

# REVIEWS

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Dr Widgery

Patrick Hutt, *Confronting an Ill Society: David Widgery, General Practice, Idealism and the Chase for Change*, Radcliffe 2004. Paperback, 144pp, £19.95.

## Reviewed by David Renton

ONE OF the difficulties of writing a biography of someone who has died recently is the temptation of their friends to demand a role in the story. Some will remind you of their dead friend's many positive characteristics and deny all other blemishes as if they were quite imaginary. Others will insist that any of your protagonist's best known achievements did not belong to them at all; that "David" (or whoever), far from originating the campaign he is said to have led, was in fact only a distant bystander, muscling into events late and with the sole idea of gaining all the credit afterwards. As a biographer, you can only do your best, armed with your protagonist's writing, a historian's guess as to who is right, and ideally by checking as many different views as possible. The interpretation that none of them denies is probably just right.

David Widgery, doyen of *OZ*, the *BMJ*, *Rock Against Racism* and *Socialist Worker*, has surviving friends in abundance. Which makes it heartening that the author of this first biography is a recent medical student who was even not in his teens when Widgery died in October 1992. Patrick Hutt uses Widgery as the start and end of his book but much of the middle is a rather general reflection on the nature of general practice and also of "idealism", the quality that Hutt associates with Widgery's political radicalism and also with the work of being an NHS doctor.

Hutt perceives a profession dominated by new managerial initiatives, by increased integration into the rhythm of the market, by stupidity, bureaucracy, and by a sort of fallback cynicism in face of the tenaciousness of ill health. "Consultants have different interests from GPs, who have different interests from nurses, who all have different interests depending on which part of the country they work in." Against the culture of permanent change, Widgery is seen to have embodied alternative values.

Hutt reads Widgery's life through the prism of his last and greatest book, *Some Lives*, a medical journal turned history, turned autobiography, an account of Widgery's own medical practice in the East End. His socialism is explained in similar terms: "Widgery believed his causes deserved attention

but he also knew that you had to make an argument for them. He drew strength from a belief that his patients and colleagues were especially hard done by. They were already poor and working in depressing circumstances. The last thing they needed were changes making life more difficult.... This is not to say that he did not possess a wider view, merely that he thought that taking a narrow and extreme view was a necessary tactic."

One of the first reviews of *Confronting an Ill Society* appeared in *Socialist Review*, where a former medical colleague of David's complained that Hutt's politics were hazy and that he had relied too much on other people's opinions. Perhaps the silliest of these, *Socialist Review* concluded, was the quote Patrick Hutt cites from another doctor Trevor Turner who told him that if he was still alive Widgery would be working for New Labour. Definitely, Hutt should have seen through such nonsense.

Widgery acted at various stages as a guiding influence to half a dozen of the best-known names of British feminism, a similar number of early gay socialists, and countless other activists. Hutt passes the politicians by, concentrating on doctors who knew David, some of them barely. The best anecdotes are missing as a result and even the quotes from Widgery's books are not his sharpest, nor his funniest, but come from the frequently more constrained passages of Widgery on medicine.

*Confronting an Ill Society* does suffer from a surfeit of sources, and those often of the wrong sort. The list of people who dedicated obituaries to Widgery, following his death at a party in October 1992, counted Paul Foot, Richard Neville, Mike Rosen, Raph Samuel, Sheila Rowbotham and Darcus Howe. By the time Widgery died in the early 1990s, no one but he could have kept them in a room together. The sparks between them might have enlightened a different book.

The last word should belong not to the book but its protagonist. David Widgery wrote several obituaries, the most poignant of which was dedicated to the magazine *OZ*, where his first and some of his liveliest journalism had been published: "The last part of *OZ*'s life was spent in a wistful melancholy.... He was happiest among friends reminiscing and he would talk of the old days with a bewildered tenderness. The circumstances of *OZ*'s tragically early death remain unclear. Whether *OZ* is dead, of suicide or sexual excess, or whether *OZ* is alive and operating under a series of new names is unclear at the moment. What is clear is that *OZ* bizarrely and for a short period expressed the energy of a lot of us. We regret his passing."

## Media Bias and the Left

James Curran, Ivor Gaber and Julian Petley, *Culture Wars: The Media and the British Left*, Edinburgh University Press, 2005. Paperback, 316pp, £14.99.

