led to a century of compromise and sell-out that has brought us today's New Labour government.

Other means of diffusing working class challenges included the first welfare measures, like pensions and unemployment benefits. A non-contributory, means-tested old age pension was introduced for those of 70 or more at a time when the average life expectancy for men was 48 years! Health schemes and unemployment insurance, were introduced by 1911. These, however, were only to be paid to those who 'deserved' them, i.e. not to anyone who had been involved in an industrial dispute.

Around the same time, and partly as a reaction to the move towards parliamentary representation, there emerged a new mood among workers with direct action to the fore and a reluctance to follow the union leadership. In the run-up to WW1, waves of strikes hit Britain, including miners, railwaymen, and dockers, that shook the British state. Troops were used , and during the general strike in Liverpool, gunboats sailed up the Mersey and trained their guns on the working class areas.

Legislation proved useless against workers taking direct action and ignoring their own union leadership. This wave of syndicalist unrest stimulated an increasing amount of government intervention and prompted it to consider more organised ways of subduing industrial militancy. The outbreak of war gave the politicians the opportunity to assume wide-ranging powers over most areas of national life.

A 'state of national emergency' was declared; the first since the Napoleonic wars a hundred years before. Within days of the outbreak of war, parliament passed the first Emergency Powers Act, the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act (popularly known as DORA). The Act had one central clause, giving the government power to make regulations for 'securing the public safety and the defence of the realm'. Immediately, a series of Regulations were issued. Some were patently ludicrous, for example, one prohibited dog-shows, and Regulation 40B regulated the supply of cocaine to actresses. Others were more serious, including Regulation 7, which provided for six months in prison for spreading false rumours, and Regulation 14B, for the detention of people of alleged to be of 'hostile origin or association'.

Parliamentary Labour leaders were new to government but they wasted no time in co-opting trade union officials both nationally and locally into negotiations and agreements to

ensure "efficiency".

Things were still not all rosy for the government, however, as workers still had grievances, and the first Shop Stewards' Movement emerged, with strikes on "Red Clydeside" and in the mines of South Wales. As the war drew to a close, a new wave of strikes occurred across the country in various industries, and were met with a brutal response. Troops were used to break the strikes and strikers were threatened with military service.

The Regulations made under DORA were due to lapse when hostilities were officially declared to have ended; however, the government and various state agencies were keen to retain the key powers afforded by DORA for more permanent use. The period immediately after the war was a testing time for the ruling class, and in 19l9 the Emergency Powers Act was brought in again, this time to 'make exceptional provisions for the protection of the community in case of emergency'. The state was empowering itself with special sanctions in cases of major strikes, civil disorders and pre-revolutionary situations.

The government established the Supply & Transport Organisation (STO); the first body specifically to break strikes by co-ordinating the police and army at a national and local level. It was used to break up industrial unrest throughout the inter-war years.

In 1921, the mine-owners announced sweeping wage-cuts and posted lock-out notices at many pits. In response, the Triple Alliance, comprising miners, railwaymen and transport workers, called a strike. The Lloyd George government declared a state of emergency and dispatched troops to working-class areas. The Triple Alliance had emerged from the syndicalist unrest and the revolutionary implications of these three vital industries striking together was not lost on the government. However, by 1921, the original syndicalist-inspired idea had been undermined by the union leadership who were not prepared to use this threat to challenge the status quo. Three days later, the militant miners (not for the last time) were sold out by the right-wing leadership of the Triple Alliance. The day of the sell-out, 21 April 1921, became known as 'Black Friday'.

The first sustained use of the post-war Act was in the General Strike in 1926 when it was in force for eight months, although the strike itself lasted only a few days, and again the trade union leadership capitulated and left the miners to fight on alone. In the run up to it, while the TUC General Council dithered, the Supply &Transport Committee (STC) who co-ordinated the governments, plans finalised their preparations. They saw the strike in terms of class war, while the TUC leadership still naively thought it was just about wage cuts. One of the leading lights of the STC at this time was Winston Churchill, along with others with a proven track record of anti-working class actions.

The police and the military were in place almost immediately to break the strike and, crucially, the government was able to publish the *British Gazette*, edited by Churchill, run by scabs protected by the military.

After the General Strike the STO remained in place. The Labour Government in 1929 kept it in place too. In the next forty years there were four more declarations of a state of emergency, in the dock strikes of 1948 and 1949 (by the Labour government), during the 1955 rail strike (by the Tories), and in the 1966 seamen's strike

As the war drew to a close, a new wave of strikes occurred across the country in various industries, and were met with a brutal response.

Margaret Thatcher was much better prepared when the miners went on strike against pit closures in 1984. She resisted declaring a state of emergency, instead asking the military to provide "logistics assistance" to the police force.

(by Labour). Sir Alec Douglas-Home's brief period as Tory Prime Minister saw the passing of the Emergency Powers Act 1964, which amended the previous one in two ways. Firstly, it widened the causes which could justify the declaration of an emergency with the words "There have occurred, or are about to occur, events of such a nature" as to disrupt the life of the community. Secondly, it made permanent the provision from the Defence (Armed Forces) Regulations 1939 to allow the use of the armed forces in direct employment in 'agricultural work or in other work, being urgent work of national importance.'

The seventies saw an upsurge in the use of the Act. The declaration of emergency by the Tory government in October 1973 lasted for four months and was the longest since that of the General Strike. Previously there wereit followed two in 1970 (in July over the dock strike, and December over the electricity strike) and two in 1972 (in February over the miners, and August over the docks again).

Margaret Thatcher was much better prepared when the miners went on strike against pit closures in 1984. She resisted declaring a state of emergency, instead asking the military to provide "logistics assistance" to the police force.

Now, another Labour government has plans to update the legislation with its new Civil Contingencies Bill. The proposed legislation would give the government stronger emergency powers to provide "a wide range of co-ordinated, capable resources" to deal with various modern peacetime emergency situations, including terrorist attacks.

The Bill widens the definition of what constitutes an emergency to include serious disruption to the political, administrative and economic stability of part of the country, or a threat to its security. It will also for the first time give the government the power to declare a state of emergency on a regional as well as a national basis, and then seek parliamentary approval of its decision within seven days. The state of emergency would be declared by royal proclamation, although this could be dispensed with as "in some circumstances it might prove impractical".

The new Bill will give sweeping powers to ministers to do almost anything they like in an emergency. It poses potentially the greatest threat to civil liberty that any parliament is ever likely to consider. While the previous Emergency Powers Act was mostly used against striking trade unions, these powers are also largely being transferred to the new Bill.

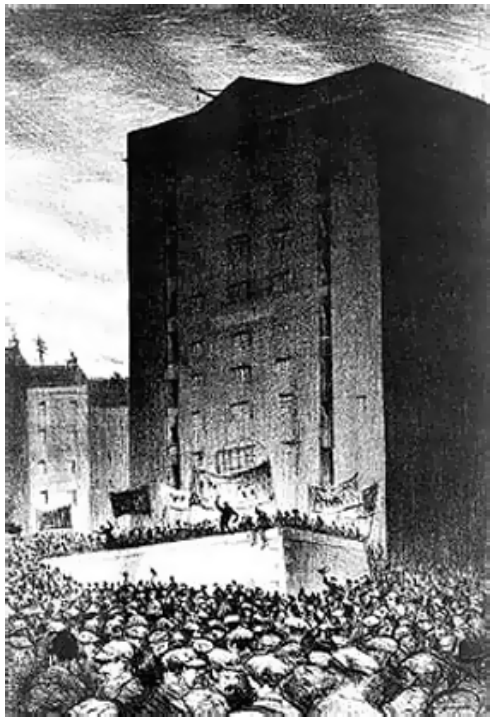
Although the Bill is a watered down version of the original, after widespread complaints by civil liberty groups, the powers available to the state are truly draconian. Basically, it is Britain's very own version of the US Patriot Act (see DA26). Cities could be sealed off, travel bans introduced and all telecommunications cut off. Demonstrations could be banned and the news media be made subject to censorship. New offences against the state could be "created" by government decree.

We have a government that is intent on controlling all aspects of our lives. It is fast becoming the most authoritarian government Britain has ever had. Forget Margaret Thatcher's rule; the Iron Lady has nothing on this lot. It is high time those on the left opened their eyes and saw the Labour Party for what it is, a vicious capitalist party.

The TUC and the union leadership have shown their reluctance time and time again to make any meaningful challenge to advance the cause of the working class. While the various left wing factions manoeuvre for position and form their fleeting alliances, the rest of us need to reject going thorough official channels and using state agencies once and for all; it gets us nowhere. The only thing that works potently enough is the spirit of direct action that first caused the state to panic.

Our direct action roots:

The Scottish experience



During the First World War, no country lost more people in combat, as a proportion of population, than Scotland. Before the war commenced, the Scots had a reputation as being the bravest and fiercest regiments in the British Army. At the onset of war, no draft was required in Scotland; there was a veritable flood of volunteers. But the mood changed quickly when the scale of the carnage became apparent and streets, towns and villages were stripped of living young men.

