

# Organise!

No. 68 – Summer 2007 | £1.50—€2.50 | Free to prisoners

FOR REVOLUTIONARY ANARCHISM

## Signs of a social quickening

*Brighter prospects for radical change?*



### Plus...

Uniforms and authority... Albert Camus... Anarchism in Armenia... Poster pullout... Magon's vision... Slavery's abolition?... Reviews... and more!

# Organise!

Organise! is the magazine of the Anarchist Federation (AF). It is published in order to develop anarchist communist ideas. It aims to provide a clear anarchist viewpoint on contemporary issues and to initiate debate on ideas not normally covered in agitational papers.

We aim to produce Organise! twice a year. To meet this target, we positively solicit contributions from our readers.

We aim to print any article that furthers the objectives of anarchist communism. If you'd like to write something for us, but are unsure whether to do so, why not get in touch first? Even articles that are 100% in agreement with our aims and principles can leave much open to debate.

As also the articles in this issue do not necessarily represent the collective viewpoint of the AF. We hope that their publication will produce responses from our readers and spur debate on. The deadline for the next issue of Organise! will be **7th September 2007**. Please send all contributions to the address on the right. It would help if all articles could be either typed or on disc (PC or Mac format). Alternatively, articles can be emailed to the editors directly at [organise@afed.org.uk](mailto:organise@afed.org.uk)

## What goes in Organise!

Organise! hopes to open up debate in many areas of life. As we have stated before, unless signed by the Anarchist Federation as a whole or by a local AF group, articles in Organise! reflect the views of the person who has written the article and nobody else.

If the contents of one of the articles in this issue provokes thought, makes you angry, compels a response then let us know. Revolutionary ideas develop from debate, they do not merely drop out of the air!

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The Anarchist Federation is a member of the International of Anarchist Federations  
[www.iaf-ifa.org](http://www.iaf-ifa.org)

Many AF groups continue to produce their own free bulletins and a few new ones have sprung up in the last year or so. These include the Nottingham Sparrow, Hereford AF's Black Apple Press and Sheffield AF's Fargate Speaker. You can find these online via [www.afed.org.uk](http://www.afed.org.uk) 'Groups and Contacts' or just write the group.

## contents

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>03—</b> Editorial                            | <b>15—</b> Flores Magon and the anarchist vision of freedom |
| <b>04—</b> What we did with 2006                | <b>16—</b> Albert Camus and the anarchists                  |
| <b>06—</b> The psychology behind uniforms       | <b>18—</b> Reviews  |
| <b>07—</b> Communities of compliance            | <b>20—</b> Letters  |
| <b>09—</b> Signs of life?                       | <b>21—</b> Revolutionary Portraits: Georg Elser             |
| <b>11—</b> Anarchism and nationalism in Armenia | <b>24—</b> Aims and principles                              |
| <b>12—</b> Poster pullout                       |   |
| <b>14—</b> Oh, say it with paving stones        |   |

Organise! has always recognised the importance of having a sense of history. In Britain, whether it's a look back over a century to the origin of the anarchist communist movement or to the radicalism of the 1960s and 70s, we have aimed to recount the best of class struggle and solidarity. For the historical articles of the current issue we examine the lesser-known anarchist leanings of Algerian-French author and philosopher Albert Camus, and the anarchist vision of Mexican revolutionary Ricardo Flores Magón. We also present a revolutionary portrait of a German 'working class hero', Georg Elser "The man who tried to kill Hitler", and look at the political situation in Armenia which has turned out to be an especially dangerous place for our anarchist comrades to work in. We seem to live in a present where it might be easy to despair and give up. We have a government that lies openly and doesn't seem to care what the active minority of radical people say or do. And not always such a minority! Millions were against the bombing and occupation of Iraq, but 4 years later our armed forces are still there. There is already a vast number of surveillance cameras in Britain and other weapons of control are on the increase. In the developing world, rapid industrialisation is causing misery for many, especially in the old Communist and Maoist regimes that have swiftly turned to individual and state-sponsored grabbing of land and resources to fuel the demands of global trade. Still there is some room for optimism. In Europe especially, building and the defence of 'free space' is becoming an important form of struggle against overpowering state control and 'social cleansing' of our cities.

Within these spaces we also find creativity that is in direct opposition to the banality of consumer capitalism. In the workplace, the potential for wilcat industrial action is recognised as an important way to break the deadlock of traditional trade unionism that always seems to stifle meaningful class struggle. And there is good evidence of rural revolt (not the Countryside Alliance type) in China.

