


Direct Action

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Magazine of Solidarity Federation



**What we're really struggling
for is our land.**

Penan People - Sarawak, Malaysia
see p.30-31

Clash of Cultures, Academy Schools, Strikes in Egypt
National Shop Stewards' Network

Direct Action

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Articles may be sent as hard copy, on a disk or by email, and can only be returned if accompanied by a request (and SAE if appropriate).

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Aims of the Solidarity Federation

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

In their place we want a society based on workers' self-management, solidarity, mutual aid and libertarian communism. That society can only be achieved by working class organisation based on the same principles - revolutionary unions. These are not Trades Unions only concerned with 'bread and butter' issues like pay and conditions.

Revolutionary unions are means for working people to organise and fight all the issues - both in the workplace and outside - which

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

The Solidarity Federation consists of locals which support the formation of future revolutionary unions and are centres for working class struggle on a local level. Our activities are based on direct action - action by workers ourselves, not through intermediaries like politicians or union officials - our decisions are made through participation of the membership. We welcome all working people who agree with our aims and principles, and who will spread propaganda for social revolution and revolutionary unions. We recognise that the class struggle is worldwide, and are affiliated to the International Workers Association, whose 'Principles of Revolutionary Unionism' we share.

Pay cuts, privatisation and Brown's 'Blue' Labour

Predictably, anyone who harboured some forlorn hope that Gordon Brown would divert the Labour Party from its anti-working class course have been soundly disappointed. Instead, it's business as usual as Brown tries to impose a pay regime across the public sector that amounts to wage cuts in real terms. Here at Direct Action, Labour's contempt for workers comes as no surprise whatever. Over the decades, whether in power or out, DA has consistently painted the Labour Party as the class enemy it truly is. For us, it would be far more of a shock if Brown actually were to take a turn towards workers' interests.

Well there's no danger of that. Brown's Labour Party continues to be the bosses' best friend while the PM himself strives to outdo anything Blair got up to in the 'heir to Maggie' stakes. From his blue ties to his stolen Tory ideas and stunts like having Thatcher over for a nausea-stalgie shifty round number 10, Brown's version of the party is more a case of 'blue Labour' than 'old Labour'. Of course, all this is little more than a part of the political popularity contest, just one more

lump in the daily diet of celebrated sh*tte that decorates our TV screens and newspaper pages. And while spin doctors cooked up the whole over-hyped non-election farce that we saw back in September, in the real world our class had far more important matters on our plate.

Public Sector pay cuts

Not content that we already suffer high levels of job insecurity (bosses call it flexibility), already endure the longest hours in Europe (over 350,000 of us regularly rack up more than 50 hours a week), and already make do with the

lowest annual leave (with one in five of us pressured into giving up some of our leave), the government now intends to drive our wages down even further. This is what the real effect will be of the announcement in the pre-budget statement that public sector pay settlements are to be restricted to 2% for the next three years.

Labour's excuse is that the measure will hold inflation down to its 2% target. But even if this target is met, workers still lose out because the measure of inflation that most closely reflects our cost of living is higher than the

one used by the Treasury. So the equation is stark but simple - to avoid what will amount to at least three years of pay cuts will mean workers standing up to this attack and beating it back.

Now, we've heard the fairly predictable calls for another 'Winter of Discontent'. But for this to have any substance beyond the slogans and petitions of lefty paper sellers then it's down to workplace activists to begin the groundwork - and quickly too. This means pushing for and building mass meetings, initially at the local workplace level, and later at the regional and



Brown and Thatcher outside 10 Downing Street

national levels. Here ideas can be exchanged, information circulated, newsletters planned, actions and tactics coordinated. The mass meetings will be important not only in building support for a 'yes' vote in the strike ballots to come, but once action is underway, to also spread the use of go-slows, work-to-rules, unofficial walk-outs and other ways to hit back over and above the official strike days.

Above all, mass meetings allow a measure of control to remain with the rank and file membership, thereby countering those well known habits of our dear union leaders to back-slide and to sell us out. These and similar ideas are being spread also by the Dispatch bulletin (see box for download details) and are shared by many of those who are participating in the National Shop Stewards Network (see 'NSSN: Time to Organise in the Workplace' - page 7).

Privatisation

This is another aspect of the class struggle in the public sector. It is also one which can be linked to pay especially considering that research is increasingly finding little to link inflation with public sector pay.

In that case then, the suspicion is that the government's motive for trying to cut pay is less to do with controlling inflation and more to do with preparing the path for more privatisation.

Throughout the public sector governments, both past and present, has been hiving off more and more services to their friends in the private sector. Whether it's wholesale privatisation or the creeping variety which, to a greater or lesser extent, affects the health, education and local authority sectors, there is a recurring pattern. First we see wages and conditions driven down so as to attract potential bidders. Then we see these private operators continue in much the same vein creating an increasingly casualised workforce, cutting the quality of service to the bone, and generally squeezing out the highest possible profit for the lowest possible investment. This is a familiar story across a range of formerly state-run services, and one that is covered from the point of view of social services in 'The "Caring" Face of New Labour' (see page 21).

Either way you look at it, there's plenty for activists

to organise around. And if Brown's pay cuts are beaten, the knock on effects on privatisation plans can only be positive.

The recent fight back by postal workers is a case in point. There is no doubt that Crozier and the Royal Mail top brass, with the complete backing of the government, want to push through savage redundancies and cuts in pay and conditions in the run up to wholesale privatisation. But resistance by postal

Also in this issue...

workers, based on effective workplace organisation and a willingness to go beyond the legal straight-jacket of union-sanctioned official action, appears to have forced another rethink.

In these pages we also take a look at yet another government policy that is more than a little to do with privatisation - namely academy schools - and the growing resistance to them (see 'Resisting Academy Schools' - page 14). On the subject of education, and with this year being the 90th anniversary of the Russian revolution, we have a history session in the shape of 'Factory Committees in the Russian Revolution' (see page 17),

and 'The Revolution that never was' (see page 18). While the first covers self-organisation among Russian workers the second looks at the effects that the Bolshevik takeover in Russia had on what was a vibrant revolutionary movement here in Britain. Sticking with the theme of workers self-organising 'In the Same Boat, on the Same Journey' covers the recent strike waves in Egypt (see page 26)...and much more besides.

And finally... One more reminder, if one were needed, of which side of the tracks Labour's loyalties lie on. This is the revelation that the majority of the super-rich pay no income tax. According to HM Revenue and Customs figures from tax returns for 2003-4, only 65 out of 400 UK-based individuals who earn £10million a year or more, declared this as taxable income. In effect, there are legal loopholes galore being exploited to enable the rich to dodge paying tax. In the fourth biggest economy in the world where, according to the government's own figures, 1 in 3 children live in poverty, there is no doubt whatsoever whose interests Brown and co. are here to serve.

To download Dispatch go to -<http://libcom.org/library/dispatch-public-sector-pay-dispute-1-august-2007>

Take back the people's game: how capitalism stole football

Page 34

Anarchism and celebrity don't mix

Dear comrades,

I'm sorry I'm not sure how to say this but what on earth is the article 'The Cult of Celebrity and the Poverty of Everyday Life' doing in an anarcho-syndicalist magazine?

"Rejecting the cult of celebrity, confronting the banal rubbish which passes as entertainment and creating our own alternatives to these is a necessary part of the process of transforming social relationships."

I take serious issue with that quote. How exactly are we supposed to be "confronting the banal rubbish that passes as entertainment"? While it is an improvement on that awful "War Games" article in issue 38, I do have to ask why it is acceptable that such a fragrantly lifestylist tone and what comes across as an almost snobbish contempt for popular culture are acceptable in a class struggle anarchist publication.