In the years running up to the war, Glasgow, like many other cities, was in political turmoil. Revolutionaries of all strands, including anarcho-syndicalists, were casting the seeds of their ideas on fertile ground. Glasgow, and in particular Clydeside, was the engine room of the British Empire. Half of the entire world's shipping was built in shipyards on the Clyde.

But the workers who produced the goods lived in poverty, dirt and squalor. They worked 54-hour weeks for subsistence wages, and the idea of having a more equal share of the vast profits generated by shipbuilding was, understandably, an appealing one.

The war turned the screw but didn't shut off the rhetorical supply. The able men went off to the front and the remaining population of working age, including women, who traditionally stayed at home bringing up the family, were called on to make up the difference. Except, they were asked to strive harder; more labour for no more pay.

They weren't about to lie down. The Glasgow Rent Strike of 1915 demonstrated the power of organised labour and caused the government of Lloyd George to pass the Rent Restriction Act, setting rents at pre-war levels and forbidding landlords from raising them.

When the war was over, the troops returned to a city where there was full employment and falling demand. If nobody was sinking ships, there was no requirement to build as many.

The unions agitated for change. Shortening the working week would mean more demand for labour. A 30-hour week with a guaranteed minimum wage of £1 a day was demanded. At a conference in Glasgow on January 18th 1919, the union leadership and the Clydeside shop stewards eventually compromised on a call for a 40-hour week with further reductions if this failed to provide the necessary number of jobs. They also agreed that a General Strike would be called for January 24th, to concentrate the minds of the employers.

The call for a General Strike was successful and Glasgow's heavy industry came to a standstill. On Monday, January 27th, there was a mass march of striking workers to George Square and an open-air rally addressed by the strike leaders. On Wednesday 29th, there was another mass rally at George Square where a deputation of strikers met with the Lord Mayor. In good faith they accepted his promise of a response to their demands by Friday and agreed to return to George Square to hear it.

However, the establishment in Westminster were no in a mood to compromise. Robert Munro, the secretary of state for Scotland, said that it was "a misnomer to call the situation in Glasgow a strike - it was a Bolshevist rising". Another cabinet minister revealed that "the King is in a funk and is talking about the danger of revolution."

So when the strikers reassembled in George Square on Friday 31st January, thousands of police armed with batons were lined up in the surrounding streets, and they attacked the assembled strikers. Stupidly as it turned out, because many of the striking men assembled were hardened war veterans. These men were unintimidated by the short bits of wood wielded by the police. Pitched battles ensued, and the striking workers uprooted iron railings and commandeered bottles from a passing lorry to use as weapons in self-defence against the police.

The chief Constable tried to read the Riot Act but had it snatched out of his hands. Some of the strike leaders were beaten and arrested. The battle was fought in George Square and the surrounding streets. The police were heavily outnumbered and driven back. The strikers regrouped and marched to Glasgow Green. They found the police waiting for them there, and another pitch battle ensued, before once again, the police were driven back.

The fighting went on through the day and into the night. The government called troops in to restore order. They were canny enough not to call on the Scottish Regiment, which was in barracks in Maryhill. These troops were veterans of the war and likely to be sympathetic to the strikers. Instead, they called up inexperienced English troops.

The sight of tanks and 10,000 armed soldiers on the streets of Glasgow restored order. Within a week, the strike was settled and a 47-hour working week agreed on.

Willie Gallacher, one of the leaders of the strike, is quoted as saying "we were carrying on a strike, when we ought to have been making a revolution". Maybe he was right.

The chief Constable tried to read the Riot Act but had it snatched out of his hands. Some of the strike leaders were beaten and arrested. The battle was fought in George Square and the surrounding streets.

12,000 prisoners prov

There is a saying, all prisoners are political prisoners. What is certainly true is that crime and punishment is a class issue.

More and more people are being sent to prison in this country - many for minor offences directly related to poverty. Successive governments have chosen to tackle crime not by looking at its root causes, but by "getting tough" and imposing harsher sentences. The result is overcrowding in the prisons and despair and ultimately death. Many die while they are still innocent before the law.

According to figures collated by penal reform charity Inquest, 88 people killed themselves in prison last year. 41% of those who took their own lives were on remand, in custody awaiting trial, yet to be convicted of any crime. Women accounted for 14 of the self-inflicted deaths in 2003, up 56% on the previous year and the highest number ever recorded. The number of women killing themselves in prison has risen eightfold since the early 1990s.

Almost 12,000 people were held on remand in prisons in England and Wales last year for crimes for which they were not subsequently convicted. The story is much the same in Scotland.

This incredible rise in self-inflicted deaths - up 29% since 1997 – is no doubt due to the increased prison population. People are being jailed for minor offences and there is a higher number of prisoners with a history of drug and alcohol abuse and mental health problems.

The vast majority of prisoners are working class and the majority are inside due to poverty. The newsworthy cases involving violence, murder and sexual abuse are a minority. Mostly, people are locked up for stealing, often tiny amounts, and have a history of poverty and deprivation.

Because of their backgrounds, working class people are more likely to be kept on remand awaiting trial. Recent government figures show that 11,742 people who were jailed awaiting trial in 2002 were either acquitted by the courts or had the proceedings against them terminated.

Most received little or no compensation, despite being held for an average of two months in overcrowded local prisons, although there are many cases of people being held a lot longer. In recent years, at least three people have spent three years on remand and one person spent six years.

In some of these prisons, remand prisoners are locked in shared cells for up to 22 hours a day. They have limited access to showers and are allowed 30 minutes' exercise a day, weather permitting. They eat and sleep in cramped cells, which also contain their toilet.

In total, more than 58,000 prisoners were remanded in custody awaiting trial in 2002. This is an increase of 5,000 on the 2001 level, and the figure is set to rise again following passage of the recent Criminal Justice Bill.

The new legislation reverses the presumption in favour of bail in certain cases and puts the onus on defendants to prove they should not be remanded in custody. Some working class accused will find it virtually impossible to persuade a court to grant them bail.

Of course, it is the most vulnerable people who are ending up in jail. Being poor is one thing, but when it is combined with a history of mental illness or a drug/alcohol dependency, care and support gives way to incarceration. Someone who is suffering mental health problems will not be helped by being locked up. In fact, the opposite is the case, with a huge increase in self harm, not to mention deaths.

Women are more likely to self-harm than men, with a large proportion hurting themselves in the first month of their sentence. The female population is the fastest-growing section of the prison population, more than doubling in the last six years. It is an extraordinary increase, particularly when the facts about women and prison are considered.

We know that the majority of women offenders pose a low risk to the public. Most women in prison are not dangerous - the most common crimes are theft or handling stolen goods, together with fraud and forgery. We know that imprisoning mothers has a disproportionately disruptive effect on family life. We know that because the number of women in prison is relatively small, inmates are held far from home and their access to suitable regimes is restricted. We know that women

It is the most vulnerable people who are ending up in jail. Being poor is one thing, but when it is combined with a history of mental illness or a drug/alcohol dependency, care and support gives way to incarceration.

Over the past ten years the prison population in England and Wales has risen rapidly to a point where it is now being described as having reached epidemic proportions. Private companies are funding prisons as sources of cheap labour. Against prison slavery has staged a number of pickets around the country. against prisonslavery@mail.com

ved innocent

react more adversely to custody than men, not least because of the higher incidence of mental-health problems among female prisoners. We know that more than half the women in prison have experienced physical or sexual abuse.

It is not difficult to tease out the reasons. Women are doubly punished for offending because their incarceration goes against stereotypical ideas of how "nice" girls behave, but the main factor is the number of women in poverty. It is personal circumstances that get women into prison.

The UK also locks up more young people than most other countries in Europe and there is an increase in the use of custody for children under the age of 14. Children and young people in prison are often children in need. Not only are they commonly from deprived areas, but 75 per cent of children in young offender institutions have not attended school beyond the age of 13 and over two thirds have a reading age lower than 11. More than half of the young people in prison have a diagnosable mental health problem and, of young people who commit grave offences, 90 per cent are victims of childhood trauma and 78 per cent have experience of emotional, sexual or physical abuse.

There is also a current increase in the number of pensioners who are being locked up. One in five pensioners are on the breadline. Half are cutting back on spending and half a million are going back to work. Hit by rising council tax bills and dwindling pension payments, our senior citizens are forced to economise. While some are penny pinching, others are pinching pennies, and we do mean pennies.

All across the UK, elderly people are being forced into breaking the rules - everything from smuggling tobacco to squirreling away benefits - and our jails are holding a growing number of old and frail prisoners who struggle to cope with life inside.