To foster a more optimistic vision, this issue of Organise! looks at 'Signs of life' within this seemingly weakened radicalism. We also present what the AF itself has been doing over the last year or so to hopefully contribute to a strengthening of radical ideas and class struggle on the ground. At

the same time we reject the false establishment optimism of the bogus slave trade 'Abolition 200' events and the coming together of our homegrown 'warlords' into the new Northern Ireland parliament. The AF's membership continues to grow. We welcome new members who agree with our aims and principles, as well as new subscribers to Organise! This issue includes three contributions from non-members. Please contact us if you have an idea for an article. If you want to comment on an article, or if there is something you'd like our opinion on, please don't hesitate to write to the Letters page or contact us by email.

*Anarchist Federation, April 2007*



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# what we did with 2006

**We attempt to recall the numerous activities  
of AF members over the previous year ...**

For the libertarian movement 2006 started in late 2005, in Hackney, East London. When the notoriously corrupt council decided to sell its shops on Broadway market to millionaire property shark Roger Wratten, they didn't bother to check with the current tenants first. Despite having the right to buy his own café off the council, Tony Platia's application was (illegally) rejected in favour of the big money, despite the fact he was even offering more money. In July he was evicted from the café he had run for 30 years. At this point the local community took matters into their own hands, and occupied the space – were evicted on the 21st of December – then reoccupied it for a further 2 months! AFers are proud to have helped slept over on eviction watch, help clean and rebuild and generally support the campaign: <http://34broadwaymarket.omweb.org> At this point France exploded. Mass demonstrations against a proposed youth employment contract (the CPE) turned into school and university strikes, until almost all universities in France were out. Direct action was taken daily – motorways and railways were blocked – and riots became the norm. After a general strike on the 28th

March – the same day a million workers in the UK struck to defend their pensions - the French government caved in a retracted the law. AFers went over for the 28th to soak up some gallic flavour and generally drool over French militancy: <http://libcom.org/blog/cpe-france>

Throughout the year, AF members were involved in many other international activities, especially as the current Secretariat of the International of Anarchist Federations which brings together like-minded organisations across national borders. Around the IAF Day of Action on March 18th, 600 AF/IAF posters against the War abroad and at home mysteriously appeared all over London and Manchester, and London AF organised public meetings around the day. AF general conference immediately followed, held in central London, with our industrial policy being a major topic of discussion. After supporting Gate Gourmet airline catering workers at the end of 2005, AFers took action over pensions in March as mentioned earlier, held solidarity pickets outside coffee houses for the sacked Starbucks IWW members in USA, and participated in a picket of JJB Sports. We have supported the development

of the IWW union (there's a lot of dual-membership in both England and Scotland) and the launch of a libertarian education workers network.

For Mayday, some AFers helped organise the Anarchism06 conference at The Square social centre which was a moderate success, and the anarchist block on the TUC march in London drew 300-500 people – a reaffirmation of the anarchist movement's place in workers struggles.

In mid-June we helped with the Projectile Anarchist Film Festival in Newcastle and also held a talk about Nestor Makhno. Projectile was a really positive event which will hopefully continue for many years. The 2007 one will be held on Friday 18th until Sun 20th May: <http://www.projectile.org.uk>. On June 25th some of us helped resist the eviction of the previously mentioned Square Centre in London. The 'Festival of Resistance' was to be the centre's final event, the occupants deciding to leave on a high note.

In July London AF group held a joint action with Reading Grassroots Action in support of Russian comrades arrested at the G8 in St Petersburg. The Russo-British Chamber of Commerce was occupied for 3

hours. Everyone was arrested then released without charge – apart from one attempted fit-up for assault.

Rosspport Solidarity Camp in the West of Ireland remained a focus of activity, with some UK members joining Irish comrades at the camp itself during the summer, organising UK speaking dates for the campaign throughout the year, and taking part in several anti-Shell solidarity actions: <http://struggle.ws/rsc> & <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/actions/2006/mayo/> Some AFers went to the Earth First! summer gathering on the Welsh coast.

August also saw the first 'Climate Camp' action in front of Drax power station as part of a week of environmental activity in Yorkshire. The event drew a huge amount of media attention despite moderate turnout (600 on final day) and seems to have awakened a new appetite for eco-action in the UK. AFers who took part say it was good, and will support next camp this summer as well as regional action groups that have now been set up. On the 25th we produced a special edition and print-run of Resistance handed out at Leeds Festival, where some members were on Workers Beer Company duties.