I'm sure it isn't intentionally meant to sound snobbish but saying things like "- or, more likely nowadays, on their eye knacker-

ing, toxin leaking, power guzzling, 'x boys boxes' thingy which comes free with every ten ton of McDouglles fat-dog burgers chemi-coke" (DA issue 38) is just an absurd comment to make. I mean what's wrong with eating burgers and playing computer games, seriously like? I always grab a burger if I'm travelling back a bit drunk from a night out, even if I try and watch the calories when I'm a bit more sober.

Likewise I find Heat and OK! and that a bit boring for sure, but have no idea why that particular aesthetic decision of mine somehow would make me an anarchist because I "rejected celebrities". Most of my workmates read celebrity magazines or the like mostly because it's boring at work and coz the magazines are fun in a tongue in cheek way. I don't feel the need to patronisingly go off on one to them about how they are "buying into the spectacle" or some similar sub-situationist nonsense.

JB

Dear comrades,

In DA 39, the 'Environmental' article reads in part:

"The future we fight for has a system of production and exchange

driven not by short-sighted profit, but by collective need and the full participation of workers and communities in deciding what gets made and how"

Surely this should read "...a system of production AND DISTRIBUTION...", since a libertarian communist society will abolish

all forms of exchange in order to distribute goods and services on

the basis of need, and to prevent the re-emergence of economic inequality and class society.

Which is to say that production and distribution will be organised

according to the principle of "From each according to ability, to each according to need".

I was also a bit confused by reference in the article to individual

ownership of resources, for the same reasons.

I don't mean to be overly critical but this needed to be said, I felt.

GL

If you have any comments about the content, or anything else regarding the magazine, please e-mail us at da@direct-action.org.uk

Are we all proud now?

Everyone here today is here to celebrate his or her own sexuality. Being open and proud is what Gay Pride is about, but are we really proud of our own sexuality?

In the last few years according to many in the Gay Press we have all become free. The reason being that of a little thing called the Pink Pound. The Gay Community now through being pumped with cash from Big Business has won its freedom and won the right to be treated with respect. Homophobia is a thing of the past, worries about coming out at work are a thing of the past and we now live in a society that accepts people for their differences and where people are not discriminated against.

The Gay Community and people feeling may have transformed considerably in the last few years, but that has very little to do with the Pink Pound. People have only

ever improved things in society through uniting to fight the problems facing them. This is the case with the LGBT community as with any other. Groups of people fought for decades to win the rights that we now take for granted. Once people started to gain respect, Big Business owners (capitalists) everywhere saw a potential market from which they could make a lot of money.

Whether these people are Gay, Straight or Bisexual is irrelevant: capitalists will happily exploit anyone for their own gain even if it is someone who has the same sexual orientation as them, so much for solidarity. It wasn't long ago that the some of these people were promoting

homophobia in rags like the Sun or even in nice middle class newspapers like the Guardian; attitudes turn on a six pence if a buck can be made out of them.

Many of the supposed liberated sectors of the gay community now work up and down the country in gay bars on the minimum wage or less if cash in hand, oh the freedom. Being out and proud will not mean much if you are working for peanuts and being leached over by a domineering boss, this can just as demoralizing as being oppressed by homophobic bullying. For decent wages and working conditions, employees in gay bars and services will need to unite together and with straight workers against their bosses who

are happy enough to maintain inequality in income and the relationship of order giver and order taker.

Whilst there may now be more Out politicians, business and religious leaders...this hasn't led to a more humane society. This pecking order change has brought about newer prejudices. Bisexuals and Transsexuals after all aren't specifically Gay, where do they fit in with all this?

The 2 biggest problems in our society for people fighting homophobia and discrimination generally are 2 things that are rarely mentioned. These 2 things are the State (government) and Capitalism (an economy run to make profit for a rich minority). Capitalism because it is



Queer radicals showing their opposition to the people who brought you Section 28

based on the pursuit of profit and will make as much money out of people's communities as possible, whether that means being nice or nasty. 2 puffs and dykes depends on what is more profitable at the time and whether the system is looking for scapegoats. The other great obstacle to the improvement of our lives is the State. The state or government is a top-down form of control and built on hierarchy which always leads to the domination of one person or a group of people over a majority.

Pride and prejudices: Gays and lesbians have had to fight hard to increase the scope of our freedom. It's taken decades of struggle and

increasing self-confidence to shape our identities and win some measures of equality. Capitalist society teaches that things are black and white, that you are part of the straight majority (still the preferred option) or a gay minority. However the reality of many people's sexuality is that is more fluid than fixed and people often experience attraction to people of either sexes at some point. Some gay people who have fought to defend their integrity in what has been billed as a 'them and us situation' with the rest of society may resent bisexuality as it appears to undermine the cohesion of the gay community.

Anarchists believe the only way that people in all

areas of life can attain freedom and equality is by people actively collaborating to run things themselves without the unnecessary funnels of Government and Big Business. These two things have always used and abused people and it places people in a very vulnerable position to insist that they rely upon them. We say annihilate that vulnerability and cut out the middleman and do things yourselves. Homo/Bi/Transphobic views and every kind of prejudice must be challenged, it wasn't long ago that homophobia was the mainstream, why should any other prejudice be so?

We need to see how our experiences link into the need to fight all forms of

discrimination, we shouldn't let the system divide and rule us. Legal protections have been won on the basis of mass campaigning activity but aren't a solution in themselves; for example we've had the Sex Discrimination Act and Race Relations Act for decades but sexual and racial inequalities are alive and kicking. We shouldn't just want equality with straights who are also trapped with the narrow and puritanical expectations of how men and women should act, but gain powerful allies whilst striving for genuine human liberation - which will include a struggle against rigid gender roles, prejudices and wage slavery.

National Shop Stewards' Network: Time to organise in the workplace

In July a number of Solidarity Federation delegates and observers attended the launch of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) in London. The overall impression reported back by our members was generally positive, while recognising that there may be problems which lurk over the not too distant horizon. Certainly the conference was successful in bringing together a good number of people who seem to genuinely see the need to concentrate on workplace activity and organisation.

SolFed had a visible presence which included a banner, literature stall and leaflet which was distributed to all present - see www.solfed.org.uk/nssn/pdfs/nssn.pdf for the full text. In the leaflet we argued that activists should...

> Organise not merely on the basis of workplace representatives meeting with other representatives outside the workplace but on the basis of involving other workers to build effective organisation inside the workplace;

> Encourage workers to confront basic workplace issues like unpaid overtime, health and safety, arbitrary and bullying management - in short, to just say "no" to management - which is badly needed in the overwhelming majority of workplaces;

> Organise workplace meetings on such issues where stewards can be mandated and held to account as workplace delegates allowing negotiation to become effective, backed up by organisation and the real prospect of workers taking direct action;

> Make links between different groups of workers, between different workplaces in the same industry and between workers in different unions; this should include groups and committees in workplaces with agency workers and subcontractors and which allow workers in different unions or who are unable to openly join a trades union to support, participate in and benefit from workplace organisation based on solidarity;

> Encourage an awareness that by confronting workplace issues we are also confronting capitalism from which they arise - in other words, our interests as a class cannot be reconciled with those of management;

> To avoid leaving politics at the workplace door in the same way that the existing unions leave

political issues to be dealt with by political parties.

Some potential problems

At this stage it is unclear if the NSSN will go much beyond a thin layer of shop stewards. Restricting the network to "bona fide rank and file TUC affiliated trade union workplace representatives" is clearly meant to put stewards, rather than full time trade union officials, in control. However, we feel there needs to be more emphasis on the role of the rank and file of ordinary members in the workplace.

Besides this there are other issues with the potential to cause problems in the future. First, and despite the emphasis on shop stewards, NSSN has not (yet) clearly rejected the union bureaucracy. Indeed there is a



Postal workers in Manchester at a picketline during a strike in June

tendency, similar to the 'broad left organising committees' of the 1980s, which seeks little in the way of workplace activity or organisation, but instead concentrates on getting motions passed at union conferences and getting left wing candidates elected to positions within unions - albeit with the usual proviso about them only getting paid average earnings.