### Reviewed by Bob Pitt

THIS BOOK has a rather narrower focus than the title implies, concentrating as it does on the media's treatment of the Labour Left in London. James Curran analyses the campaign against the GLC in 1981-86 and Julian Petway the parallel attacks on Left-controlled local authorities of the period, while Ivor Gaber brings the story up to date with an account of the propaganda war against Ken Livingstone two decades later, when the '80s stereotypes of "Red Ken" and the "loony Left" were dusted off in an attempt to discredit and provoke public opposition to the congestion charge. The final two chapters assess the influences shaping the media and the impact of right-wing bias on popular political consciousness.

Petley's detailed investigation of the false stories about left-wing councils in the '80s is of particular interest. He shows how the notorious "Baa Baa Black Sheep" story, claiming that a local authority had banned school children from singing the song because it was deemed to be racist, which was attributed to several councils – first Hackney, then Haringey and finally Islington – was in fact a media-generated fraud. The same methods are of course still used today, though the targets may have changed. Hence the absurd reports that Lambeth and Islington councils (both under Lib Dem control) had "abolished Christmas" because they referred officially to "festive" or "celebration" (rather than "Christmas") lights. The obvious point that the neutral term had been chosen to take account of the fact that the lights were also used to celebrate the Hindu festival of Diwali did not prevent the *Daily Express* from running a front-page story headlined "Christmas is Banned: It Offends Muslims".

*Culture Wars* reveals another interesting connection between the '80s campaign against the Labour Left and the current wave of media-inspired anti-Muslim bigotry – namely reporter John Ware, who was responsible for the August 2005 Panorama Special that falsely depicted the Muslim Council of Britain as a hotbed of extremism. It turns out that Ware (a former *Sun* reporter, according to Julian Petley) headed a similarly scurrilous Panorama programme in 1987 entitled "Brent Schools – Hard Left Rules". Petley notes that "this particular edition of Panorama provoked an unusually large number of complaints". Regarding Ware's interview with Brent council leader Merle Amory, Petley writes that "the sole purpose behind Ware's interviewing techniques was to get Amory to make an incriminating remark about Trotskyist penetration of Labour". Amory and her fellow Labour councillors "were

never allowed freely to put their own or the council's point of view, unlike those critical of the council's policies – their function in the programme was simply to stand at the receiving end of criticisms levelled by their opponents and reinforced not only by Ware himself but by the very manner in which they were actually interviewed." I imagine Iqbal Sacranie knows exactly how they must have felt.

Curran demonstrates that the media onslaught on the Labour Left had little influence on elections in the local authorities under attack. Here Labour remained broadly popular with voters, whose own direct experience of councils under Left control ran counter to the media campaign and undermined its credibility. However, for voters outside London (or other leftist local authorities like Liverpool and Sheffield) who relied for their information on a politically biased press, the impact was different. Curran argues that media attacks on the Left did make a significant contribution to the Tory general election victory in 1987. No less importantly, he also shows how the "political elite" embraced the media myth that the Labour Left was unelectable, paving the way for and legitimising the Labour Party leadership's subsequent shift to the right.

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## A New Moscow Trial?

Michael Barratt Brown, Edward S. Herman and David Peterson, *The Trial of Slobodan Milosevic*, Spokesman Books, 2004. Pamphlet, 80pp, £5.00

### Reviewed by Ian Richardson

DEVELOPMENTS since the early 1990s in Yugoslavia have posed many challenges for the Left in Britain. With a few honourable exceptions, most notably the SWP and what remained of the "Bennite" current in the Labour Party, most of the Left failed to fully grasp what was happening in Yugoslavia and to consistently oppose imperialist intervention. The Hague Tribunal, which seeks "justice" for the victims of Milosevic, is the latest of these challenges. This pamphlet seeks to answer the question: "What purpose does the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia serve?"

The answer is well worth reading, providing as it does further evidence that imperialist intervention exacerbated the problems in Yugoslavia rather than providing peace and security, as well as exposing the truth behind the Tribunal. It does not aim to be more than an expose of the court, though, so readers will have to consult the works of Kate Hudson, Peter Gowan and others for more in-depth analyses of Western intervention in the region.

The publication is divided into two parts. First, an in-depth analysis of the transcripts of the trial by Michael Barratt Brown. Second, a "study in propaganda" by Herman and Peterson critiquing the reporting of *New York Times* correspondent

Marlise Simons.

Barrett Brown starts from a point which should be obvious – that the degeneration and break-up of Tito's Yugoslavia was a reactionary process, with horrendous consequences for millions of people. He rightly argues that "the main responsibility for the break-up of Yugoslavia and the subsequent civil war lies with outside forces, primarily German and American, who fought out their own rivalry on the bodies of the Yugoslav peoples" (p.7).