In September we hosted the Anarchists Against The Wall speaking tour in London and Sheffield. As an anarchist direct action group in Palestine and Israel, AATW are a seriously interesting outfit. The talks went down very well with Sheffield raising £300 in donations. For more info on the group see: <http://www.awalls.org>. September also saw a joint anarchist block with the Solidarity Federation and other anarchists on the Stop The War march coinciding with the Labour Party conference in Manchester. A joint leaflet was also produced. This hopefully paves the way for more joint work in future – and why not? Other demos we attended in 2006 included an anti-Academy School demo, and outside the Mexican embassy against repression in Oaxaca.

Against their better judgment some AFers went to see if the cops really meant their ban on protests in Parliament Square at the 'sackparliament' event on October 9th. They really meant it. 30 people got nicked by 800 cops and one journalist was put in a coma by a police baton charge.

As usual we hosted several meetings at the Anarchist Bookfair in London that took place on October 21th, and participated in those organised by others. Then on November 25th Nottingham Defy-ID hosted the second national Defy-ID gathering

on how to fight ID cards and databases, which was well attended. AF members are involved in several of the local groups in this small but active network.

Rounding the year off nicely, London AF held its first club night 'Just Defy' on December 15th. Originally intended to be a benefit for the comrade arrested on our G8 action, the police scuppered this plan by not submitting any evidence and getting the assault charge thrown out of court. £100 was donated to Anarchists Against The Wall and the rest was made available to those arrested at Sackparliament.

Our Resistance newsheet has come out like clockwork every month, and 2 editions of Organise! were published – one celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Spanish Revolution and the other celebrating the AF's own 20 year anniversary, the Hungarian Revolution's 50th and the General Strike's 80th. In spring the second edition of 'Defending Anonymity' was published, our free guide to the hows and whys of fighting ID cards and databases, plus the historical pamphlet 'Resistance to Nazism' which recounts the activities of libertarian groups in Europe during the 1930s. West Midlands AF and the Anarchist Black Cross jointly produced a new prisoner support guidebook, also listing current anarchist prisoners. Various local newsheets were produced and distributed. The AF website was maintained, which provides all of our publications online for

free, and a 'MySpace' networking space was set up that now links up over 1000 'friends' across the world, together with an excitingly irregular blog. We contribute to various internet forums, newswires and online libraries especially through libcom.org but also on Anarkismo, A-infos, and Indymedia. Huge numbers of posters and stickers were produced in 2006, especially in Manchester and London. And we did an interview for Freedom newspaper... whilst dodging various requests from the mainstream media (they couldn't meet our appearance fee).

Like most grassroots activity, everything the AF does is done voluntarily – we have no paid workers, or paper-selling targets, unlike political parties. Funds come from members as annual 'subs' and by members committing effort and time, dipping into their own pockets, and sharing all this with others! Activism isn't everything. But being involved in activity and at the same time working in an anarchist organisation like the AF means we can form the 'politics' of what we do, say, and write from real world practice. Getting stuck into a campaign and being involved in struggles that concern us in our own workplaces and communities informs our understanding of the different issues and the ideas of the other people involved. We get to share our skills and tactics with others and learn new ones, hopefully win those struggles, and maybe even meet some future AF members.



# the psychology behind uniforms

by Joanne Roberts

**The presence of uniforms in modern society is unavoidable and, for a number of vague and dubious reasons, people are indoctrinated into this regimented practice from infancy.**

The first direct encounter a person will have with uniforms is when they first attend school. Most primary and secondary schools in Britain adopt a strict uniform policy. The less strict still encourage children to wear uniforms. Parents and pupils alike are told that school uniforms help avoid inequality, in the sense that all children will be dressed identically and thus, bullying will be eliminated. In theory, this sounds like a very admirable, noble reason for having school uniforms, but if one examines the reality of the situation it becomes nothing more than a naïve, grossly misguided notion.