There is a saying, all prisoners are political prisoners. What is certainly true is that crime and punishment is a class issue. DA

People who killed themselves in prison in 2003

Last year's most shocking list

Andrew Lloyd McLeggan, 31, hanging, Brixton prison
Albert Preston, 26, hanging, Altcourse
Maurice Cowen, 30, hanging, Durham
Michael Logue, 40, hanging, Preston
George Coates, 62, hanging, Blakenhurst
Martin Wilson, 24, hanging, Prison Escort and Custody Service
Stephen Barrass, 23, hanging, Durham
Petra Blanksby, 19, hanging, New Hall
Daniel Blake, 21, hanging, Woodhill
Kevin McSweeney, 35, hanging, Wandsworth
Robert Jones, 32, hanging, Swansea
Wendy Booth, 35, hanging, Durham
Liang He, 23, hanging, Bedford
Paul Baker, 42, burns, Dartmoor
Emma Levey, 25, hanging, Downview
Gary Hatton, 31, hanging, Elmley
Andrew Minor, 36, hanging, Shrewsbury
John McFarlene, 26, hanging, Liverpool
Mohammed bin Duhri, 19, hanging, Belmarsh
Richard Dales, 28, hanging, Hull
Leon Marshall, 27, hanging, Lewes
Jaon Williams, 28, hanging, Bristol
Brian Smith, 20, hanging, Aylesbury Youth Offenders Institute
Robert Green, 38, hanging, Winchester
Ian Tabberer, 35, hanging, Leicester
Steven Coates, 43, hanging, Camp Hill
Iqbal Shamraz, 35, hanging, Nottingham
Craig MacAdam, 25, hanging, Acklington
Michael Proctor, 24, hanging, Leeds
Julie Bernadette Walsh, 39, overdose, Styal
Barry Edward Mawson, 44, hanging, Liverpool
Charles Dojer Lebon, 43, hanging, Winchester
Duncan Barrett, 24, hanging, Wymott
Robert Cairns, 29, hanging, Wormwood Scrubs
Phillip Allcock, 41, hanging, Altcourse
Peter Shaw, 50, hanging, Belmarsh
Barry Beeres, 22, hanging, Wellingborough
Vincent Spinelli, 40, hanging, Liverpool
Graham Draisey, 36, hanging, Manchester
Andrew Blacknell, 25, hanging, Nottingham
Raymond McDermott, 32, hanging, Preston
Robert Dickinson, 52, hanging, Lincoln
Benjamin Townsend, 19, hanging, Norwich
Jessica Adam, 22, hanging, New Hall
David Boote, 32, hanging, Blakenhurst
Hayley Williams, 41, hanging, Styal
James Prosser, 47, jumped off building, The Verne
Darren Bennett, 30, hanging, Nottingham
Kevin Collins, 29, hanging, Wymott
Patrick Okello, 32, hanging, Wandsworth
Daniel Madden, 38, hanging, Winchester
Jayne Buck, 28, hanging, Durham
Andrew Graham Barclay, 20, hanging, Norwich
Mark Joseph McNamara, 20, hanging, Swinfen Hall
Jolene Willis, 25, hanging, Styal
Ian Birrane , 45, hanging, Highdown
Alan Rowles, 29, hanging, Birmingham
Carl Steven Dennis, 23, hanging, Hull
Neil Mark Bracey, 41, hanging, Shepton
Steven Mark Wilson, 44, hanging, Blakenhurst
Paul Alan Watson, 20, hanging, Castington
Rajwinder Singh Mutti, 22, hanging, Blakenhurst
Paul Dobbin, 23, hanging, Forest Bank
Michael Smith, 37, hanging, Elmley
Adel Muftah El-hage, 29, electrocution, Woodhill
Nicholas Graham, 23, hanging, Dorchester
Neil Sowry, 32, hanging, Leeds
Andrew McKee, 32, hanging, Preston
Sue Stevens, 48, hanging, Durham
David Taylor, 22, hanging, Belmarsh
Steven Walpole, 33, hanging, Wandsworth
Helena Price, 27, hanging, New Hall
Stephen Kirby, 57, hanging, Nottingham
David Lawson, 39, hanging, Bullingdon
Jennifer Dawn Clifford, 19, hanging, Bullwood Hall
Michael Bodnarchuk, 42, hanging, Haslar Immigration Removal Centre
John Leslie Sharp, 40, hanging, Bristol
Alan Hutchinson, 32, hanging, Lancaster Castle
David Byron, 31, hanging, Doncaster
Clare Parsons, 20, hanging, Eastwood Park,
Sarah Campbell, 18, overdose, Styal
Stuart Warwick , 29, burns, Winchester
Timothy Birch, 30, hanging, Bristol
Leanne Gidney, 18, hanging, Brockhill
Michael Dolman, 49, hanging, Birmingham
Alan Brittan, 56, hanging, Birmingham
Nicholas Brownlee, 29, plastic bag over head, Norwich
Clinton Rixon, 21, hanging, Dorchester.

DIY funerals

Our culture's squeamish attitude towards death is the only thing standing between us and a burial within any part of the land that we like.

The ritualising aspect of death has long been one of those 'nice little earners' for capitalists. Undertakers charge between £1,500 and £2,000 for the average funeral (though the 'average' for North London is around £4,000), with crematorium charges averaging an additional £250, and burial plots rising in price as space in cemeteries and church graveyards becomes scarcer. Cremations, which are favoured by 80% of Britons, cost an average of £1,215.

Crematoria pass the costs of European anti-pollution regulations back to the customer, but the biggest cut of the funeral bill goes to funeral directors; around £585 for the most basic service. The average fee for an independent funeral director is £791, and some companies, including an American conglomerate that has taken over around 18% of funeral parlours in Britain and over 20% of crematoria, charges an average of £1,031 for funeral directors costs.

Our culture's relationship with death has become sanitized and distant – and funeral directors have assumed an expertise that most ordinary people have lost – knowledge about what to do with bodies after death, at a time when we are grieving and most need support. The irony is that having a closer relationship with the body of the dead person – cleansing it, taking care of it prior to cremation or burial, and then choosing where to place that body – can itself be a good way of coming to terms with our grief and loss.

In fact, dead bodies are not evil receptacles of disease. They do not corrupt the land or water. Soil, and living organisms in it and in the body itself will break it down safely and cleanly.

In fact, dead bodies are not evil receptacles of disease. They do not corrupt the land or water. Soil, and living organisms in it and in the body itself will break it down safely and cleanly. We need to be very aware that our culture's squeamish attitude towards death is the only thing standing between us and a burial within any part of the land that we like.

There is a growing movement away from traditional funerals; partly as a reaction to the high costs, and partly because of the impersonal nature of many crematoria, and the often inappropriate, standard religious ceremonies that many people have come to believe are compulsory. In reality, there is no compulsion on anyone to have a religious ceremony – it is just what most funeral directors assume will be the case, and they will also have business arrangements with local clergy. There are alternatives; the Humanist Association offers printed guides that set out suggestions for anyone who wishes to conduct a non-religious funeral, whilst a number of other organizations provide some useful information on the law, your options and some suggestions for planning a farewell that fits.

If anyone has ever been to the funeral of a loved relative or friend and been horrified by the sermonizing or inaccurate picture drawn of the deceased person by an officiate (usually a priest) who hardly knew them, then you will recognize the importance of putting together a funeral that really means something. The trouble is, that trying to be sensitive and creative when you may be in shock or grief does not come easy, especially when you are used to this being the job of someone professional. But actually, with a little planning and forethought, it is not difficult.

If the dead person did not leave detailed instructions about what their 'alternative' funeral might entail, get together with family or friends beforehand to decide what you think would be suitable. Sometimes thoughts and memories of the person, paired with some good readings are okay- but depending on the circumstances, you may feel as though you may all need to commit the body to the earth fairly simply, and have a memorial get-together to share memories a few weeks later, when you have had time to gather your thoughts. One thing to avoid (and here comes the voice of experience) is having a free-for-all where one or two people 'hog' the grief regardless of how other people, including partners and children who were very close to the dead person, might be feeling. This is where planning *together* with others and having an agreement around input is useful.

On a practical note, many of us are confused about the official procedures that follow a death, partly because we shy away from thinking about it until we have to; and also because it is mystified by those who benefit from being 'experts' at a time when most of us are unlikely to want to start researching information for ourselves. It is generally pretty straightforward. In England and Wales, for example, if the person died at home, a doctor must have visited them within two weeks, otherwise the death is referred to a coroner. The doctor will then issue a free death certificate if a burial is planned. If the body is to be cremated, two certificates from two different doctors must be obtained for a total charge of £82. Death certificates must be

presented at the local register office within five days of the death. The registrar will issue a burial certificate (this will come from the coroner if an inquest has taken place) if this is the intended method of disposal. It is as simple as that.