The validity of the court is dubious to say the least under current international law, although it has received surprising amounts of support from liberal leftist elements tied to the agenda of "cosmopolitanism". The true nature of the Tribunal, which received at least qualified support originally from elements such as *Red Pepper* contributor John Palmer, is to further pursue and legitimise the agenda of the NATO intervention.

Just one illustration of this is how the Tribunal has been funded. Whilst it was supposed to be funded out of the UN budget, "in fact it has depended on US and other governments' funding, on donations from Soros and other private donors, with equipment and staff seconded by NATO members" (p.11), with \$3 million coming from the US in 1994-5, at a time when it was failing to meet its UN obligations.

Finally, Barratt Brown rightly points out that to expose the hypocrisy and aggressive actions of the Western powers is not to excuse any war crimes committed on the Serbian side. Rather, it is central to being able to grasp the dynamics in Eastern Europe today, where the US seeks to further strengthen its support and bases, in order to isolate Russia and be able to strike against any other "rogue" regimes, whether by military or political means.

Herman and Peterson's contribution is useful in terms of illustrating Barratt Brown's key points, rather than being a sophisticated analysis of the political situation. Putting Simons' reporting to a vigorous test, they show that bias was there in every aspect. From the number of witnesses quoted on each "side", to the tone of the reporting, to the use of quotation marks, each article was designed in such a way as to demonise the Serbian side and justify US intervention. The US is presented as being on the side of "international justice", despite its refusal to back the ICC or the UN. Crucially, "when the issue of NATO culpability in the deliberate bombing of civilian facilities came up during and after the 78-day bombing, Simons and her paper evaded the issue and provided only NATO tribunal apologetics" (p.37).

(Indeed, the authors go as far as to compare the "trial" of Milosevic to the judicial frame-up of Trotsky in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, stressing its political, public relations and pre-arranged aspects. Whether this is a valid comparison, I shall leave to other readers to decide.)

The most worrying thing about this of course is not that US imperialism and its allies would lie, or

that the bourgeois media would propagandise on behalf of their projects – socialists should expect nothing less! Rather it is that much of the "Left" has swallowed the propaganda and bought into the agenda of imperialist intervention in the region. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who actively promoted and joined pro-NATO demonstrations, were the most grotesque element in this regard, but many others were effected.

With the war on Iraq clearly exposing the nature of US and UK imperialism to new layers of people, those on the Left who adapted to imperialism in terms of their analyses of Yugoslavia should revisit their position or they will fail to meet the continuing challenges posed by the US war drive.

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## Freeing the World

William Blum, *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire*, Common Courage Press, 2005. Paperback, 314pp, \$18.95.

### Reviewed by Will Podmore

THIS IS a brilliant collection of essays, extraordinarily acute, containing some fascinating information. Blum is the author of two of the very best books on US foreign policy – *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower* (Common Courage, 3rd edition, October 2005) and *Killing Hope: US Military and Civil Interventions Since World War II* (Zed Press, 2003).

This book includes a selection from his Anti-Empire Reports, available at [www.killinghope.org](http://www.killinghope.org); studies of some US interventions; an overview of the Cold War, showing how Cold Warriors have consistently used Goebbels' biggest and most-repeated lie about communist aggression and violence; and studies of the unemployment and poverty inflicted on American workers, exposing the myth, peddled by Gordon Brown among others, of the USA's booming economy.

Blum exposes the US state's current political violence against Cuba, Venezuela, Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan. Charles Clarke should perhaps readdress to George Bush and wormtongue Blair his remarks about how political violence is so unnecessary nowadays.

Contrary to Blair, the war on Iraq has not made us safer. Blum cites the US State Department as witness: "Tensions remaining from the recent events in Iraq may increase the potential threat to US citizens and interests abroad, including by terrorist groups." (*Voice of America News*, 21 April 2003)

Blum quotes a leading member of Al Qa'ida who threatened that they will bomb people in Britain "until the people of the country themselves recognise that this is going to go on until they get the leadership changed". Oh, no, sorry, that was Britain's Admiral Sir Michael Boyce threatening to keep

bombing people in Afghanistan.

Strangely enough, people the world over tend to react hostilely to aggression and violence. Colin Powell wrote of the 1983 US assault on Lebanon: "The U.S.S. *New Jersey* started hurling 16-inch shells into the mountains above Beirut, in World War II style, as if we were softening up the beaches on some Pacific atoll prior to an invasion. What we tend to overlook in such situations is that other people will react much as we would." Was he glorifying terrorism?