Firstly, the idea of having school uniforms in place as an antidote to bullying is unrealistic. School uniforms do *not* eliminate bullying. At best, they help soften one form of bullying. By dressing all school children the same, it becomes more difficult to tell whether a child comes from a poor background or not, but not impossible. Bullying still exists in other forms, be it racial discrimination or verbal bullying brought about by a child looking 'different' to their peers, i.e. overweight, tall or any other distinguishing physical characteristic. The second flaw in having school uniforms in place as an antidote to bullying is that it masks the greater issue, which is that poverty exists in the first place. To drape an poor child in a school uniform will not change the fact that the child is poor. It only masks the poverty, which is a grossly offensive act, derisory and cowardly. The state of affairs which every member of society should be striving for is complete equality, i.e. every child coming from a comfortable background. If this were the case, then uniforms would be completely superfluous. To ignore poverty by simply dressing every child in a standard uniform simply does not achieve anything, it only makes it easier for the privileged people to ignore or forget that poverty exists. The third and most obvious flaw of school uniforms is that they undermine individuality. From infancy, children are being encouraged, if not forced to all dress the same. It has absolutely no bearing on their

academic ability or their ability to discern between right and wrong, but school uniform does have a bearing on a person's ability to find their true individuality, their true identity. In a sense, it is a mass indoctrination. The school environment becomes an allegory for life in the real world, and the message is clear: everyone must look the same. Can we be surprised then, when the track-suited teenager thinks it's acceptable to break the nose of the teenager who dresses from head to toe in black?

As if it wasn't bad enough that school uniforms stunt the individuality and freedom of children, the adult population too continue the use of uniforms, to a bizarre extent. They have become so commonplace in day-to-day life that people now find their presence unremarkable. Banks, offices, supermarkets, sports centres, restaurants, fast-food outlets, clothing shops and hotels are only some of the places in which uniforms are on show. These uniforms are remarkable in their ugliness. They are of course, designed that way, for a number of reasons. One cannot help but suspect that one of the reasons is that the powers that be want to demean and humiliate the working-class. It is another subtle way for the ruling class to assert their power over the working-class: dress them up in clownish clothing and speak to them as if they don't have the brains they were born with. Every single one of the jobs listed above is a working-class job and the one distinguishing feature of uniforms worn in working-class jobs is that they are all hideous. What confuses me is that people so glibly adorn themselves with revolting trousers, made from burlap, sewn by a child in Taiwan being paid seventy-two pence a day. Or skirts so unattractive and severe they belong in the Victorian era. Or cheap, garishly patterned blouses which look as though someone has vomited on them. How can people so willingly strip themselves of all dignity and self-respect?

But the main reason for uniforms in jobs is to extend the indoctrination begun at infant level. Every uniform screams "conform". In

a truly equal society, a bank manager would be wearing the same uniform as a trainee bank clerk. This is not the case. Instead, the manager gets to wear a suit of his or her choice. Why? Because they have more money. Money = Privilege = Power. Does anyone really care what their bank cashier is wearing? Can anyone seriously tell me that they think it affects an individual's ability to do their job? For that matter, does anyone really care deeply whether the person serving them in a supermarket is wearing their cheaply-made skirt and atrocious blouse, complete with name tag? No. It's just that people have become so accustomed to seeing such sights that they would now be deeply shocked if they didn't. To even ask people to wear name tags is deeply offensive in itself. It reduces a person to little more than an item, a product on a shelf, precisely labelled. And let us not forget the shameful, sad, degrading, advertising campaigns which certain banks now bribe some unlucky staff members into taking part in: Embarrassing adverts in which bank staff parade around like performing seals, with their uniforms brazenly on show, name-tags in place, singing some consumer-friendly, FM-lite pop song, but changing the words to suit the world of banking. Scarcely has a more pathetic sight ever been seen. If this weren't bad enough, the same can be seen in the variety of literature, encouraging an individual to get up to their eyes in debt, which the banks will happily provide anyone with. Nothing can excuse the fact that millions of people, children and adults, up and down the country are being stripped of dignity, self-respect and individuality, by being forced into wearing cheaply-made, deliberately unattractive uniforms which are neither necessary nor desirable. It is yet another sad indictment of modern society that such petty, trivial torments are still being imposed upon the working-class.