Second, there is the potential for political infighting to undermine the NSSN. Many at the conference were members of some political party or other, but there currently seems to be a truce amongst the various groups. This could be because no one group dominates or because things are so bad that for the moment people will sink their differences in the hope of building some

resistance.

Third, and related, the ever present ghost of 'a new political party' kept rearing its ugly head. It is very odd indeed, at a conference called to help build a shop stewards' organisation, that this issue should be mentioned so often. Arguments over what form such a new party should take is another source of future problems for the NSSN, that is, if the stage of launching it is ever reached. In the meantime it is an idea that diverts attention away from where it is most needed.

Lack of structure is also problematic. Clearly many participants were present "in a personal capacity" rather than being delegated from their workplace. In addition, the fact that the NSSN committee was 'agreed' - if you stuck your hand up

you got on the committee - rather than 'elected' immediately prompts questions like: who are these people?; who, if anyone, do they represent?; how are decisions going to be made in an accountable fashion?

A supportive critique

Despite these reservations, the SF members who attended the conference would urge all anarcho-syndicalists, as well as others with a focus on encouraging workplace activity and organisation, to remain or to become involved in the NSSN to put these ideas across and help to influence its future development.

As such we can argue for the central role of workplace organisation, for an alternative accountable structure for the NSSN, for our critique of political

parties and union bureaucracy, and against the red herring of a 'new workers' party' as well as the idea of getting people elected to union positions beyond the workplace. Having said this, the NSSN is not a substitute for developing anarcho-syndicalist ideas and activities based on our own industrial strategy and the long term aim of building revolutionary unions.

There are many people involved in the NSSN who actively organise in the workplace. For this reason Solidarity Federation will remain involved but will continue to have a supportive critique of it. Should the worst come to the worst at least these people will have heard of an alternative to the toothless politicking that often gets in the way of the real work of organising.

No new Trident

A nuclear attack would commit murder and suicide

Nuclear missiles have been compared to a pistol with two barrels, one pointed at the enemy and the other at the holder of the gun. A nuclear attack would commit murder and suicide.

Even the smallest nuclear wars would ignite fires and generate smoke which would be enough to trigger an epoch of cold and dark...a nuclear winter, blotting out the sun on which most life forms depend globally (1). Also radiation fallout would be blown around the planet and enter the food chain (parallels with Chernobyl).

Billions of pounds wasted on the development of a new set of nuke subs could be spent on much needed, other things.

But imagination is needed to create alternative employment for the 3,000-plus work force at the Barrow-in Furness shipyard where these machines are built. Almost totally dependent on MoD contracts, the yard is rather like an obsolete nationalised industry, only owned by BAE Systems shareholders.

Possible alternatives include work like the two fully equipped hospital ships 'Amazon Hope' and

'Amazon Hope 2' that were refitted in recent years at Barrow. They help to make friends with people instead of frightening them with nuclear destruction.

There are other kinds of subs apart from nukes: they can be used for filming, research, tourism, the leisure industry and to harvest manganese on the sea bed. Some of these are a niche market, but cars, phones and computers were once novelties. Drilling platforms for oil and gas are alternatives as are off shore technologies to make power for wind, waves and tidal energy. All of these products could be sold internationally.

Barrow has time to recruit and train a research, development and sales team.

Ironically, it would be cheaper to send the workers at Barrow on holiday for life, rather than build new Trident subs. However successive governments have lacked the courage and foresight to dismantle these national status symbols. That goes to the heart of who makes decisions in our society...read on!

Needed for defence?

Wars mainly arise out of

the competing interests of different national elites who battle for wealth, power and prestige in capitalist and state socialist societies alike. Class struggle anarchists support the replacement of conventional armies with democratic militias. Other forms of defence include strikes, go-slows, and other forms of non co-operation. Propaganda aimed at 'enemy' troops who are usually drawn from the working classes of other countries who may mutiny as well as other forms of solidarity action by workers internationally. Workers and peasants in Vietnam defeated the US with a combination of these tactics.

This would not prevent part of another states ruling elite deciding to drop a bomb, although neither could having nukes as there are no defences against them.

So what's the alternative?

In the short term anarchists work within anti-militarist campaigns and promote direct democracy and direct action within them. This can develop an alternative culture of defiance to the present system and encourage self

reliance instead of being hood winked and sold out by politicians whom we have no real control of.

In the long term anarchists want to work towards a society where wealth is shared equally, and where human society is based on co-operation. We would not give up our decision making power to politicians of any persuasion. Instead local workplaces and neighbourhoods would arrive at decisions via consensus in regular meetings. They could elect delegates to carry out their mandates this would assist with everyday planning and co-ordination. Delegates would remain recallable and receive no privileges. History has shown that these would then federate outwards to form new structures of self-governance, with power residing at the base of society.

Examples of this libertarian tendency can be seen in embryo form in things like strike committees and the anti-poll tax unions. On a grander, scale in the beginning of the Russian revolution (especially in Ukraine) and the Spanish Civil war for instance. Therefore there would not be anyone to rule over us and decide when to 'press the button'.

(1) Sagan, Carl (October 11, 2006) The nuclear winter; A special report by Carl Sagan. Parade/ Daily News. Pp4-7.

Bush, Bin Laden and the clash of civilisations myth

At a time when the subject of religion is perhaps more contentious than ever, with various figureheads predicting an escalating 'clash of civilisations' between the Islamic and Western worlds, it seems apt to comment on the overtly political role religion plays in fomenting conflict and maintaining reactionary social/economic conditions.

Religion: an anarcho-syndicalist view

Anarchists and libertarian socialists have consistently argued that most religions are anachronistic: Reactionary ideologies which have been carefully manipulated throughout history to sanctify and legitimise oppressive power relationships, destroy freedom of thought and provide a pretext for the persecution, domination and demonisation of non-believers and infidels.

Before science was able

to provide logical explanations for the origin of humankind, nature and the universe, religion and superstition filled this void. Moreover, religious beliefs are clearly linked to the early development of the state and social classes, with a small elite claiming their divine right to rule over others. The ancient Egyptians are

"Mohammed is the apostle of Allah. Those who follow him are merciful to one another but ruthless to non-believers."

The Koran, Sura 48:29

"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ." The Bible, Ephesians 6:5

"And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall be put to death, and all the congregation shall surely stone him" The Bible, Leviticus 24:16

credited with being the first to develop the notion of the afterlife, casting the mortal world as a proving ground for the great hereafter. The idea that followers should obey god's will, and accept their subservient position in the hope that they will be

rewarded by a state of bliss when they die, remains common to both Christianity and Islam. It serves to legitimise the exploitation of the masses regardless of culture or country, and gives apparent meaning to their suffering.

Further, religious ideas have been (and still are) used to subjugate women

of the African continent.

Religion hasn't had it all its own way however. As civilisation developed, science and philosophy increasingly challenged its legitimacy, repressive morality and inherent contradictions.

Machiavelli (1469-1527) was the first to declare war on the dictatorship of the clergy stating that 'the

and persecute dissenters, gays, and others by virtue of their perceived 'difference'. Religion, from the time of the Crusades has been realised as a pretext for imperialism. Significantly, both early Christians and Muslims saw fit to enslave people

church has appropriated god for its own means'. Marx later famously described religion as 'the opiate of the masses', whilst Bakunin, foretold Nietzsche, declaring that 'if God existed, it would be necessary to destroy him'.

Challenges to dogmas

degree of liberalisation within established religious practices. (It is conceded that there are, unquestionably, ideas contained within most religions which promote basic humanist values, but these are certainly not exclusive to the faiths themselves).

The passage of time has also witnessed an increasing separation between the church and state, largely as a consequence of shifting opinion. Religion no longer carries the influence it once did, and other forms of social control such as the mass media, education and systems of law enforcement now contrive to maintain the status quo on behalf of the ruling classes.