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## Liberation Music

Sun Ra, *Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra Vol.3: The Lost Tapes*, ESP, £10.99; Charlie Haden, Liberation Music Orchestra, *Not In Our Name*, Verve, £11.99.

### Reviewed by Robert Wilkins

ALTHOUGH the African-American composer and bandleader Sun Ra began his musical career back in the swing era, and had by the 1960s acquired a reputation in jazz circles as an eccentric musical genius, it wasn't until 1970 that he made his first appearance in Britain. I can still remember sitting in a concert hall at Liverpool University, waiting with some trepidation for the "Arkestra", as Sun Ra's band was known, to appear on stage. The audience consisted of several hundred hippy-ish students who had been attracted to the event by publicity presenting Sun Ra as a exponent of "space music", and they were presumably expecting something along the lines of Pink Floyd. Being familiar with the challenging music contained in the two volumes of the *Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra*, I was convinced that the Arkestra's music was going to prompt a mass walk-out. (I would have been even more anxious if I'd known that a few days earlier Sun Ra had almost been booed off stage at a concert in Germany – he had outraged his serious-minded free-jazz audience by training a telescope on the roof of the auditorium and announcing that he could see his home planet of Saturn!)

As it turned out, the Liverpool performance was a triumph for Sun Ra and his band, and at the close of the concert a large section of the audience rushed to the stage cheering and chanting "Ra, Ra, Ra". In part, this enthusiastic reception was undoubtedly due to the highly theatrical form in which the music was presented. The members of the band were all dressed in lurid costumes like extras from a Flash Gordon movie, saxophonists came down from the stage and wandered through the audience playing duets, and the 1970 version of the Arkestra included several dancers, one of whom doubled as a fire-eater. Sun Ra certainly knew how to put on a show.

The music, too, turned out to be much more

varied than I'd anticipated. The highly abstract style of the *Heliocentric Worlds* albums, which were the only Sun Ra recordings readily available in Britain at that time, in fact represented just one aspect of the Arkestra's repertoire. The Liverpool concert featured a wide variety of music, including written arrangements together with singalong ditties like 'Outer Spaceways Incorporated' ("Do you find earth boring, just the same old same thing? Come and sign up with Outer Spaceways Incorporated.")

Since then, Sun Ra fans have been much better served by the recording industry and these days we are able to get a fuller sense of the breadth of his creative output. Most of the once obscure albums that received only limited distribution on Sun Ra's own Saturn label are now widely available on CD, as are his recordings on more mainstream labels – and, having begun by recording enough music for three-and-a-half albums in 1956, he continued to produce material at the same prodigious rate until shortly before his death in 1993. While much of this music is far more accessible than the mid-'60s stuff – the 1950s material, though unlike anything else being produced at the time, does feature compositions based on chord changes with solos in a conventional hard-bop style, while in the 1970s Sun Ra began introducing classics from the swing era into the Arkestra's performances – I still retain a lot of affection for the two *Heliocentric Worlds* albums as the records that introduced me to Sun Ra's music. So the discovery, after all these years, of additional material for a Volume Three is an unexpected bonus.

The first three tracks are out-takes from the second volume of *Heliocentric Worlds*, recorded in November 1965 by a small-scale version of the Arkestra. The opening cut, 'Intercosmosis', is definitely the highlight of the album, an example of Sun Ra's brilliance in maintaining interest throughout the 17 minutes of improvisation. Various combinations of instruments are used, and John Gilmore's tenor sax and Pat Patrick's spluttering baritone are given solo space, as is the alto of (I think) Danny Davis, while Sun Ra himself makes a contribution on piano in his Cecil Taylor mode. The next track, 'Mythology Metamorphosis', is a slighter affair, though we do get to hear Sun Ra's keyboards, Marshall Allen's eastern-sounding oboe and a short solo by the Arkestra's great bass player Ronnie Boykins. Next up is 'Heliocentric Worlds', an interesting piece in 5/4 featuring Sun Ra on piano and electronic celeste accompanied by bass and percussion. Unfortunately the master tape was damaged and about a minute of music has been lost, resulting in a brutal splice at 1:09. The album notes carry the assurance that "you won't notice". Well, not if you've got tin ears and no sense of rhythm.