# community of compliance

*I had secured a meeting with the General, head of 'Rioters inc.', in an attempt to find an explanation for the conformity in my neighbourhood of Ingol in Preston. A shadowy figure, with no more substance than the memory of smoke from a gun powder keg, led me by the nose, teasing my nostrils sulphurously, after dodging several notebook dangling residents, fishing from behind lace curtains with hand and glassy eye like strange five fingered spiders in webs.*

*We see the brave leave their homes with ale cans to toast the mid day sun; to melt crouched in their doorways like dropped ice creams, lapped up and too scrutinised by pigs, pandas and other wild life: "Quick, drop down".*

*...Then we are at a canal where a mini sub bobs jollily. As the sub bobbed a duck bobbed a hello back. As I watched, my gloom lifted. The wind blew and at that moment the clouds swept off the sun with a whoosh, leaving it static like a big disco light. My phone vibrated in my pocket to a Prodigy tune. The shocked duck danced its yellow feet on sunbeam squares; my phone was tickling my heart. I held it gladly. "Hello?" I spoke into the phone. "Come in", the phone crackled. With a second glance at the duck, I crawled down the portal head first, kicking my feet behind me. The General was an impressive sight. Involuntary expressions sweep across his red face. You can see all past historical battles as he remembers, his frown a rearing horse, that twitch of the moustache a doodle bug. I shine a torch through the hole in the back of his head and his ears twirl like the wheels of his facial projector. His face lights up like a Nazi lampshade and the battles take place, movie like, arranging themselves in the red flushes of*



*his face. His face in mine, between gushes of violet breath he spoke. "You will relate the following facts for me". His face provided the pictorial evidence.....*

*...There is a three-pronged axis of evil at work in my neighbourhood. The forces of capitalism, the state and spies, Stepford men and women and would be macho heroes of the pen. In summary this is who they are and how they work. They are the housing association 'Gateway', 'Ingol Community Association' (a residents against crime group), and a police initiative called PACT, which stands for 'Police And Community Together'. PACT liaises between Gateway and ICA who publish PACT communications and propaganda, whilst PACT keep a heavy police presence on the estate, for behaviour control not crime prevention. Although much of the housing is not Gateway, they fund the ICA and it acts as a listening post for Gateway whilst at the same time benefiting from pressure by them to evict undesirables.*

But to go back a bit. Before I moved to Ingol I lived on a feral estate in Preston called Avenham, where you could say I had a job helping the community, selling very bad grass (and I don't mean astro-turf). So I knew a lot of people in the area, over 100. You could not imagine a more amoral, sexually liberated, work shy and disrespectful to society bunch of people. So when I found myself in Ingol it was a shock to see this culture downtrodden and victimised. It would be a mistake to assume that because someone is disorderly and disrespectful they are going to be revolutionary. In fact the selfish hedonism that makes them appear so, really seems to contradict the broad consciousness necessary to be revolutionary. But even as such it has better prospects and leaves a better taste than those catholicised by work, trying to force blanket conformity on the estate. Max Stirner, a German individualist anarchist of the nineteenth century, had as one of his themes, that people in society, or their egos, were prisoners not just of the

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state but of the custom of society, and were therefore prisoners of themselves as well, and of the restrictions they placed on themselves: "Exertions to 'form' all men into moral, rational, pious, human 'beings'...are wrecked against the indomitable quality of I, against own nature, against egoism." Max Stirner would have liked the people of Avenham and the minority of Ingol. Those in Avenham were even sometimes faithful to Stirnerite economic principals, that is, theft: "What then is my property? Nothing but what is in my power! To what property am I entitled? To every property which I entitle myself." In fact when you add to this an almost principled contempt for letting the police into their lives you could well describe it as a Stirnerite utopia, making its realisation neither necessary nor desirable.

Starting with Gateway. The association owns most of the housing in Preston that used to belong to the council. Housing associations are capitalist enterprises and it is therefore in their double interest to both keep unruly elements down for the protection of capitalism, and property for that matter, and keep an area desirable, therefore profitable. Avonquest, who took over Avenham estate, tried really hard to make it respectable, with mass evictions, short term tenancies and CCTV. They failed abysmally, the estate recently being the scene of a small, gangster manipulated riot. But Gateway have succeeded, probably due to the co-operation of the residents. PACT really amounts to community policing and propaganda. They have ingratiated themselves into our community which, judging from their communication, has no victim crime, and anti-social behaviour amounts to nothing more than high spirits. Their purpose seems to be to convince residents of their need for them, because they are such unruly children. They are part of the social beurocratisation that is taking place everywhere in our lives these days, as the state and capitalism tries to make any kind of future resistance impossible. We can see it in the ID scheme, CCTV, anti-terrorism laws, criminal justice act and mental health act. The less resistance they get to their activities the more it encourages them. It is not only oppressive to have them interfere in our neighbourhood, but people start to think they depend on them and the friendly face of the state, which makes independent class action impossible in the community. The following are typical quotes of what PACT do: "Problems with number (X)...and

