Football is perceived as the people's game. A game that brings people together for sport, exercise, comradeship, and entertainment. Sometimes it is hard to remember that's the case.

At the time of writing this review Manchester City fans only a few weeks ago had baulked at paying £62 for a ticket at the Emirates stadium, the modern day home of Arsenal. The fans factored in travel to London, a few beers, maybe a bite to eat, and quite rightly thought it was too much. Even before this many supporters, particularly those who follow a Premier League or even a Championship team, have been financially excluded from attending matches for many years.

When Carlos Tevez was suspended and fined by his own club, he lost a staggering £200,000 per week. Even within the Premier League, the richest clubs have excluded others from the on-field battle for major honours. More than that, many working class supporters have been excluded from the stands.

Stanley Matthews made the point: 'How many ordinary working people can afford to take their family to a football match these days? Too many clubs having worked hard to rid their stadiums of racism and bigotry are now simply practicing economic bigotry'.
team and enter the local league. That in itself would make some kind of story, particularly if they went on to have success on and off the pitch.

However, as this book illustrates, the Easton Cowboys FC is a little more adventurous than that. While they competed week in, week out in the local Sunday league with enthusiasm, the book tells an even more inspirational story. This political football club initially toured to Germany and other parts of Europe. They then organised their own international tournament in Bristol before putting on an ‘alternative World Cup’ with teams from among other places South Africa.

The club even turned itself into an anti-fascist campaigning organisation and helped inspire clubs in the same vein across Europe. On top of that they even stopped the deportation of young asylum seekers in their early days – not bad for a football club.

Most inspiring of all were trips to Mexico, or more specifically Chiapas, to play football against teams representing the Zapatistas.

The book outlines their international football trips to Morocco, Palestine, and Brazil among other destinations as a mark of solidarity and a simpler love of the game. Combining football with politics.

Over a 20 year period the Easton Cowboys have also given birth to a women’s football team (the Cowgirls), a rugby league team, and a basketball team. In a surreal moment in the club’s history their cricket team toured South Central Los Angeles playing against the Compton Homies & Popz.

The story is a rollercoaster of laughs, fun, inspired campaigns but most of all comradeship. There is no doubt that they have brought some truth to football being the people’s game.

FC Barcelona has a motto – ‘Més que un club’ – meaning ‘more than a club’. I am sure that could easily be the motto of this football club from Bristol.

Paul Heron

Paying twice for drugs

Fire In The Blood

directed by Dylan Mohan Gray

Dartmouth Films (2012)

This excellent documentary plots the story of how the multinational pharmaceutical industry denied essential medication to tens of millions of people in the developing world affected by HIV and Aids. Fire In The Blood is a story of unfathomable cruelty and neglect as Western neoliberal governments did the bidding of the powerful pharmaceutical industry. By effectively blockading low cost Aids drugs to the developing world it is estimated that ten million people died. In pursuit of profit, lives and communities were destroyed.

The film explores why the system governing the development and commercialisation of medicine is deeply flawed and discriminates against those who cannot afford to pay. It shows how very few patents are new, novel, or improved, and how patent monopolies have been established to maximise profiteering.

As the film points out even people in the west, particularly in the USA, are also being ‘priced out’ of the market. As a result of the neoliberal agenda, western governments are now considered the ‘bag carriers’ to the pharmaceutical industry as they pursue bigger profits for their shareholders.

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The film explains how treaties are used to prevent affordable generic drugs, particularly from India, reaching the developing world. In the field of ‘research and development’, globally governments and other public sources provide 84 per cent of funding; only 12 per cent of such research is funded by the pharmaceutical industry. Only 1.3 per cent of the profits of the multinationals go into new drug discovery research. As the former CEO of Pfizer comments in the film, people pay for the drugs twice – once through taxes and then to the pharmaceutical industry.

The statistics are damming. As a human story Fire In The Blood shows the devastating impact on lives, how millions died, and how working class and the poorest African communities were disproportionately impacted.

This documentary also tells you about the fight back being galvanised by the medical profession, lawyers, but above all the working class, and how a combination of mass campaigns, and even breaking the law, won a campaign for affordable generic ‘first-line’ antiretrovirals (ARVs).

However, the film also carries a warning. Millions of people with HIV/Aids in the developing world, whose lives were saved by these first-line ARVs will at some point need to switch to the more complex second and third line ARVs. Not surprisingly these are not available in generic form and the multinationals recently took steps under new trade agreements – under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation – to ensure that the next battle will not be lost by them so easily to allow cheaper generic drugs.

This is a film that fills the viewer with a feeling of betrayal by governments in the pocket of big business and shows the desperate need for socialised medicine, with health systems nationalised and under democratic control.

Paul Heron

It is therefore very refreshing to read a book about the fun, and the comradeship that can be derived from football.

Freedom Through Football tells the story of a football team in the working class area of Easton in Bristol. It tells of how just over 20 years ago a group of anarchists, socialists, and various waifs and strays got together for a kick around every week. During the course of the weekly friendly match and after a meeting in a pub they decided to form a football team and enter the local league. That in itself would make some kind of story, particularly if they went on to have success on and off the pitch.

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