Whilst most anarchists and libertarians remain hostile to established reli-

gion and its institutions for the reasons identified, most also recognise that an individual's choice to hold spiritual beliefs, so long as this does not entail infringement of another's liberty, is basically up to them.

The clash of civilisations: Myth or Reality?

One thing which unites George Bush and Osama Bin Laden, apart from their cosseted, privileged backgrounds, are their fundamentalist religious beliefs and apparent conviction that god is on their side.

Significant global events such as the invasion of Iraq, occupation of Afghanistan, 9/11, 7/7 and other terrorist atrocities, have led some commenta-

tors to cite an impending 'clash of civilisations' between Islam and the West. It should be of no surprise however, that the very forces who paint these inflammatory scenarios and portray simplistic, stereotypical images of cultures other than their own, have very clear motives for doing so.

The idea of the clash of civilisations is not a new one, and has been used by competing imperial powers to justify their practices abroad and prolong and deepen divisions between the oppressed classes of different countries.

The fact that the U.S. and British states, as well as invading and occupying Muslim states, have also chosen to arm and support Israel in suppressing the Palestinians, is portrayed by some followers of Islam as evidence of a conspiracy by the monolithic West to crush Islam. The conversion of some young Muslims to 'radical' Islamism is portrayed by some prominent moderates as regrettable but understandable against such a backdrop. But what is the reality of this alleged conspiracy against Islam?

Commentators such as Noam Chomsky have noted that although Saudi Arabia is a relatively fundamentalist Muslim state (with a dire human rights record), its ruling class is largely sustained and supported by US business interests. Needless to say, oil and its strategic position in the Middle East play a major part in serv-

ing this relationship.

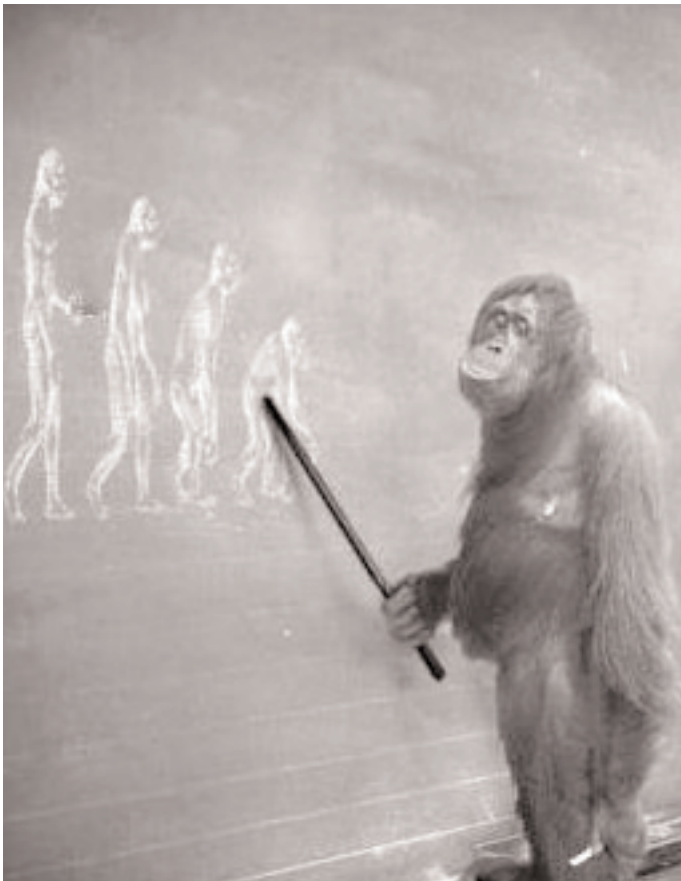
Indonesia, another Islamic state whose notorious sweatshop wages are lower than China's, continues to maintain close relations with Western corporate interests, despite it's relatively recent invasion and genocide in East Timor.

Saddam Hussein remained an ally, and was supported by Western powers in his country's conflict with Iran, despite his regime's gassing of the Kurds. When he chose to 'annex' oil-rich Kuwait however, this was a step too far.

Even Bin Laden was supported by Western elites in the 1980s, when the CIA recruited him and his followers to fight the Russian forces occupying Afghanistan.

The reactionary totalitarian regime of the Taliban, distinguished by its particularly despicable treatment of women, was sent millions of U.S. aid dollars to promote stability and fight 'the war on drugs' as recently as 2001.

It should be clear that a common theme is developing here. So long as the economic hegemony and interests of the respective ruling classes are fulfilled, religious and cultural divisions become immaterial. Once this fails to be the case however, the enemy state is painted as rogue, terrorist or part of what George Bush described as 'the Axis of Evil'. Its people are invariably painted as being in need of liberation from their backward, tyrannical rulers. Then





Members of the Yugoslav Catholic Church, who assisted the Nazis and the Holocaust

come the lies and slurs. Attempts were made prior to the invasion of Iraq to link Saddam Hussein's regime to the events of 9/11, although more liberal voices exposed this for the obvious mistruth that it was. Plainly the decision of the US and UK governments to invade Iraq (despite a further catalogue of misrepresentations about weapons of mass destruction) was expedited purely and simply because the world economy relies heavily on the one commodity Iraq has in abundance: oil.

The myth of the 'clash of civilisations' does not prevent some political and religious groups from playing on fears for their own ends. The BNP, predictably, promotes Islamophobia and racism, supported by sections of the right wing press. Sections of the left however remain culpable in their failure to expose and

criticise reactionary elements within Islam. The Socialist Workers' Party's decision to align itself with the Muslim Council of Britain should be seen for what it is: a cynical piece of political opportunism.

The New Right in the US, with its links to C h r i s t i a n Fundamentalism, is at the forefront of the 'clash of civilisations' lobby, as are some figureheads in the Islamic world (not least Bin Laden himself). Worryingly, both appear to be bent on inculcating their respective followers with an ideology of 'destroy or be destroyed', their eventual goal being world domination. (Mmmm, I think we've heard that somewhere before....).

Terrorists and governments are one and the same. Through their murderous, repressive ways, both display their contempt for innocent people

and propagate false truths to justify their obscene actions. Neither can have any claim to act out of any sense of love, respect or compassion for others. All states are terrorist. All terrorists are states in waiting. As Hassan Butt, a former

"Those who can make you believe in absurdities, can make you commit atrocities."
Voltaire

member of radical Islamic group, Al Muhajiroun, said recently, "what drove me and many of my peers to plot acts of extreme terror in Britain, our homeland and abroad, was a sense that we were fighting for the creation of a revolutionary state that would eventually bring Islamic justice to the world".

Ordinary people, aside from the lies and simplistic stereotypes, have far

more in common than they are ever led to believe by the mullahs, politicians and priests who thrive on an ethos of divide and rule. In truth, many in the West oppose the occupation of Iraq and Palestine. Across the Muslim and western world, totalitarian regimes and corporate interests are facing widespread resistance from those who have had enough. The vast majority of us simply want to live in peace, free from the burden of social and economic injustice and the threat of war.

Workers of the Western and Islamic world are all oppressed by the totality of capitalism: governments, corporations and religion. The occupying forces and sectarian bombings in Iraq and across the world will never bring about peace and stability, quite the

opposite. Those who preach hatred and commit atrocities in the name of God, Allah and profit are the self-serving enemies of humanity.

The only power that can liberate us, and bring about lasting peace and social justice, is a working class united across cultural, racial and national boundaries against the forces that divide us.

No Gods, No Masters!!!

City academies: creationism, privatisation and advertising

It had been hoped by some on the left that, once elected, Gordon Brown would signal an end to the backdoor privatisation of education by calling a halt to the proposed creation of 400 academy schools. Then again some people still believe in fairies. Since becoming prime minister not only has Brown gone out of his way to back academy schools, his new education minister and close ally, Ed Balls, has promised a "significant increase in the academy schools programme".