number (Y)...is involved in a tug of love between the two. Panda mediation explained and considered by both parties." Even worse, "North British Housing were today informed by a resident, the lovely...(X)...of Ingol area is now going to marry the father of her expectant child." Do they fight any crime at all? "(X)...was given a £50 fine by magistrates for being found in possession of cannabis whilst at school." How far are we expected to conform? "Residents are beginning to express concerns about the residents of...the Ingol estate for noise nuisance and outside drinking in the front garden." By far the worst offenders in all this is the Ingol Community Association. Their nuisance value can be summed up in the following ways. They generate fear through their propaganda which causes people to have less sense of community and rely on them for protection. They have powers way beyond the police since they use their relationship to evict anyone who does not fit their plans for the area, including a local bunch of squatters, who they threatened to move in on and intimidate if Gateway did not evict them. They divide the community, causing mistrust and anger. For instance a feud developed between two of my neighbours when ICA and a local bobby told her that my other neighbour, a man in his fifties or sixties, was responsible for vandalising her car, and forced us all to take sides.

The ICAs very reason for existing is dubious. They claim it was due to a drug escalation in the area. This is a quote from their quarterly newsletter, "Bearing in mind that all these people had had all the help the system could give them, they then had this estate in turmoil, we had to do something, it may seem harsh to many but we felt if we

could pressure the drug fraternity to moderate their intake we would benefit." Yet they don't seem to understand or differentiate between different drugs, their different harmful and anti-social effects, because they don't seem to know, just like they can't differentiate between shoplifting and burglary. Out of 100 monthly incidents reported by PACT, although references to drunkenness and cannabis possession are common, there is only one mention of class A drugs, referring to paraphernalia. Every thing else is disputes between neighbours, unruly drunks, cannabis and shoplifting. Much housing in the area is neither Gateway nor North British but privately owned, not just property sold to tenants under the council, but housing structures so grand that no Labour council at any time in history would have considered building for mere proletariats to live in. The ICA cannot hold any influence in this area, nor do they intend to. Their beef is entirely with poorer tenants who rent. Its snobbery is backed by the state and capitalism, one part of the class against the other and the creation of an unchallenged status quo.

In an act of overzealous and over anticipated divide and rule, the state and capitalism has turned the majority in the area, whose minds they own, against the minority in a show of ignorance fear and zero tolerance. They have turned on them because they are Other. They are backed and funded because the modern state and capitalism now wants to squeeze the air out of all resistance to it. The state. The super ego has won; the estate has become the police force. The policeman is in everyone as the spy and condemns, with the exact same judgements and attitudes, greater power and greater numbers than the police.



Above: ICA members in Ingol; Right: Max Stirner.



# signs of life?

**Although the situation here in Britain and internationally appears quite bleak in terms of prospects for radical change, a number of recent events and circumstances point to a possible quickening.**

## **Defending free spaces against 'social cleansing'**

The first of these events was the fierce resistance to the closure and demolition of the Ungdomshuset occupied social and cultural centre in Copenhagen, which led to social unrest and expanded from the activities of a few 'marginalised' punks to draw in much broader sections of Danish society. The police eviction involved two sequences of the fiercest rioting that Denmark has ever known. These riots show that:

1. Relatively minor incidents can galvanise fairly large numbers of people, like a spark ignites a brush fire, and that social unrest is widespread and can come bursting to the surface quite unexpectedly. These events could very easily be repeated in any European centre, or anywhere else in the world.

2. One of the key neo-liberal policies of many governments is 'social cleansing'. In London this coincides with the Olympic Games of 2012 as an excuse to push large numbers of working class people out of East London. In Copenhagen it involved the Ungdomshuset (The 'Youth House') and the probable attacks on the nearby 'self-governing' independent neighbourhood, Christiania (see Resistance 93). The social cleansing of the inner cities includes attacks upon the destruction of centres of opposition. In Denmark the government was able to use a right-wing Christian group as its cat's paw. This tactic, involving reactionary and fascist groups, may well be employed more widely throughout the West in the next few years.

## **Wildcat strikes and 'sick-ins'**

Another important development of radicalism is the proliferation of wildcat strikes and other radical forms of struggle. From Vietnam to France, Germany and the Channel Islands, wildcat strikes have been employed by the working class more frequently. In the United States teachers

recently used a mass 'sick-in' (phoning in sick) when strike action was banned, and this has already been used around the world on a number of occasions. Strike action outside the control of the unions has been a regular tactic of British postal workers, and to a lesser extent of firefighters, over the last few years.