The last two tracks are performed by the larger version of the Arkestra that is used on Volume One of *Heliocentric Worlds*, and they presumably come

from the same April 1965 session. 'World Worlds' is, however, untypical of the other music from that date – it is a written arrangement in 4/4, and John Gilmore's melodic solo recalls his playing on the space ballads of a few years earlier such as 'Lights Of a Satellite' or 'Tapestry From an Asteroid' (though the effect is rather undermined by some out-of-tune contributions from other band members).

The final track, given the title 'Interplanetary Travelers' (I suspect that none of these pieces was actually named by Sun Ra himself), is in fact an alternate take of 'Other Worlds' from Volume One, and has previously appeared on the 1989 compilation *Out There a Minute*, Sun Ra's personal selection of rare Arkestra recordings. Though usually attributed to a later session that produced some of the music for the album *The Magic City*, it is more likely an initial attempt at the issued cut, which is a much tighter and more coherent performance. A comparison of the two takes demonstrates why Sun Ra always resisted attempts to describe his work, even at its most abstract, as free jazz. Though 'Other Worlds' dispenses with conventional harmonic, melodic and rhythmic structures, and on first listening sounds wild and utterly chaotic, it is nevertheless a highly organised piece of music.

*Heliocentric Worlds Vol.3* is probably only for completists, or at least for hardcore fans of the first two volumes (now handily available on a single CD, by the way). Nevertheless, in its short 36 minutes of music this album does provide some useful additions to the already vast Sun Ra oeuvre.

I usually try to work out some sort of political angle for music criticism in *What Next?* but in Sun Ra's case this is not easy. The nearest Sun Ra came to public political engagement was his mid-'60s collaboration with Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), for whose play *A Black Mass* the Arkestra provided the music. However, although Baraka welcomed Sun Ra's fusion of ideas and images from ancient Egypt and science fiction as an attempt to develop a distinctive African-American mythology which tied in with his own Black nationalist concerns, Sun Ra himself remained an unreconstructed mystic who lacked any real grasp of political issues. While Amiri Baraka subsequently became active in the Maoist movement and remains an anti-imperialist radical to this day, Sun Ra ended up voting for George Bush and Ross Perot.

Placing Charlie Haden's latest album, *Not in Our Name*, in a political framework presents no such problems. The bass player and bandleader has declared that "music can't be separated from politics" and that is certainly true of much of his own work. The latest incarnation of his Liberation Music Orchestra was formed to campaign against the Bush administration and its foreign policy. It consciously harks back to the first album by the orchestra, recorded in 1969 at the height of the struggle against the Vietnam War. Like the earlier work, *Not in Our Name* features arrangements by

Carla Bley and the artwork uses same "Liberation Music Orchestra" banner that Bley designed for the first album. As Haden has explained: "although the music might be different, the reason for its existence is the same. Then it was Nixon, now it's George W. What they're doing is the same."

The centrepiece of the 1969 album was a 21-minute suite based on music from the soundtrack of *Mourir à Madrid*, a documentary film about the Spanish civil war. But the album's high point was undoubtedly 'Song for Che', which featured a poignant bass solo by Haden and included an excerpt from Carlos Puebla's homage to Guevara, 'Hasta Siempre Comandante'. The 1969 album contained only two pieces that related directly to US domestic politics – 'Circus '68 '69', a musical representation of the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, and an inspiring version of the civil rights anthem 'We Shall Overcome', with the great Roswell Rudd on trombone, which concluded the album.

*Not in Our Name* adopts a different strategy, concentrating exclusively on pieces with an American theme. The avowed aim of the LMO is now to "reclaim our country in the name of humanity and decency". Haden writes: "We want the world to know ... that the devastation that this administration is wreaking is not in our name. It's not in the name of many people in this country." Elsewhere Haden has stated that his aim is to establish "an America worthy of the dreams of Martin Luther King Jr, and the majesty of the Statue of Liberty".

The argument that the United States has been hijacked by an unrepresentative, corrupt and unpatriotic elite, and that it is necessary to return control of the country to the common people, has been a familiar theme within US radicalism since the days of the Populist movement in the late nineteenth century. It was an approach enthusiastically adopted by the CPUSA in its Popular Front period and became a distinctive characteristic of the politics of the "Old Left". In the 1960s, however, would-be revolutionaries derided this appeal to "American values" as a concession to social patriotism and a betrayal of true internationalism. They identified with anti-imperialist movements in the Third World and denounced their own country as "Amerika", while some even campaigned against the Vietnam War under the slogan "Victory to the Vietcong", with its implied support for the killing of US servicemen.