For the uninitiated, academy schools are independent state schools, run by private sponsors such as business or religious organisations. The sponsors contribute up to a maximum of £2 million to the building of the new school. In return the entire cost of running the school is paid directly by

the government, with the sponsor taking control of the running of the academy school, including admissions, governing body, curriculum and teachers' pay and conditions.

The government at first argued that "city academies", as they were used to be called, would only be introduced as a replacement "in order to break the cycle of failing schools in inner cities". But since their introduction, it has become increasingly clear that academies are now seen by the government as a means of undermining comprehensive education by handing increasing chunks of state education over to the private sector and not-for-profit organisations.

Announcing a review of public services in March, Blair held up academy schools as the model for the introduction of "truly

personalised" public services. He went on to describe a future of "much greater diversity of providers, moving away from the monolithic state provision". In May Labour launched new proposals for academies which painted them as "exemplify[ing] the new role of local authorities as commissioners rather than providers". Commenting on Labour education policies, the National Union of Teachers recently stated that "the Labour government was putting in place statutory mechanisms which would make it much easier for future governments to establish an entirely privatised system of schooling".

While the Tories have made it clear that they would increase the number of academies significantly, it appears that Labour is just as keen to get the education privati-

sation bandwagon rolling. Under Labour the building of schools has already been handed over to the private sector with 90% of new build schools paid for through "private finance initiative" schemes. Should Labour's proposed 400 academies go ahead, it would mean that one in ten of state secondary schools would no longer be run by local authorities. This would totally undermine what little is left of comprehensive education, making it far easier to argue for ever more academies to replace the failing state sector, leading to the point where all or the majority of state secondary schools would be run as academies.

In its war of attrition on state provision Labour is using several tactics to force through its academy programme. The carrot of bright shiny new schools is being used to win over



Trinity Academy in Doncaster, one of many academy schools run by Christian fundamentalists

parents backed by a massive government publicity campaign aimed at promoting the idea of academies. The government is also employing the big stick. A number of local authorities who reject academies, have complained that government advisors have warned them that money for the repair and refurbishment of schools may be withheld if they do not agree to academies. This is the same strategy used by the government to undermine council house provision, where tenants, who voted to reject having their houses taken out of local council control, were denied funds for repairs and refurbishment.

At the centre of the government campaign to win hearts and minds is the idea that the involvement of the private sector will make schools more efficient both in terms of cost and in the teaching of children. These claims, as so often with Labour, are based more on free market fantasy rather than actual reality.

Take the claim that the involvement of the private sector will be more cost effective. According to the government's own figures, each academy on average costs £24 million to build. This is twice the amount it costs to build a new comprehensive. But the government figure of £24 million figure has been

doctored. It includes academies that were set up by simply refurbishing existing schools, which is far cheaper. If the cost of new build academies is taken separately the cost is far higher with new academies costing as much as £38 million upwards to build. The government's £24 million also does not include the additional costs that are constantly being paid out to academies after they have been built. These payouts have become so frequent that the National Audit Office warned there was a danger of academies becoming dependent on a never ending stream of government handouts.

The government's argu-

ment that sponsors' contributions would keep cost of academies down can only be described as a sick joke. Originally sponsors were supposed to pay £2 million each of an estimated £10 million to build each academy. Hence sponsors would have been paying 20% of the total cost. However, as costs have soared, so too has the money put in by the government, while the amount from sponsors went in the opposite direction. An investigation by the Guardian revealed that only four of the 26 academies built at the time, had received the full £2 million pledged, while four others had received nothing from sponsors.

Taken in total it's doubtful if sponsor money covers all the cost of wining and dining potential sponsors and certainly does not cover the £20 million already paid out to consultancy firms and the £28 million paid to project management services.

The argument that the involvement of the private sector would make for a better education would be amusing if it was not so shocking. Thus far control of our children's education has been handed over to the likes of David Samworth, a sausage and pie maker; Peter Vardy, a second hand car dealer who advocates the teaching of creationism; those pioneers of radical education, West Bromwich Albion Football Club; two individuals who achieved the almost impossible task of being turned down for a peerage on the grounds that they were "unsuitable"; and a haberdashers company. We could go on but the point is: what on earth qualifies these people to take over the running of a school?

With this lot running schools, and even though academies receive 25% more government funding per pupil than comprehensives, it comes as no surprise that academies have not been the success the government would have us believe. Despite the small number of academies so far built, one has already received an improvement order, one has been placed in "special measures", and one (the Paddington Academy) was found to be

in a total mess by OFSTED. Paddington, having had £50 million spent on it, was found to be so badly managed by sponsors that children were found to be learning in a building site, with the school having no phones, no ICT, no governing body and a huge deficit. Another school, Deacon City Academy, was built without a playground in order to prevent "uncontrollable" numbers of children running around. When challenged, the headmaster announced "pupils are able to hydrate during the learning experience". We kid you not!

Based on exam results academies are not doing so well either. On average they have so far failed to match the results of the 10% of schools operating in the most deprived areas. But it would seem that the sponsors are using all their experience from the private sector to drive up results. Instead of attempting to raise standards, academies are attempting to attract children from more prosperous areas as a way of improving results. At the same time they are increasingly blocking the entry of children from the most deprived backgrounds and those with learning difficulties, while excluding "problem pupils" in ever higher numbers. One sponsor, on taking control of Islington Green School, even attempted to move the school's catchments area away from Hackney to the far more prosperous City of London.

The worry is that the attempt by academies to select pupil intake is having an adverse effect on comprehensive schools in the immediate locality. These comprehensives have seen pupil numbers fall overall, but their proportion of children from poorer backgrounds and those with learning difficulties has increased at the same time. This invariably affects standards, allowing the government to step in to label the school as failing, and to roll out the prospect of an academy as the solution. In some cases schools are not waiting for the government and are considering academy status as the only way of competing with existing academies.

Mercifully there is growing resistance to academies from both the unions and parents. In some cases resistance has taken the form of direct action such as occupations. Already there have been defeats for the government in both Doncaster and Lambeth. This is encouraging but there are obvious concerns with any struggle that involves union leaders. Not the least of these is that union leaders will accept academies in return for recognition rights and vague promises to keep nationally agreed terms and conditions.

The best way to prevent this is to involve parents and for the campaign to be run democratically with all decisions being decided by mass meeting. But just as importantly, the aim of

the campaign should not be limited to just protecting terms and conditions but rather to total opposition to academies. After all academies have to be resisted not just because they threaten pay but also because they would further debase an already appalling class ridden and unequal education system. Education should be a means of liberation, a way of teaching children how to think for themselves and to analyse the world around them. It should be one of the processes which enable us to develop as human beings to our full potential. Academies are the total negation of this; they are a means of handing over the teaching of our children to capitalists and religious zealots who would stunt children's individuality rather than develop it.

One of the biggest failings of the British trade union movement has been limiting itself to workplace militancy to the exclusion of wider social and political issues. In the fight against academies education workers can avoid that trap, by involving parents and the wider community in their struggle. By organising in this way not only could they defeat Labour's attempts to privatise secondary education, but also begin to organise a movement capable of challenging an education system geared more towards preserving the dominance of society's ruling elite than towards liberating the minds of our children.

Factory committees in the Russian Revolution

The idea of revolution in Russia had been growing since the general strike of textile workers that shook St. Petersburg in 1896. The Russian anarchists argued that Russia would not have to have a bourgeois revolution similar to those witnessed in Germany and France and that the way forward was the revolutionary general strike. Mass strikes continued throughout the next two decades up to the beginning of the First World War.