In addition, workers are prepared to carry out solidarity actions with other workers. British Airways workers in 2005 came out in support of workers in the outsourced airline catering company, Gate Gourmet. In the following year Catholic and Protestant postal workers were prepared to strike and to demonstrate together in Belfast.

Capitalists have increasingly moved their industries into the developing world and away from the old centres of working class militancy. The destruction of manufacturing industries in Britain continues apace and indeed it has increased its tempo under Labour after it was initiated by the Thatcher regime.

The development of great factories in the Far East has meant that large numbers of people have moved from peasant life in the countryside to hard conditions in the towns. Vast numbers are now working between 60 to 80 hours a week in these new factories in China, Vietnam and India and other Asian countries. But at the same time fierce struggles, often involving wildcat strikes and mass unrest, have been a regular feature of resistance to this industrialisation. In China, as well as industrial struggle, resistance is taking place in the countryside in opposition to landgrabs, forcing of peasants off the land, and to other government initiatives like the building of huge dams. This has involved fierce fighting and the intervention of the armed forces.

## **The military mire**

Alongside these developments have been the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In Iraq the situation under the US-led occupation is appalling and has led to the Bush regime being forced to increase its military strength there. The situation in Afghanistan is hardly much better for the US, and casualties in both fields of operation have mounted.

The British military has found itself swamped in these two countries. Whilst the government has appeared to have made a decision to start a gradual withdrawal from Iraq, it has become more committed to increasing its military strength in Afghanistan. To do this, it has been forced to pull most of its forces out of the Balkans where the current wave of so-called humanitarian wars began. This indicates how tightly stretched British military strength is, and how much more difficult it is for these forces to operate on the international level. The British administration's policies in Iraq point to an attempt to slightly distance itself from the US, and to reposition itself between Europe and the US.

Short of a complete withdrawal from the mire they have helped create, casualties will continue to mount for both the US and Britain. The anti-war movement in Britain brought huge numbers out in the streets, but the determination of the Blair administration to continue with its war offensives successfully demobilised this movement. A contributory factor to this was the effort of the Liberal Democrats, the Socialist Workers Party and others to keep these huge demonstrations strictly legal, with no attempt to foil British war efforts through direct action, blockades, and mass civil disobedience. However, the continuing punishing war in the Middle East with more and more soldiers being brought home in body bags may resurrect anti-war movements in both Britain and the USA. When and if this happens, there must be a clear break with the commitment to legalism because these tactics have proved so demobilising and ineffective.



Protests in Denmark to defend Ungdomshuset

Revolutionaries will have to argue strongly for more robust means of countering the military adventures of 'our' governments.

#### From despair to dissent

The massive defeats of the working class in Britain in the 1980s with the crushing of the steel workers, dockers, miners and printers has left a long term legacy of pessimism, dejection and apathy. The demobilisation of the anti-war movement, after millions had poured out on to the streets, seems to have aggravated this situation. Now, there are some signs that this mood is slowly changing, both here and across Europe and the world. This change is already being seen and may manifest itself in further and hopefully larger actions in the workplace, taking on the form of an irregular war of wildcats and other new forms of action, outside the control of the trade unions. It may also demonstrate itself in outbursts of civil disorder, as with the recent Copenhagen riots.

Another spur for radicalisation may be the increasingly widespread awareness of the huge toll that capitalism has taken on the planet. The unwillingness of the Bush regime to take any form of action, the pious platitudes and lack of action of other governments, may impel more and more people to take more radical actions. In Britain, this may coincide with a struggle against the British government's decisions to renew its nuclear power programme. Another factor of growing discontent is anger at a surveillance society that is steadily tightening its grip. Adding to all this, dissatisfaction over the new norms of work - constant assessment and target setting, casualisation and temporary contracts - rides alongside the deep unhappiness within a society geared more and more to consumerism, banality, boredom and mediocrity. This unhappiness and alienation should not be underestimated as it had a key importance in struggles of the last few decades.

To sum up then, this new radicalisation might involve a number of discontents converging and sparking off simultaneous or overlapping revolts: around opposition to war, against ecological devastation, against nuclear power, against surveillance, around workplace unrest and dissatisfaction with the consumer society. The last great radical wave in the 1960s saw new combative cultural developments, characterised as "counter-cultures" and "youth sub-cultures". It remains to be seen whether these will develop again. If they do develop, it will be one indicator that the deathly grip of defeat and apathy on the mass of the population is beginning to become weaker. Whatever happens, anarchist revolutionaries must continue to underline the need for resistance and struggle. Without any illusions, in a cool analytic way, it must revitalise the message of hope that was originally the vital spark of the revolutionary movement when it emerged in the 19th century.