As a political tactic, I have some sympathy with the "radical patriotism" stance, which does try to relate to the consciousness of the masses. In a country like the US, where school children are brought up to salute the flag and a sense of national pride is deeply ingrained among large sections of the population, there is nothing wrong with trying to present a radical message in language that has resonance in the minds of the people it seeks to influence.

The problem I have is with the music itself,

rather than the politics behind it. In an interview last year Carla Bley was quoted as worrying that Haden might find her arrangements “too ironic”. Certainly the original LMO album was characterised by an exuberant humour that sometimes verged on parody. However, with the exception of a catchy version of David Bowie and Pat Metheny’s ‘This is Not America’, performed in a cod reggae arrangement (and what is *that* about?), irony is in short measure on the new album. Hackneyed pieces that have an association with the US, such as ‘Amazing Grace’, Samuel Barber’s ‘Adagio for Strings’ and the largo from Dvořák’s ‘New World Symphony’, are played almost completely straight (with the latter sounding disturbingly like the brass band version that was once used to accompany an advert for Hovis bread).

Jazz artists do of course face problems getting radical politics across to relatively large numbers of people by means of a music most listeners find too demanding. Archie Shepp, a prominent tenor saxophonist of the 1960s “New Wave”, was a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist who had embraced Black nationalism, but the free-form music that dominated his recordings of the period proved far too abrasive for all but a tiny minority of his fellow African-Americans. Shepp’s most overtly political album, 1972’s *Attica Blues*, dispensed with free improvisation altogether in favour of soul and other popular musical forms. There is of course a pragmatic argument in favour of moderating a difficult style in order to reach a wider audience – but, frankly, in artistic terms, the album fell far short

of Shepp’s earlier work.

Although the original Liberation Music Orchestra album was itself not lacking in identifiable melodies, the folk themes of the Spanish civil war medley dissolved into some pretty challenging “outside” playing, which undoubtedly restricted its appeal beyond committed fans of that variety of jazz improvisation. When I played the album a couple of years ago in a political campaign office it provoked loud complaints (“What *is* this rubbish?”) from one comrade, who was dissuaded from removing it from the CD player only after its progressive politics were drawn to her attention.

There is no doubt that the new album contains some impressive musicianship, notably from alto saxophonist Miguel Zenon, while Curtis Fowlkes’ trombone, which recalls Rudd’s dixieland-derived style, does give the music a slightly rougher edge. But at times the restrained and tasteful playing comes perilously close to falling into that dire musical category, “smooth jazz”. You miss the quirky trumpet playing of a Don Cherry and begin to wish that the blistering saxophone of a Gato Barbieri would come crashing through the mix and disrupt the almost suffocatingly polite atmosphere.

Let me finish on a positive note. Despite my complaints this is an interesting album both politically and musically which I have listened to repeatedly, and I wouldn’t dissuade anyone from buying it. But it does underline the brilliance and one-off character of the original 1969 recording. If you don’t yet have a Liberation Music Orchestra album, get that one.

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## LETTERS

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### A Message from Uncle Bulgaria

THE MORE I read “Geoffrey Brown’s” article ‘Wombing Free? Anarchists and the European Social Forum’ (*What Next?* No.29) the more it ceases to be odd & amusing & becomes utterly bewildering.

The document ‘reflections & analysis: the wombles, the esf & beyond’ (<http://www.wombles.org.uk/auto/reflections.php>) may clarify some of “geoffrey’s” attempts at trying, & failing with almost subtle brilliance, to construct a valid argument against our continued criticism & antagonism towards the European Social Forum.

What interests me more though is his clueless (& I mean genuinely clueless) attempt to discredit the wombles over Dublin mayday. Let’s be clear: the relationship between the wombles & DGN [Dublin Grassroots Network] has never been stron-

ger, indeed the wombles & groups involved in DGN have every intention of working together in the future. We respect (though do not always necessarily agree with) the groups involved with DGN. Odd that we should be described as “the anarchists” whereas in fact most of the group in-volved in DGN would happily describe themselves as such & vehemently argue the anarchist corner. The ritual attempts at creating false divisions may work in reactionary left circles (& indeed it is the favourite tactic of state agents) but anarchists are made of sterner political stuff & stronger friendships.

The fact that much of “geoffrey’s” source material is from anonymous posting on irish indymedia it makes it virtually impossible to take what he has to say seriously. It reminds me a little of the right wing media & their woefully apolitical, but equally hysterical, criticism of the wombles. But, again, just