The repression in Russia and the growth of Zubatovian (state controlled) unions meant that independent mass workers organisations and trade unions which were common in Britain and Germany during the same period did not develop. In the revolution of 1905 the unrest was sparked and co-ordinated not by the political parties, but by factory committees elected directly in the workplace. Strikes were called spontaneously and often spread beyond a single factory to become local or regional general strikes. This level of action proved its worth and workers began to elect delegates from local factory committees to co-ordinate action

within the locality. These committees became the embryo from which would grow the Councils of Workers' Deputies, which were later to become known as the Soviets.

At the outbreak of the 1917 revolution factory committees sprung up and mass assemblies came to full maturity as many workers, instead of staying out on strike, took their workplace over and carried on producing for the community. They did not look to any central planning but began organising production and distribution themselves. The factory committees took responsibility for everything from production, distribution and the acquisition of raw materials to the payment of wages (or payment in kind) and the organisation of workers' militias. Anarcho-syndicalists were gaining more influence as they urged the development of these committees and assemblies in the direction of workers management over all industries.

Both the anarcho-syndicalists and the Bolsheviks successfully resisted attempts by the moderates to absorb the factory committees into the trade unions. Although the influence of the anarcho-

syndicalists increased, and was disproportionate to their actual numbers, it was the Bolsheviks with their centralised organisation and leadership that gained the most ground. The factory committees had been initially rejected by the Bolsheviks but when Lenin returned to Russia in April 1917 he realised the mood and feeling was definitely libertarian and the Bolsheviks rallied behind the anarchistic slogans of 'factories to the workers' and 'all power to the soviets'. At the 1918 All Russian Trade Union Convention Lenin declared that "the factory is a self-governing commune of producers and consumers". This was sheer opportunism in order to gain support until they were able to seize power and use the state to enforce their will on the committees and soviets.

Before the workers had time to establish a federation of producers and consumers, the Bolsheviks asserted central control over industry under the banner of 'war communism'. They stripped away piece by piece all expressions of workers management until the factory committees became nothing more than an appendage of the state.

Only in Ukraine did a sizeable free federation of soviets and committees appear. Even though Ukraine was signed over by Trotsky to Austria under the treaty of Brest-Litovsk a guerrilla army, organised by the anarchist Nestor Makhno, beat back the invaders. This enabled over two million workers to take part in the first test of libertarian communism through free soviets and factory committees under the direct management of the workers and the community. Initially the Bolsheviks allied themselves with Makhno in his fight against the Tsarist White Army but once the time was right Trotsky marched the Red army against Makhno to suppress the revolution and bring Ukraine under Bolshevik rule.

With the defeat of the revolution at the hands of the Bolsheviks, their implementation of the 'workers state' and dictatorship of the proletariat revealed the true face of bureaucratic despotism.

The factory committees during the Russian revolution showed but a glimpse of the ability of the working class to be masters of their own communities, workplaces and lives.

The revolution that never was

In 1917 the shock waves of the Revolution went far beyond the borders of Tsarist Russia. All over Europe war-weary and increasingly restless workers were inspired by the news of the Tsar's overthrow, and later by the news of the Bolsheviks' seizure of power. In Britain these events profoundly affected the labour movement and eventually led to a significant shift from pre-war anti-electoralism, direct action and rejection of

political parties to a movement dominated by a unified, centralised and highly-disciplined Communist Party under Moscow's direct control.

The years before 1914 had seen widespread industrial unrest in Britain during the period known as 'the Syndicalist Revolt'. Syndicalism had developed from the British anti-parliamentary socialist traditions and was becoming the dominant revolutionary current. Before the outbreak of war in 1914 the

British state faced further unrest and a potential syndicalist inspired general strike by the militant 'Triple Alliance' of miners, railworkers and transport workers.

The war had begun with industrial calm but this ended in 1915 when the South Wales miners and the Clyde engineers came out on strike. The latter signalled the beginning of the Clyde Workers' Committee, the catalyst for the war-time shop stewards movement. The syndicalist inspired shop

stewards became the focus of rank and file resistance. Trade union leaders co-operated with the government to dampen working class discontent but the shop stewards attempted to widen the issues and raise class antagonisms.

News of the Tsar's overthrow in February 1917 and the creation of Soviets brought an immediate response. If Tsarist Russia, long considered the bastion of reaction, could be overthrown then anything was possible. The mounting war casualties, food shortages, rising prices and low wages, combined with excitement over Russia, saw a wave of strikes in May 1917. Later in the year, in August, there was a shop stewards' conference in Manchester declaring that the most important features of the revolution were the 'mass uprisings and the formation of Soviets'.

Then came the news of the second revolution in October. Reports were confused, but in Britain the Bolsheviks were closely identified with the Soviets and were considered to be almost syndicalist in nature. From this



Shop Stewards arrested in connection with engineering strike 1917

point onward, any attempts to set up break-away industrial unions were sidetracked down the blind alley of creating a British Communist Party.

The future Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was shaped by the Third International, which was created and dominated by the Bolsheviks. The Third International first met in March 1919. 'Delegates' were mainly Russian Bolsheviks and a few foreign communists who happened to be in Russia at the time. Foreign parties were 'affiliated' by so-called delegates who had little contact with them. The meeting did little more than announce the founding of the Third International or Comintern, and call for the immediate seizure of power by the working class creating the dictatorship of the proletariat. Nothing was said about the Bolsheviks' belief in the need for political centralism under their control. Lenin calculated (not unwisely) that this would lead to any syndicalists withdrawing their support for the new International.

At the second congress in 1920, among the British representatives were the BSP (British Socialist Party), SLP (Socialist Labour Party), Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers Socialist Federation (WSF) and delegates from the Shop Stewards and Works Committee Movement (SSWCM). The main aim

for Lenin and the Bolsheviks was to set up a centralised international party with national sections modelled on the Communist Party of Soviet Russia, i.e. the Bolsheviks themselves.

Before the Comintern conference opened, the newly arrived syndicalist delegates from different countries were invited to attend a Comintern Executive Committee. Here, the Bolsheviks announced they were to launch a new international trade union organisation, the Red International of Labour Unions, ostensibly to counter the reformist International Federation of Trade Unions, recently launched in Amsterdam. The syndicalists were handed a document entitled 'To Syndicalists of all Nations'. It contained a clear message; the world syndicalist movement was to become subordinate to the communist political leadership in Moscow. It argued for a 'close indestructible alliance between the communist party and the trade unions' and claimed that the aim of the new International should be to set up 'communist cells' within reformist unions in order to capture the leadership. The syndicalists rejected the document out of hand.

The conference itself provided further controversy. On the opening day, the Bolsheviks presented a document stating that the proletariat cannot accomplish its revolution without a political

CITY OF  GLASGOW
PROHIBITION OF MEETING
OF
WORKERS' & SOLDIERS' COUNCIL

WE, the undersigned, acting under special authority conferred upon us by the Secretary for Scotland in pursuance of Regulation 9a of the Defence of the Realm Regulations, DO HEREBY PROHIBIT THE HOLDING OF THE MEETING IN GLASGOW, on Saturday, 11th August, 1917, called by the Provisional Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council, in whatever place it may be proposed to hold the same.

THOMAS DUNLOP, Lord Provost.
J. V. STEVENSON, Chief Constable.

City Chambers,
Glasgow, 10th August, 1917.

party leading it. They argued that the aim of the revolution was the capture of state power under the leadership of the communist party. Thus, the Bolshevik proposals explicitly repudiated the basic principles of revolutionary syndicalism. They claimed that the syndicalists' rejection of political parties 'helps only to support the bourgeoisie and counter revolutionaries...They fail to grasp that, without an independent political party, the working class is a body without a head [and, in comparison to revolutionary Marxism]... syndicalism and industrialism are a step backward'.

Commissions headed by Bolshevik experts examined each country's situation - the 'British Question' was rated so highly that Lenin himself took responsibility. He had little knowledge of the British situation or the make up of British groups. British revolutionaries were condemned in Russian terms, some as 'Mensheviks', and others as 'ultra-leftists' as Lenin argued for a centralised Communist Party which would take part in elections and affiliate to the Labour Party.