There is another good reason for the turn away from crematoria and graveyards, and that is concern about the impact of crematoriums on the natural environment. One internet site suggests that: "*Anyone with green pretensions should think twice about cremation - 437,000 wooden coffins are wastefully burnt in the UK each year, polluting the atmosphere with dioxin, hydrochloric acid, hydrofluoric acid, sulphur dioxide and carbon-dioxide. Burial, even with a wooden coffin, locks the carbon underground and doesn't add to the greenhouse effect. And it helps to protect land from being used by humans, thus saving it for wildlife.*"

As for burial outside of a cemetery, most people still believe that burial outside of consecrated ground is illegal. To add to this misconception, government departments and local councils are often not clear about the law themselves, when approached. Planning law surrounding burial is vague and it is individuals' interpretation of this that causes confusion. However, the truth is that the practicalities of arranging a burial are very, very simple. If the burial is on private land, the death certificate should be handed to the landowner or manager. The tear-off slip at the bottom should be filled out and returned to the registrar within 96 hours of the burial - the only legal requirement.

'I can confirm to you that planning permission is not required for the burial of one or two persons. While planning permission is not required, [it is] strongly advised to consult [the] local authority to ensure [the grave] would not...be polluting the water table. You would also be advised to append a plan of where the body is to the deeds of your property.' (Letter to Natural Death Centre from Department of Environment 12.5.94)

You do not need planning permission. Neither do you need to contact the Environmental Health Department. All you need is permission from the land owner (yourself if you own your garden). The Council will have to get permission from the Home Office to exhume you, (which they are unlikely to get), if they feel strongly about your choice of burial site. Consulting the local authority about the water table is not good idea, since this will set alarm bells off all over the Town Hall and invite unwarranted interference.

Wherever possible, do not bring officialdom into your plans since their knowledge of the law is generally appalling and their actions based on their own fears and from living in a culture that has turned its back on anything to do with death. Rather, we should take advantage of the law as it stands, and think about conservation and feeding the land.

The pollution of the water table is very unlikely from one or two bodies. Dead bodies will not cause problems once they are buried since the earth acts as a deodorizer and cleaning agent. However, if you are particularly concerned about this, contact the Environment Agency for advice. They suggest, for instance, that burial should not take place within 10 meters of any standing or running water.

Many woodland sites will accept bodies both uncovered, and wrapped in a shroud. Those preferring an eco-friendly cardboard coffin can buy one for £45 by mail order or different types directly from wholesalers from £53, delivery included.

For those of us who are not concerned about being buried with others of whatever faith, burial out in the open land is an achievable and worthwhile aim "*Don't take death lying down*," urges Funerals to Die For, a website offering support and advice to DIY funeral organisers. "*Always stand up for your rites.*"

The New Natural Death Handbook is available at £12.99 inc. p/p from The Natural Death Centre, 0181-208 2853, www.naturaldeath.org.uk

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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 in full.

Dear DA,

In the last few years we tried to contact you but it seems that our postal services are not reliable. For safety now we are giving you a return address outside Kosova.

Our not-for-profit free reference library project (RLP) is based in Pristina (Kosova) and is a meeting point for encouraging public activity in a non-violent way. After the cruel wars and DU bombs not only are cancer & birth defects growing dramatically in every Balkan country but also you are able to see the growing signs of the new neo-colonialism everywhere!

RLP would be grateful if you send us your magazine in future on a complimentary basis. Here the average salary is quite miserable ($40 monthly) and our group is not in a position to order any foreign publications otherwise.

We would like to receive a set of the back issues still available (esp. Summer 2003 issue).

Please encourage your readers or colleagues to donate to us any second hand copies of books or other publications. Also any addresses of other such independent magazines welcome.

Yours sincerely
RAD, Coordinator RLP

DA back issues have been sent – any other material/contacts you have to: R.L.Project, c/o PF 256, CH4142, Munchenstein, Switzerland.

DA list,

I think a football issue would be good. It's already a very politicised sport both here and abroad, where political allegiances are reflected in the team you support. Last week I found myself in the curious position of being happy that Chelsea, the very nadir of corrupt Capitalism at work, beat Lazio four nil; the terraces of Lazio AC being a recruiting ground for the Italian Neo-Fascist movement, 'Forza Nuova'. There's also very interesting issues surrounding the kind of 'new' money that is coming into football. Chelsea is owned by a Russian Oligarch, who it seems has bought the club in order to launder some very suspect money from the former soviet state. So numerous are the club's faceless, unnamed shareholders, that Chelsea FC has become a metaphor for the way Russia was itself carved up among a cabal of Oligarchs in the early 90s.

Another interesting aspect of this debate, aside from how an Anarchist F.A. would be organised, would be to extend the reforming principle to the rules of the game itself. An anarchist game of football would be played on a triangular pitch, with three goals. There would be an odd number of players, who would not be part of separate teams, but would spontaneously form allegiances as and when the flow of play dictated them to do so. This would mean that a player with the ball could, legitimately, pass the ball to someone who was previously an opponent, or indeed score a spectacular own-goal. I actually tried playing this with two other friends in the local park, and can recommend it as great fun. In fact, why don't we organise the first Free Anarchist World Cup in Manchester next year? O.

Hi,

I have been trying to get in touch with any UK retail food labour unions that might be affected by the a coming buy-out in February of a group of food stores in London and elsewhere.

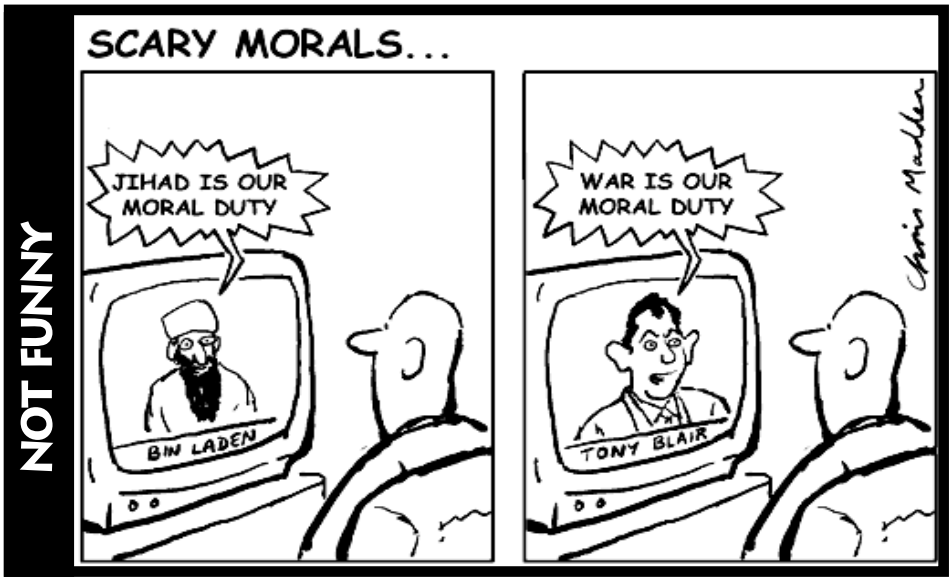
Whole Foods of Austin, Texas has announced that sometime in February it will complete a buyout of the Fresh & Wild Holdings Ltd. Although its present stores are relatively small in size at the moment, they have announced the they intend to put up larger stores as soon as possible.

In a nutshell, there is not a more vicious anti-union store in America, not even Walmart comes close when it comes to unions. If there are unions in any stores they take over, they immediately fire all the employees. If any workers attempt to organise, they too are fired immediately. One of their stores managed last summer to unionise legally. However, before the union could certify its victory, those employees thought to have voted to unionise were fired and a new vote was taken where, of course, the union didn't have a chance.

The head of the company, one John P. Mackey, has even written an anti- union pamphlet wherein unions were called parasites and having a union was likened to having herpes. He actively spreads this nonsense around and brags about it. Once this company gets a foothold in Britain, unions in the retail field are in trouble because this guy actually enjoys his anti-union role and goes public with it every chance he gets.

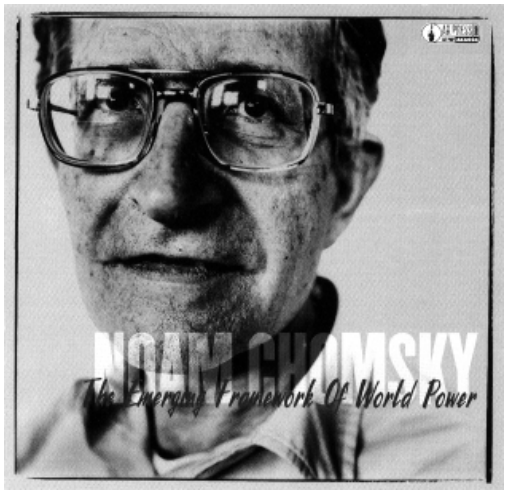
If you could please send me any address (via e-mail) of unions/workers that might be affected I could go into more detail. A union email address would be welcome as its easier to get in touch.

Brighton GMB (UK IWW ROC General Secretary), PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ.



The emerging framework of world power

Noam Chomsky
Spoken Word CD, 77 minutes running time, Alternative Tentacles, AK Press and Distribution,



Another dose of genius from the grand master, this time he answers the questions the popular US press are asking; "why do they hate us?", "why did 9/11 happen?", etc. He meticulously explains in plain language and with succinct accuracy why 9/11 happened and the events which led up to it.