# anarchism and nationalism in armenia

Armenian anarchists, all of whom fled the country in late 2005 after attacks and threats to their lives by the nationalist Dashnakuthyun political party, have been vindicated over the issue that threw them into this most recent conflict with the far Right. Four Anarchists, founders of the ex-Soviet Union-wide Anarchist-Communist organisation Autonomous Action, had campaigned against changes in the Armenian constitution by President Robert Kocharyan (whose government is propped up by Dashnakuthyun). These changes allowed Armenia's 8,000,000-strong diaspora to apply for dual citizenship. Autonomous Action blew the lid the Right's real agenda: to allow those with dual citizenship to vote in Armenian elections. Armenian anarchists have been engaged in historic struggles with Dashnakuthyun before. Both movements in fact grew out of a late-nineteenth-century socialist movement which emerged essentially in opposition to control of the country by Imperial Russia. Dashnakuthyun went the reactionary route and can best be described since then as national-socialist (quasi-fascist), and like most authoritarians actively collaborated with successive regimes before and during the Soviet era to eliminate libertarian influence amongst the people. Anarchism declined under various repressive regimes until Autonomous Action was formed in 2002, when some disillusioned young communists found Kropotkin's *Conquest of Bread* in a second-hand bookshop.

Armenia was once a vast power and by

**“The three premiers decide to have a democratic vote to see who deserves the parachute: one man, one vote. Kocharyan wins”**

304AD was the first ever Christian 'state'. Over the centuries it was squeezed by Persian, Imperial Russian and in particular Turkish expansionism. In 1915 Turks murdered one and a half million people in what many people regard as an attempt at genocide (but which has only been recognised as such by a handful of countries). During the Soviet era Armenia formed an important geo-political boundary between the USSR and its enemies in Asia, and was closely controlled and militarised by Moscow. As a result of its turbulent history, the Armenian diaspora is far larger than the population of the country itself, a land-locked Trans-Caucasian country of 2,000,000 people. Most of the émigrés are in ex-Soviet Union, France, the US, and also the UK. But extreme nationalism is often a characteristic of displaced peoples, anxious to see their mythologised homeland rise above its enemies.

A popular Armenian joke runs thus: When the Flood subsided Noah set the Ark down on Mount Arrarat (once in Armenia, now in Turkey). It was soon surrounded by a small, proud people shouting “It's the circus! It's the circus!” Endearing jokes can mask ugly



politics. Specifically, nationalism prevents the ending of a historic conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over control of the largely ethnically Armenian Autonomous Republic of Nagorny Karabakh. In 1991, when the three republics became independent from Soviet Union, Azerbaijan refused to recognise the autonomy of the Karabakh and set about annexing it. Armenia, whilst never *officially* involved in the Karabakh, sent troops to 'defend' it, and to hopefully to take it for itself. The war lasted from 1991-1995 and hundreds of Armenians from the diaspora returned to the region to take part. This demonstrates that nationalist attachment to a greater Armenia is far from being limited to benign romantic nostalgia, and provides stark contrast with the traumatic ordeal of conscripted of Armenian citizens, including those who were to later become the anarchists.

In recent years Armenia has not stood up to close examination of its electoral system. Political commentators and independent observers remain suspicious of practices employed around the last election, way back in 1999. A more recent Armenian joke runs thus: “Bush, Blair and Kocharyan are on a plane. The engines fail, and the pilot bails out leaving only one parachute. The three premiers decide to have a democratic vote to see who deserves the parachute: one man, one vote. Kocharyan wins”. On February 23rd 2007, as the anarchists had predicted, Kocharyan indeed extended the franchise to the diaspora. Anarchists now predict that the voting forms of Armenians *entitled* to vote, but not actually making the trip to their embassies in New York, London and Paris, will not be returned Armenia blank. “Armenian Embassies are part of the Kocharyan ‘firm’”, an Armenian anarchist exile explained, “This is it for Armenia; the End”.

*Autonomous Action is a 500-member strong federation of Anarchist-Communists and others on the Libertarian Left in over 50 towns throughout ex-Soviet Union: <http://www.avtonom.org/index.php>*