This was totally opposed to the experiences of many British delegates. Lenin backed up his argu-

ments by publishing 'Left Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder' in which he attacked Sylvia Pankhurst and others for opposing him. Initially Jack Tanner of the SSWCM argued against Lenin and political parties, saying the

“The obsession of forming a Communist Party and gaining affiliation to the Labour Party meant that the focus was shifted and the challenge never happened”

Bolsheviks dismissed the struggles and experiences of other movements out of hand and that they 'have come not to learn, only to teach'.

In many ways, this Congress proved a turning point for the SSWCM, as the delegation split, with some being converted to the idea of the need for the formation of a Communist Party (CP) to lead workers. Nevertheless, a number of SSWCM delegates, including Tanner, resisted the evangelising.

On the delegation's return to Britain, a fierce debate ensued with some calling for close relations with the communist movement, and others arguing for the SSWCM to remain independent of all political parties, including the CP. Unfortunately, the supporters of the Bolsheviks slowly gained increasing control. In this, they were assisted by the economic recession of late 1920, which caused mass unemployment. The employers were quick to exploit the situation,

unleashing a wave of victimisation. Within engineering, the stronghold of the SSWCM, they unleashed an offensive that was to end in lockout and defeat for engineering workers. As a result, the local Works Committees were wiped out in many

areas. This weakening of the SSWCM within the workplace assisted the Communists in arguing that the focal point of the organisation should be switched from the workplace to the structures of the wider unions and labour organisations. In line with the policy of the Red International, the argument was made that the SSWCM should seek to win control of the unions, principally through working inside union branches and capturing union positions.

Negotiations to form a communist party were shaped by the Third International. A network of couriers and instructors carried orders from Moscow. Financial assistance was given to approved groups and individuals to smooth any doubts; thousands of pounds were given to certain papers. This should not be underestimated as it was done on a scale hitherto unknown in Britain. Negotiations dragged on as previously hostile groups had to find

a way of working together. Undoubtedly the main sticking points were parliamentary action and Labour Party affiliation. Also, the BSP's presence insulted many, identified as they were with opportunism and deceit.

When the CPGB eventu-

ally formed it had 3-5,000 members, about the same size as the pre-war British Socialist Party. It was claimed as many as 20,000 people were represented at the negotiations so a considerable number of groups stayed outside. But financial backing and Bolshevik prestige ensured it would be the dominant force to the left of the Labour Party. Ideologically and financially dependent on Moscow, the CPGB slavishly followed and obeyed the twists and turns dictated by its master during the periods of Social Fascism, United Front and Popular Front.

At the 1921 SSWCM Conference, the name was changed to the National Workers' Committee Movement (NWCM). The emphasis was now on working within the reformist unions. The Communist take-over was quickly consolidated and, within weeks, it was announced (without recourse to the wider organisation) that the movement could no longer

support two weekly newspapers, and that the syndicalist paper 'Solidarity' would be dropped immediately.

After the end of the war the British labour movement could have mounted a direct and serious challenge to state power through industrial action. Both the government and the reformist union leaders realised this. They knew that the army could not be trusted to follow orders to put down unrest and that a large-scale strike called by the Triple Alliance could take Britain towards revolution. The obsession of forming a Communist Party and gaining affiliation to the Labour Party meant that the focus was shifted and the challenge never happened. Militancy eventually subsided as economic slump followed defeat. One last upsurge in the 1926 General Strike showed that potential was still there but this was sabotaged by the TUC General Council with much help from the CPGB who called for 'all power to the General Council' - the TUC General Council that is. Away from the leadership, workers did rapidly organise themselves, creating alternative structures under their direct control, such as transport permit committees and hastily formed councils of action. This proved too little too late and the strike ended in bitter defeat not only for syndicalist ideas but for the whole of the British working class.

The 'caring' face of New Labour

Service cuts, privatisation and casualisation

To suggest that Local Authority social care services have taken a hammering in the last 10 years would be a major understatement. Echoing changes that have occurred in the NHS, New Labour policies have not only resulted in mass privatisation, but also a comprehensive deterioration in the quality of care provided to vulnerable people living in the community.

To provide some background and context:

Since the 1990 NHS and Community Care Act was introduced, local authorities have been required to purchase care services based on the principle of 'best value'. In the ensuing period, central government grants have been incrementally shaved in real terms. The combined effect of these factors is that private sector provider services have been preferred simply because they are cheaper and don't operate to local government terms and conditions, partly because of a greatly diminished union input. Widespread redundancies have resulted as statutory provision is rendered obsolete by market forces. Use of casual

agency support staff is now also the norm in both the private and the few remaining statutory services.

So what is the impact of this on service quality?

Many people who need help in the community have specialist support requirements, such as learning/physical disabilities, age-related or mental health needs.

Obviously, they require a consistent, trained and focused team. Extensive use of inexperienced and often poorly trained casual workers has meant that continuity of care is seriously compromised. Agencies tend to have a high staff turnover, and often service users are never sure from one week to the next who will be supporting them.

The damaging effect on the quality of service delivery has been confirmed by a number of high-profile investigations into the failings of social care services. Against a backdrop of funding cuts however, it is difficult to see things improving.

Nationally, recruitment and retention of frontline support staff is now becoming a major problem in the grossly devalued

social care workforce; particularly so in the profit-driven, poorly-paid private sector.

The wider privatisation agenda also assists the powers-that-be by weakening the bargaining position of the remaining local authority workforce as efficiently as any of the most draconian anti-union laws. In a climate of competitive commissioning, those demanding decent pay and conditions are warned that they are pricing themselves out of a job. Attempts to remove protected local government pension rights have been well-documented previously, and further attacks are likely as the industrial muscle of unions is progressively weakened.

The introduction of laughably-named Fair Access to Care Services legislation has meant that some groups of vulnerable people are now being excluded from receiving a service under new criteria. A recent survey indicated that nationally up to 15% of people presently using homecare services will be no longer eligible to do so. Across the country, care homes, day services and other valuable community-based advice/support serv-

ices are being systematically cut back.

Whilst the public service union UNISON continues to fund New Labour with political levies paid by its members, it should be clear that the like of Brown, and Blair before him, are guilty of implementing policies which have resulted in both worsening pay and conditions for Local Authority workers, and a significant reduction in the standard of service provided to the local community.

To add insult to injury, local government staff were recently offered a 2% wage rise. In real terms, this amounts to a pay cut with inflation currently running at 4.8%. The vast majority of employees have rejected this derisory offer, and industrial action looks inevitable as we go to press. It is hoped that this will not only provide a platform for care workers to demonstrate the extent of their feelings at the injustices perpetrated against them, and those who they support, but will also provide a much needed opportunity for activists to build and spread solidarity and resistance.

The scourge of humanity

Capitalism, alienation, crime and insanity

One topic of conversation that pervades virtually every sphere of social life these days concerns society's general degeneration: the disintegration of community and the basic lack of regard for others. Unanimous disquiet is expressed about spiraling levels of criminal, violent and antisocial behaviour. Lamenting the passing of the mythical good old days seems to be no longer the preserve of those who are a bit longer in the tooth, and a general mood of pessimism looms. But why are things so bad, and what can we do about it? Well, here's an explanation you're unlikely to read in the Daily Mail!

Capitalism, in the words of John Maynard Keynes, is "the absurd belief that the wickedest of men, for the wickedest of motives, will somehow work for the benefit of all". In order to legitimise itself, capitalism's economic infrastruc-

ture is constantly reinforced by its ideological superstructure. Competition, greed, materialism, vanity, and obsession with status are promoted universally by society's dominant institutions. These values are invariably internalised by all of us to varying degrees over time. That way we are conditioned to see capitalism, its beliefs and hierarchical structure as the natural order of things.