After previous president's attempts in places like Korea and Vietnam, Reagan took up the so-called "war on terrorism" by unleashing a massive clampdown on South America, not to mention practically everywhere else US "interests" were deemed to be at stake.

On some of the US Latin American bombing raids, whole villages were flatted, with thousands of innocent civilians dying in single mass-raids. Both the UN and world court condemned the US bombing of Honduras outright. But 'globalisation' has to be backed up with military hardware, and the US administration has been very focussed on the key issues of keeping a firm grip on its key priorities – ensuring cheap overseas 'free' (sic) labour, and a 'free' flow of oil into the US economy.

In short, Chomsky explains the hypocrisy and lies of successive US administrations. If Milosevic had been a US ally, he wouldn't be facing a war crimes tribunal, he would be acclaimed as a world leader, just as the dictators of places Indonesia were, and just as the current military dictator of Pakistan is.

However, while he analyses in typical detail the global terror networks of the US and its war on enemies, he reserves the main detail for the Middle East. Not surprisingly, he focuses on previous US atrocities in the region, pointing out the Orwellian double-speak in the US administration's rhetoric of the day, as it explained its state terror activities as counter-terror. Some things haven't changed over the last couple of decades.

Analysing today's headlines, Chomsky quotes Bush's recent description of Sharon as a "man of peace", despite his well-known history as a tyrant, slaughtering defenceless civilians in various Middle Eastern states. Even today, the daily killings of Palestinian women and children just does not fit with such a description – unless your definition of "man of peace" is "supporting US foreign policy", and nothing to do with how many people you are murdering.

There is no point summarising Chomsky's analysis of Iraq and the Middle East – you have to listen to the real thing to get the full impact. However, of particular note are the last few tracks, which are dedicated to questions from the audience. This provides us with an insight into just how superb Chomsky is at replying cold to questions on an incredibly wide range of subjects related to US foreign policy. The recording was made on April 23rd, 2002, but remains bang up to date, and essential listening.

Abolishing the Borders from Below

www.abb.hardcore.lt
A4, 32 pages. UK distribution: Active Distribution, BM ACTIVE, London, WC1N 3XX. £0.80, inc. postage – cheques, etc. to 'Active Distribution'

An excellent, informative and truly inspiring read, *ABB* is a bi-monthly English language 'anarchist courier from eastern Europe'. Created by a collective of anarchists from eastern Europe now living in Berlin, it brings together contributions from correspondents based in an impressive number of countries.

The main features in issue 12 (December 2003) are:

- Resistance against McDonalds and Big Business is Growing in Eastern Europe
- Uzbekistan and Western Capitalist Interests
- Squatting Activities around Eastern Europe
- Interview with Member of Serbian ASI (Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative)
- Antifascist Resistance
- Workers' Protests in Poland, Ukraine and Russia
- Anarchist Actions Connected to November 7 in Russia

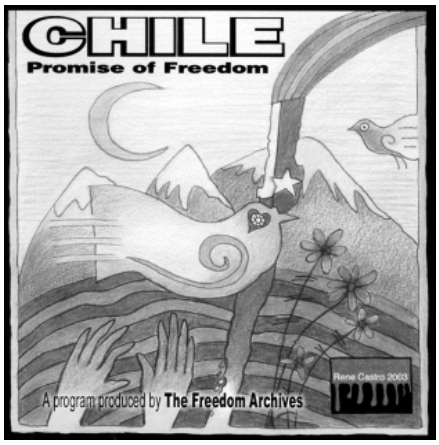
The presentation is a mix of long and short pieces, interspersed with additional short articles on a range of other news, issues and publications.

Among *ABB*'s aims is the tightening of 'collaboration between east and west in resisting Fortress Europe, the globalisation of the world economy and above all capitalism and its effects on our life'. With the 'never complete list of anarchist groups, projects and collectives from eastern Europe' and a growing distribution network throughout western Europe – distributors still required for Belgium, Ireland, Spain, Switzerland and Portugal – they are well on the down that essential road.

Chile: Promise of freedom

The Chile 30 Collective of the San Fransisco-based Freedom Archives.

Spoken word documentary with Chilean music, 2003, ISBN 0972 742239. Available from AK Press; www.akuk.com



When people think of September 11th they think of the twin towers in New York. In Chile, on September the 11th 1973, the US-funded and led military coup helped the Chilean right unleash their murderous campaign of terror on the population. Yes, regime change is not a new concept of US foreign policy. Salvador Allende knew that to fight against this military coup would be a blood bath, but this didn't stop US fighter planes from bombing the palace to the ground.

Then, anyone who had been anything to do with the previous regime was publicly murdered, disappeared and/or imprisoned. New phrases came into conversation that most Chileans had never heard before the coup like 'concentration camps' and 'torture chambers'.

The US government wanted the copper, and stopped at nothing to make sure that US companies were the ones to get it. In the months leading up to the coup, they poured millions of dollars into right wing groups in Chile, as well, of course, as their military hardware.

This was not a regular coup, as the concentration camps did not go away, the assassinations did not stop, and the constitution was changed. Voting became a distant memory and was replaced with daily oppression and censorship. That isn't to say that there was no resistance, there was, and it started immediately after the coup. But the secret police in unmarked cars would arrest and 'disappear' people with the help of the CIA and the FBI. Foreign capital was invested in Chile and the profits went to those countries.

After the years of misery, a generation of Chileans has been permanently scarred. Even today, years after Pinochet has left power, [redacted] period is not an acceptable topic of conversation, and pe[redacted]e in fear that the military will take over again someda[redacted]are not even look for the missing and the disappe[redacted]s CD is about opening the door on this troubled era, featurin[redacted]es of participants, both the capture the past and to face up [redacted]e scars are ever to heal for Chilean society, this is an esse[redacted]nmissable part of the healing process.

Northe[redacted]es: Our urban environment

No.1, Sum[redacted]03. £1.50 incl. p+p from Springbank, Hebden Bridge, HX7 7AA.

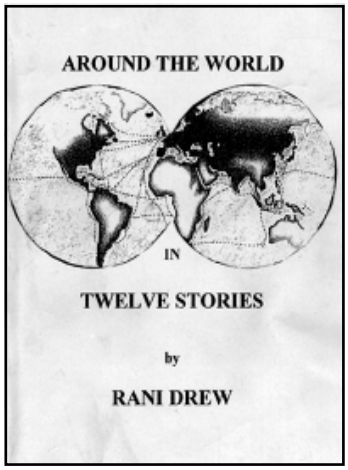
No[redacted]ces is a series of articles bound together by their norther[redacted]connections. Not all of them are 'genuinely' norther[redacted]nple, one is written by Tim Jones, and tells how his brother [redacted]nes, was killed by a crane on Shoreham docks in Sussex [redacted]f corporate killing through negligence. The norther[redacted]on appears to be that Tim currently lives in Sheffie[redacted]

Thi[redacted]ently the first of an ongoing occasional periodical, and a l[redacted]ntributions read as recollections and musings on aspects [redacted] anarchists and libertarians across the north.

Around the world in twelve stories

Rani Drew

ISBN 1-871214-05-x
Digitally printed by Parchment (Oxford) Ltd



***Twelve Stories* travels the world, providing us with an incisive view of people and places. It follows a short story format, with each delivering a mix of characters and places.**

The journey starts with the student uprising and the brutality of The Peoples' Army in Tian'anmen Square, China ("Bus ride home on June the fourth"). Then we are off to India, with "Dhenoo", and a young girl's perspective on a rapidly 'modernising' world juggling schoolwork and toilet attending, with pride in her work and dreams in her head. Other stories come from Egypt, Romania, Hungary, England, and Canada, then to Papua New Guinea and China. While each story is engaging and separate from each other in its own right, the common thread is the richness of cultural commentary along the way. This is real life made exciting by the experience gained from shifting between different countries.

The last and much shorter story, "Our Planet - The blue plastic bag" is a fast-moving tale of a woman's exasperation when dealing with the bureaucracy of her local council; a tale that could apply equally across Europe. We are confronted with an inefficient and ineffective council grudgingly being forced into domestic recycling. Their general plan is to make a profit out of the exercise, and otherwise do as little as they can. Paper only – no plastic or anything else. The story is about a free plastic bag. Or a plastic bag that has a short taste of freedom before it gets stuck in a tree. The narrative is thought-provoking, and while the real problems – the manufacturing of the waste in the first place, and so on, are not explicitly mentioned, it takes you there if you want to go.

The almost perfect crime: The misrepresentation of Portuguese anarchism - Julio Carrapato, 2004.

KSL, ISBN 1873 605684, www.katesharpleylibrary.net

In this retrospective on Portuguese anarchism, Carrapato summarises, in a dozen pages, the largely lost hostory of one of the earliest class struggle anarchist movements. From its beginnings around 1870, he charts the growth of anarchism, initially as a reaction to capitalism and parliamentarianism, into a positive social force for revolutionary change. Along the way, the fledgling anarchist movement flirted with gunpowder, treason and insurrection, before discovering and developing the power of mass action through anarcho-syndicalism.

To give an idea how big this all got, in 1919, a syndicalist daily newspaper was launched. It remained a daily mass-circulation newspaper until 1927, when the fascist dictatorship forced it to shut down. By this time, it ranked in the top three newspapers in terms of nationwide circulation. From opposing the First World War to organising general strikes and street protests bordering on revolution, Carrapato takes us through the troubled '20s with the rise of fascism, to the '30s organised resistance. Unfortunately, crushed by the fascists, there is then a gap in history, until the downfall of the oldest fascist dictatorship in the western world in 1974. Still, at least 21st century Portuguese anarcho-syndicalism is now on the rise.

STILL getting away with murder: Asbestos epidemics 2004-2020

If you were in any doubt that capitalism is a brutal system that cares not a jot for human suffering, read on...

If you have been telling people this for years, the story of asbestos is more stark evidence for you to use...

Asbestos kills. From its earliest use, the dangers have been known, and concealed in order to make money. The cover-up by big business, with the state as a willing helper, has resulted in the unnecessary deaths of millions of people. And the cover-up continues…

There is no doubt that the longer a person is exposed to asbestos the greater the risk, although it cannot be stressed enough that there is no safe level of asbestos exposure. After decades of denials, the British state has been forced to concede this, leading to the banning of asbestos in 1999. The European Union has followed suit, and an asbestos ban will come into force across Europe in 2005. Meanwhile, its use has been dramatically reduced in the USA. Unfortunately, this does not mean it is now yesterday's problem; in fact, it is very much today's and tomorrow's.

First, some basics. The term 'asbestos' covers a range of silicate minerals, the three main ones in use being Crocidolite (blue asbestos), Amosite (brown asbestos) and the most common Chrysotile (white asbestos). All three can kill. The danger arises because it separates into very fine fibres 2,000 times thinner than a human hair and invisible to the naked eye. When these are inevitably inhaled, they become embedded in the lungs, causing the development of a number of diseases, often many years later.

The most deadly outcomes are lung cancer, mesothelioma (cancer of the lung linings), and asbestosis (a scarring of the lungs causing severe breathlessness and chest pains). All three diseases can take anything up to 60 years before symptoms first appear, and all are fatal, with no known cure. Sufferers have to endure extremely painful deaths, and mesothelioma and lung cancer now account for the overwhelming number of asbestos-related deaths in Britain. Exposure to asbestos can also lead to Pleural thickening of the lung and Pleural plaques (dense bands of scar tissue in the lungs). diseases are debilitating and can develop into lung cancer or lead to heart attack due to the strain of severe breathlessness on the heart. Asbestos has also been linked to cancers of the oesophagus, colon, rectum and ovaries.

The asbestos bans and use reductions that have painstakingly slowly been forced on to industry and governments since the 1980s have come far too late for the million-plus people expected to die from past exposure in western capitalist countries over the next 30 years. In Britain alone, 4,000 people each year are already dying from it, and current estimates are that this will rise to 10,000 people a year by around 2020. Horrifying though these official estimates are, the true figures will never be known.

Past predications of the number asbestos related deaths have been woefully underestimated, as governments have sought to play down the issue. As a result, asbestos deaths often go unrecorded. This is especially true in the case of lung cancer, currently the biggest asbestos-related killer. Doctors often give little thought to the fact that lung cancer may have been caused by exposure to asbestos decades ago. This is especially true for women, who are assumed to not have been associated with asbestos-related industries, and so are rarely even considered as possible asbestos victims.

smoking gun

Smoking further complicates the statistics. Lung cancer is officially so closely linked with smoking that it is normally assumed that all lung cancers are a result of smoking . This is even more the case with smokers, where there is rarely any consideration of asbestos related damage. In fact, it is now known that those who smoke have their risk of getting lung cancer increased by 800% if they are exposed to asbestos. Asbestos workers that smoke have 92 times the risk of contracting lung cancer than non-smokers not exposed to asbestos. Only a major investigation into lung cases would reveal the real extent that asbestos is causing lung cancer deaths, and that simply is not about to happen. As it is, we can only rely on estimates, and in Britain these suggest that as many as 6,000 lung cancers deaths a year are attributed to asbestos exposure.

While true death figures will never be known, reports from the USA indicate more about the extent of asbestos impacts on health. Of the 18 million or so American men and women still alive who have undergone occupational exposure to asbestos, it is expected that 2 million of them may develop X-ray evidence of asbestos disease. Studies also indicate that fully 30% of the wives, children and family members of heavily exposed asbestos shipyard and factory workers (some 200,000 people in all) are also developing X-ray evidence of asbestos lung disease. Other studies show that about 30% of the school custodians in Boston, New York, and San Francisco are developing X-ray evidence of asbestos disease. To what extent these early signs develop into a deadly asbestos disease is still unknown - but the human impact of the growing tidal wave of death and suffering is there for all to see.

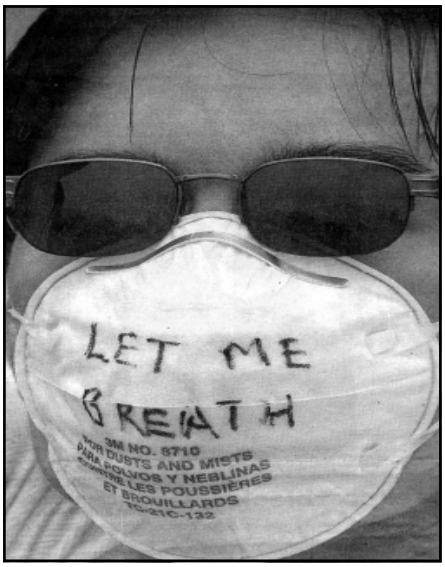
shame on who?

The tragedy is that today and tomorrow's suffering need not have been caused. The danger of asbestos has been well-known since the early 1880s. Throughout the 20th century, evidence has been systematically suppressed by the asbestos industry with the full compliance of governments, in the name of keeping the wheels of industry turning (and the profits mounting). Even in the

Asbestos: A history of evil

1880 The first asbestos plants are set up in Britain
1898 HM Medical Inspector reports the deadly effect of asbestos dust among asbestos workers
1906 Dr D Murray diagnoses death of worker from asbestos disease
1918 US Bureau of Labor publishes a report by Frederick L. Hoffmann that Prudential Insurance Company of America would not to issue life insurance policies to asbestos workers, because of the "health-injurious conditions"
1929 Leeds corner calls for public inquiry into asbestos use after death of Turner & Newall employee
1930 Merewether and Price place a report before Parliament confirming the asbestos epidemic among British asbestos workers
1931 The Asbestos Industry Regulations set a safe level that allows 1 in 3 asbestos workers to get asbestosis after 15 years exposure
1932 Turner writes to Newall urging that new regulations must be "stretched to meet our needs"
1933 Johns-Manville's and Raybestos-Manhattan (the 2 biggest US asbestos companies) and others embark on a cover-up to conceal the dangers of asbestos by not disclosing the results of trials on and not informing workers that X-rays showed that they had developed asbestosis
1952 7th Saranac week-long Symposium on pulmonary dust disease, attended by over 200 doctors, research scientists, state and federal public health officials, insurance executives, and asbestos manufacturers, who were presented with the medical evidence implicating asbestos. Unlike the proceedings of the six previous symposia, the proceedings were never published, so the carcinogenicity of asbestos was buried for another decade
1955 20 years after the first reported link between asbestos and cancer, Doll publishes a major work proving the link
1960 The UK adopts "safe" standard based on industry levels in the US
1963 Selikoff and Churg test 1,117 asbestos insulation union workers and find X-ray evidence of asbestosis in half of them. Of 392 with over 20 years exposure, 339 had developed the disease. Lung cancers were 7 times the normal rate and gastrointestinal cancers 3 times. The US government responded by changing the standard that allowed workers to inhale tens of billions of asbestos fibres each day, to one that allowed them to inhale hundreds of millions of fibres each day.
1982 Tait published research proving that Government estimates of likely deaths from asbestos were far to low and that impending legislation would not prevent thousands of deaths
1983 UK Government bans the use of brown & blue asbestos, while white asbestos (which accounts for 95% of asbestos in use) was dropped from the legislation after a concerted campaign by the industry
1984 Hazards Bulletin was sued and bankrupted after its publication of Asbestos Killer Dust – a worker/community guide, which predicated the current asbestos epidemic
1997 Canadian Government brings a case against France to the WTO on the grounds that its ban on asbestos use is in breach of 'free trade' rules
2003 Canadian government leads several countries to oppose the inclusion of asbestos in the Rotterdam Convention, which informs countries about hazardous substances

The Japanese state continues to allow its citizens to die from asbestos, continuing to use it in enormous amounts...



1970s, western governments were still deliberately concealing the dangers of asbestos from people.

Examples of government lies abound, but given that one in four asbestos deaths are construction workers, an example from the building trade seems appropriate. In 1976, activists alerted to the death-rates amongst South African asbestos miners put forward a resolution to the building trade union UCATT, calling for a ban. The union bosses wheeled out a speaker from the Health and Safety Executive, who proceeded to trot out the official myths of the day; "some asbestos is less dangerous than others", "there is only about 2% in most construction products", "asbestos is sealed in", etc. The resolution was passed anyway, but subsequently buried by union leaders. As the mover of the resolution Vic Heath commented; *"we could have enforced a ban in those days. The industry was 50% organised; 100% in local authorities. Imagine the difference and the lives that could have been saved."*

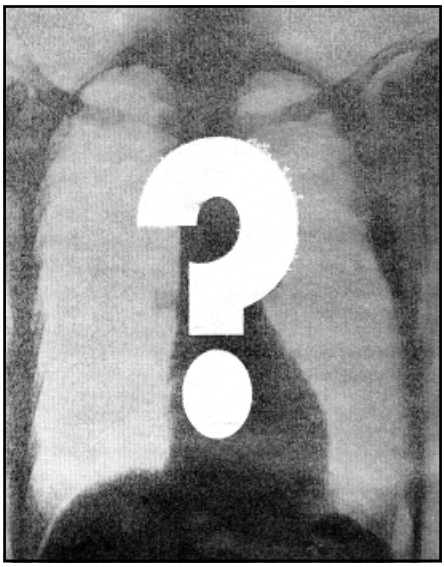
However, although they are pathetic, the blame for asbestos deaths cannot be levelled at union bosses. It rests with the companies who produced and used asbestos and, above all, with western governments who, rather than protect the people they were supposedly elected to represent, actively mislead them. The past decades of management wheeling out some state official from the HSE or medical profession to lie to workers are an insidious betrayal of trust by the state, resulting in the painful deaths of countless thousands of people.

Western governments have behaved atrociously, but others have possibly been even worse. The Japanese state continues to allow its citizens to die from asbestos, continuing to use it in enormous amounts (190,000 tonnes per year). Official asbestos-related death figures are shrouded in secrecy, but as Japan has a similar history of asbestos consumption to other western capitalist economies the pattern of asbestos-related deaths will be similar, except that they will not peak in the 2020s, but carry on until 60 years after asbestos is banned in Japan.

Worse still is the record of the so-called socialist republics of Russia and China. In both countries, discussion of asbestos has been banned. Russia is currently the world's biggest user, consuming 700,000 tonnes a year, with China in second at 220,000 tonnes. In both countries, production involves truly appalling conditions. In China, asbestos is mined by prison slave labour. In both counties, whole regions close to asbestos mines and factories are heavily contaminated with asbestos dust so badly that in the west they would be declared disaster areas and evacuated. The figures for asbestos deaths can only be guessed at, but, given that both countries have used asbestos for over 40 years, they must already be terrifying and getting worse.

still killing for cash

Asbestos use may be declining in the west, but western capitalism is still making a killing out of the asbestos trade. As its use declined in the developed world, multinational companies, backed by their national governments, turned their murderous attention to the developing world. As a result, over the last twenty years, asbestos use in the developing world has rocketed. And guess what? Just as they did in the west, the asbestos companies are lying to conceal the true dangers from workers and the public.



Canada spends millions of dollars funding the pro-asbestos lobby and promoting the ridiculous idea that asbestos is safe...

What are the CAWR?

New Control at Work Regulations due to come into force in June 2004.
Main requirements on employers:

- **Duty to determine location and condition of asbestos in buildings**
- **Presume materials contain asbestos unless there is evidence that they do not**
- **Make & keep up to date records of the location and condition of asbestos-containing materials**
- **Assess the risk of anyone being exposed to asbestos**
- **Prepare a plan setting out how the risks from asbestos are to be managed**
- **Take the necessary steps to put the plan into action**
- **Review and monitor the plan periodically**
- **Provide information on the location and condition of the materials to anyone who is liable to work near or disturb them.**

In Brazil, French and Swiss companies currently mine 180,000 tonnes of asbestos each year, largely for Brazilian domestic consumption. Some 3,500 products in use in Brazil now contain asbestos, with 200,000 workers employed in asbestos-related industries. From the mid-1970s onwards, large-scale developments of cheap housing were constructed using asbestos. Although the resultant deaths are already reaching alarming levels, the worst is yet to come. A study of 1,022 former cement industry workers conducted by ABREA (the national association of asbestos victims), found that 50 had already died of asbestos-related illnesses, 223 had respiratory disorders, 192 had pleura plaques and 109 had asbestosis. Deaths due to asbestos are predicted to be soon outpacing those of the developed world.

Third world governments are generally keen to allow multinational companies a free reign in the exploitation and use of asbestos. Otherwise, they come under extreme pressure from western governments with asbestos interests. Canada is the world's biggest exporter, with virtually all of its annual 500,000 tonnes destined for the developing world. It spends millions of dollars funding the pro-asbestos lobby and promoting the ridiculous idea that asbestos is safe. For decades, successive Canadian governments have used tactics ranging from appeals to the World Trade Organisation to the intimidation of local activists to block any restrictions on their exports.

France was one of the first countries to impose a total ban on asbestos at home. Yet it is still sponsoring and supporting the French-based asbestos giant Saint Gobain, which operates throughout the developing world, employing 173,000 workers in 47 countries.

fighting for our lives

Despite all, the power of government and big business are being increasingly resisted. Anti-asbestos groups now exist in all asbestos using countries, except for China, and are growing in their size and effectiveness. Campaigners and trade unions in Chile scored a notable success in 2001, when they managed to get asbestos banned. This was won despite threats and intimidation from the Canadian government, which included a disinformation campaign against Chilean anti-asbestos campaigners. The growth of the anti-globalisation movement has also boosted the campaign for a global asbestos ban. As the Brazilian group ABREA recently noted: *"The anti-asbestos movement use studies to show how Brazilian workers organised themselves to fight for an asbestos ban and gain recognition for their suffering…The development of the anti-asbestos movement has been significantly boosted by the emergence of a new international social movement…able to mobilise large numbers of people in direct action against governments, institutions and transnational corporations"*.

It is essential that the fight for a world wide ban on asbestos becomes one of the central issues of the anti-capitalist movement. In Britain, this means linking the international struggles for a ban with the need to defeat the threat still posed by asbestos in Britain. The fight against asbestos in Britain is far from won; asbestos use may be banned but we are still left with the legacy. For example, an estimated 73% of buildings in Britain still contain asbestos. Although new legislation exists (Control At Work Regulations, 2002) aimed at safe management of buildings containing asbestos, and will come fully into force in 2004, it remains woefully inadequate. It only covers 2 million of the 4.4 million buildings which contain asbestos and, as with all Health and Safety legislation in Britain, even when it does apply it is rarely enforced. Even with the new legislation, the Health and Safety Commission estimates that 1.8 million people will still be exposed to asbestos as part of their daily work in offices.

The fact that asbestos it is still so widespread is testament to the brutality of capitalism and the ruthlessness of the state against its own citizens. In a democratically-run economy, the use of asbestos would never have occurred and millions of lives would have been saved. The terrible history of asbestos shows how badly a truly democratic alternative to both capitalist and state control is needed.

In the immediate present, the best way to avoid exposure to asbestos is by initiating information and joint actions; in other words, workplace organisation. Meetings can to be organised to establish group demands that proper surveys are undertaken to establish if asbestos is present in the workplace. If it is found, it should be removed properly or made safe, and measures taken to make sure it is not disturbed.

Even in the least-organised of workplaces, asbestos can be raised with workmates as the starting point to putting pressure on management to ensure they are complying with the new legislation. Management have a legal duty to consult with workers in regards to Health and Safety. If having raised the issue of asbestos you are ignored, you should contact the HSE or local council.

For more info., contacts and support on asbestos issues, contact: SolFed Asbestos Campaign, PO Box 469, Preston, PR1 8XF. solfed@solfed.org.uk Ans. 07984 675 281

SF Contact Point:

SF, PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8XF.
Answerphone 07984 675 281
Email; solfed@solfed.org.uk

www.solfed.org.uk

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

Education Workers' Network, PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8XF.
Public Service Workers' Network, Box 43, 82 Colston St, Bristol BS1 5BB.
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 7LE. Tel. 0208 3745027 jacob16@btopenworld.com
Red & Black Club, PO Box 17773, London SE8 4WX. Tel. 0207 3581854.
South West Solidarity and **Solidarity Bristol**, Box 43, 82 Colston St, Bristol BS1 5BB. www.southwestsolidarity.org.uk
South Herts SF, PO Box 493, St Albans AL1 5TW. Tel. 01727 862814.
Lancashire SF, PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8XF. Tel/Fax 01772 734130 solfed@solfed.org.uk http://mysite.freeserve.com/LancashireSF/index.jhtml
Manchester SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW. Tel. 07984 675281. www.manchestersf.org.uk
Sheffield SF, PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2 4YR. da@direct-action.org.uk
West Yorks Solidarity Federation, PO Box 77, Leeds LS8 3XX.

SF includes contacts across England, Scotland and Wales. Use the SF Contact Point above to make contact with people near you.

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.....
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Please pay Solidarity Federation - Direct Action, account no.: 98963732; NatWest, Leeds City, 8 Park Row, Leeds LS1 1QS; sort code 60-60-05. First payment of £..... to be made on ....., and subsequent payments of £..... on the same day each month until further notice.

Name(s) .....Signature(s).....

All Cheques to 'Direct Action'. Overseas subscriptions: £10 basic, £20 supporters.
Return this form to: DA-SF, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW, England.

About Solidarity Federation...

Formed in 1994, SolFed is a federation of groups and individuals across England, Scotland and Wales. Everyone involved is helping to build a non-hierarchical, anti-authoritarian solidarity movement. The basic foundation used for doing this is the Local group.

locals

Locals put solidarity into practice, organising and joining local campaigns in communities and 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 is all part and parcel of building a solidarity movement.

direct action

Direct action is what locals do. 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,it also 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.

networking

SolFed members who work in the same sector have formed Networks, to promote solidarity and use direct action where possible to fight for better pay and conditions. They form a basis for a completely new labour movement, nothing like the weakened and hierarchical Trade Unions.

where next?

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 and 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. SolFed opposes these in favour of a movement built on global solidarity. It is the British section of the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers' Association (IWA), which provides global solidarity and experience from much larger sections, such as the CNT (Spain) and USI (Italy). The IWA has a long history of solidarity in action. Today, there are sections ranging from a few dozen to thousands of members, and growth is rapid. At the last IWA Congress in Granada, Spain, three new groups were welcomed into the IWA, to add to the seven new sections welcomed at the previous Congress.

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. No experience or background in politics/activism is necessary. SolFed groups are open and egalitarian. Do not expect to be patronised; do expect to be made welcome. Fill in the form below to meet your local SolFed.

Solidarity Federation Membership Application

I wish to join the Solidarity Federation
I have enclosed a cheque for £5.00 (made out to "Solidarity Federation" to cover my initial three months membership. I understand that my details will be passed on to the nearest SF Local who will contact me shortly.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Pos[redacted]

[redacted] Email .....

.....

Events/Campaigns/Gatherings...

Solidarity Federation

North & East London SolFed
Free Solidarity Bulletin out now. Socials: Last Thursday of the month, 8pm, near Camden Tube. Plus, advice surgeries/discussions. Also for people SE of London and along the S. Coast. Contact details p.34.

SelfEd Collective
Self-education - developing and sharing ideas and skills. Download pamphlets FREE in FULL VERSIONS from the SelfEd website. SelfEd, PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2 4YR. www.selfed.org.uk

South Herts SolFed
St Albans Discussion Meetings. Tel. 01727 862814.

Catalyst
Freesheet of the Solidarity Federation - IWA

If you like DA, you'll like Catalyst. New issue out now. Pissed off with the boss? Get free light relief. Send a stamp or phone for your copy - or for a bunch to hand out at work or play. Catalyst, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW. Tel. 07984 675281. Email; manchestersf@manchestersf.org.uk

SF Lancashire Reclaim Mayday SF

A series of events is planned in Lancashire to celebrate Mayday:

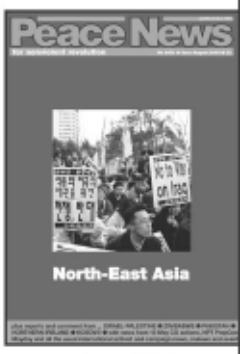
Friday 30th April. Preston. Social/gig with stalls in evening
Saturday 1st May. Lancaster. Join in/swell/disrupt the Mayday march. Anarchist Picnic/footy match. Social/gig in evening
Sunday 2nd May. Lancaster. A day of discussion/videos/food/stalls. Burnley. Social/gig in the evening.

Organised by Lancaster Anarchist Group & Lancashire SolFed
Anyone who wishes to contribute or get involved or if you want more information contact Lancashire Reclaim Mayday c/o Lancashire SolFed, PO Box 469, Preston PR1 8XF. Tel 01772 734130
lancashiresolfed@hotmail.com

Peace News
for nonviolent revolution

FREE SAMPLE ISSUE

Peace News, the antimilitarist magazine read and produced by nonviolent activists and campaigners worldwide, is offering readers of *Direct Action* a **FREE SAMPLE ISSUE**. Simply fill out the form below and send it to Peace News, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DY, Britain. Alternatively, you can claim your free copy by emailing admin@peacenews.info, quoting "*Direct Action* offer".



Please send a **free sample** of *Peace News* to:
Name:_____
Address:_____
_____
Post code: _____

Peace News will not pass your details on to any other organisations.

Office use: DA03

www.peacenews.info

Friends and Neighbours

[To get listed here, write to; DA (F&N). PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2 4YR, da@direct-action.org.uk]

Kate Sharpley Library
Dedicated to recording and revealing the history of Anarchism - send SAE ; KSL, BM Hurricane, London WC1 N 3XX. www.katesharpleylibrary.net

Loombreaker
Send a stamp for a copy- c/o Manchester EF!, Dept 29, 22a Beswick St, Manchester M4 7HS. Now online - www.earthfirst.org.uk/loombreaker.

Cultureshop
Online shop for independent/radical/political issue-based videos. www.cultureshop.org

Networking Newsletter
Networking in Greater Manchester working for positive social change. Tel: 0161 226 9321. www.networkingnewsletter.org.uk

Toxcat
Essential exposures of polluters, polllution and cover-ups. £2 or sub £12 from ToxCat, PO Box 29, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire CH66 3TX.

Plymouth Claimants' Union
Offers free advice and support for the unwaged – donations, calls, letters, and new members welcome. Tel. 07811 582742. PCU, c/o M. Scantlebury, 144 Alexandra Rd, Mutley, Plymouth PL4 7EQ.

Resistance
Freesheet of the Anarchist Federation. Anarcho news, views and comment from: AF, c/o 84b Whitechapel High St, London E1 7QX. www.afed.org.uk

Eroding Empire
Monthly listing of gigs, events, actions and classifieds for London. Punk, anarcho, squatting, etc. info. from: Eroding Empire, c/o 56A Crampton St, London SE17 3AE, Tel. 07890 350448, eroding@eroding.org.uk

Manchester
Organising grou[redacted]
other Sunday, C[redacted]
07816 420391
manchester@an[redacted]

Reb[redacted]
Hereford's freesl[redacted]
Herefordshire Ar[redacted]
(HAG), c/o PO E[redacted]
Gwent NP4 8YE[redacted]
info@herefordan[redacted]

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subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Bradford Anarchist Group
Local anarchist group for the Bradford/Wakefield area, contact; BAG, c/o 17-21 Chapel St, Bradford BD1 5DT.

Norwich Anarchists
£1 for newspaper 'Now or Never'; PO Box 487, Norwich NR2 3AL. Also; Norwich's first annual anarchist bookfair - Saturday June 12th 2004, book your stalls now at; Norwich Anarchists - Po Box 487, Norwich, NR5 8WE. Tel - 07941 657485. - norwichanarchists@hotmail.com. Web - http://twotins.tripod.com

Organise!
Working Class Resisitance is back on the streets of Ireland - freesheets and info. from PO Box 505, Belfast, BT12 6BQ

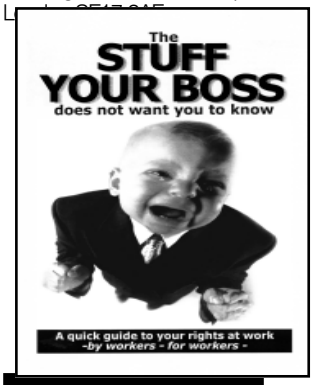
Common Voice
Common Voice, "an Electronic Journal of Non-Market, Anti-State ideas" is out now. Access it at www.commonvoice.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

Global Protest Day
The last global protest, Feb 15, 2003, saw over 5 million people out, 1.5 million in the UK – the next is on March 20, so get on down.

Mayday 2004
Mayday 2004 is a Saturday, and will be big. Download and distribute info. from www.ourmayday.org.uk/, subscribe to the list: londonmayday-subscribe@lists.riseup.net http://www.londonmayday.co.uk http://www.maydayonline.net

Anarcha project
The Anarcha Project is a people's history project covering interviews with anarchist women; http://www.anarcha.org

56a Infoshop
Bookshop, records, library, archive, social and meeting space. Anarchist, eco-activist, queer, feminist, DIY, squatting, class struggle. Open Thur 2-8, Fri 3-7, Sat 2-6. Near Elephant and Castle/ Kennington tube: 56 Crampton St, L[redacted]



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