During the industrial revolution the "Protestant work ethic" and the Darwinian idea of "survival of the fittest" were equated with individualism and the accumulation of wealth. This assisted the ruling classes with engineering the changes to society they desired. In more recent times, capitalism has undergone a further shift with the advent of mass consumerism and hard-nosed Thatcherism. The focus has moved inexorably

away from the community to the individual. Love thy neighbour has been replaced by look after number one; mutual aid by survival of the fittest. Isolation and alienation are the order of the day in a modern world dominated by fear, suspicion and disaffection.

The education system underlines first and foremost that achievement is all about competition and obedience to authority, a philosophy reinforced by an incessant programme of grading and testing. The ruthlessness of market ideology spills invariably and inevitably into the world of work, with ubiquitous performance frameworks, league tables, sales targets and material incentives. In most organisations, the most ruthless, cut-throat individuals are those that get on and climb the ladder of success. Conversely those following altruistic and socially useful professions are among the most

poorly rewarded. A recent illustration of this was provided with the revelation that in the last year top corporate executives received a 37% rise in income; nurses in comparison have recently been offered a paltry 2% wage increase - effectively a pay cut taking inflation into account.

Advertising constantly blights our lives with its unattainable, contrived images of perfection; designed to both create and feed off dissatisfaction. Even in the sanctity of our homes we suffer a steady barrage of TV and radio ads, cold-callers and junk mail. Celebrities are held up as role models for us to aspire to, encouraging mass consumption.

Entertainment reflects a perverse voyeuristic snapshot of the prevailing social decay. Violent computer games enable us to effortlessly wipe out our adversaries in the virtual world. Bookshops abound with biographies of hard

men, football hooligans, and figures from the criminal underworld; as do texts cataloguing the gruesome exploits of serial killers. Gangster rappers are the new darlings of MTV, draped in 'blinging' jewellery, cavorting in flash cars surrounded by scantily-clad women. Hollywood movies portray breathtaking violent action scenes and gangster 'cool'. TV soap operas normalise the aggressive machismo and social dysfunction going on around us.

Even popularised leisure activities promote social alienation. Football grounds act as a (controlled) pressure valve for our frustrations. For 30 quid or so we can temporarily regain that lost sense of community and vent our tribalistic spleen at the referee and people from other towns. Pubs and nightclubs exude a competitive edge where alienated sexuality and macho violence are the (alcohol-fuelled) order of the day. Keeping fit entails handing over wads of cash for gym membership, all for the privilege of a few minutes pounding the treadmill, listening to pre-recorded music, and avoiding human contact at all cost. Betting shops, casinos and lottery schemes sell us the 'get rich quick' dream - at a price. Notably, all forms of entertainment contaminated by capitalism, including music and theatre, are designed to take our cash whilst providing a temporary and in some cases brain-numbing

escape from our misery. We have been rendered largely passive spectators where once we were actors and performers in our own right. (Fortunately, in less commercialised quarters, some communities still enjoy making their own music, theatre, games, sports and entertainment without any recourse to monetary gain).

On a global economic scale, businesses that fail in the profitability stakes fall by the wayside with mass redundancies. Big corporations gobble up smaller ones. Powerful

der; banks and corporations rob. What fine role models we have. That's capitalism, and that's its depraved morality.

So, why all this crime and antisocial behaviour? Well, if all the above wasn't enough, society divides us from an early age into successes and failures. The failures, unable to achieve status by legitimate paths, often seek social value, reward and respect by alternative means. In the poorer, more brutalised sections of society, social deprivation is amplified and most acute. Problems such as

secure lucrative drug markets and enforce territorial dominance, with innocents tragically caught up in the crossfire. It's capitalism, but without the state's support. Meanwhile, the heroin and crack addicts accept defeat and rob their neighbours blind to feed their habits.

Needless to say the right wing press fulfils its role dutifully in preserving the status quo, pointing out what needs to be done to put things right. The usual suspects are wheeled out (single parent families, permissive-



states bully weaker ones. The rich get richer, the poor get poorer. The natural environment is sacrificed on the altar of material greed. People starve in their millions and die because of lack of access to basic necessities such as clean water, when the world produces more than enough to go round. The spectre of war is an ever present reality. Massive profits for the few, misery and enslavement for the rest. Governments mur-

der; banks and corporations rob. What fine role models we have. That's capitalism, and that's its depraved morality. So, why all this crime and antisocial behaviour? Well, if all the above wasn't enough, society divides us from an early age into successes and failures. The failures, unable to achieve status by legitimate paths, often seek social value, reward and respect by alternative means. In the poorer, more brutalised sections of society, social deprivation is amplified and most acute. Problems such as

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conian legislation and rigorous sentencing to preserve the dwindling social order. However, government strategies such as the 'war on drugs' fail miserably simply because they fail to address the root social causes.

Buoyed by the anxiety they have helped to create, the authorities intensify their monitoring of us. Surveillance by CCTV and ID cards become the norm with our every movement tracked. Even our e-mails and trips into cyberspace are open to scrutiny.

Fleet Street and other pillars of the establishment enlighten us by advocating a return to the much cherished 'family values' as the panacea to cure all ills. But the specific type of family relationship which exists under capitalism is yet another major contributory factor in explaining the dysfunction which blights

mad are mad is simply incorrect.

Whilst some who are imprisoned are there because they have consciously acted against laws which are fundamentally unjust, many are not. Studies revealing widespread patterns of mental illness and personality disorder amongst prisoners in British and American jails demonstrate a clear link between madness and badness. It might therefore be argued that the prison population and society as a whole would be better served by treatment rather than punishment within inhumane institutions which Kropotkin famously described as "universities in crime". But surely this underlines why families and family values are so important? Yes, but it's not that simple.

In pre- and post-capitalist societies, a system of social kinship exists

to care for their children (due to say, illness), then other support mechanisms are readily available to ensure a consistency and continuity in care for those in their formative years. Note that all the available evidence shows that our experiences in early life play a major part in shaping our patterns of behaviour in later years, which is why if you suffer from abusive or unresponsive care in a modern day family arrangement, immediate support systems are less likely to be accessible. Unsurprisingly, a large proportion of prisoners surveyed had been in local authority or foster care at some point in their childhood. It does not take a genius to surmise that poverty is a major factor in determining the ability to provide good quality childcare, and opportunities later on.

The pioneering sex-pol writings of Wilhelm Reich

that the patriarchal nuclear family functions as the epicentre of reproduction of capitalist/authoritarian ideologies. Imbuing its offspring with a sexually and morally repressive conditioning reflective of society's dominant values, it functions as a mini-state generating mass produced individuals who crave authority and fear self-determination. In Reich's words, "sexual inhibition alters the structure of the economically suppressed individual in such a manner that he thinks, feels and acts against his own material interests". Manipulating us into fulfilling pre-ordained roles, the nuclear family thereby also ensures that we accept our subservient status in the capitalist hierarchy. Moreover, it should be no surprise that many of those convicted of sexual offences derive from the most sexually repressed and/or abusive environments. The extensive paedophilia exposed in the clergy is just one example. In a society which juxtaposes archaic religious concepts of chastity and guilt with pornographic images which alienate and commodify our sexual needs, conflicts are rife. Such conflicts often lie at the root of much neurotic, controlling and abusive behaviour.

Compounding all this, we've become saddled with debt, the threat of redundancy, the need to juggle commitments, congestion charges, stealth taxes, the insanity of the

"Manipulating us into fulfilling pre-ordained roles, the nuclear family thereby also ensures that we accept subservient status in the capitalist hierarchy"

our lives.

In his book "They **** you up" the psychologist Oliver James concludes that:

[L]ow quality care and lack of continuity in early childhood are the core causes of crime and mental illness. To believe, as so many British and American leaders seem to, that genes are the main reason the poor are poor, the bad are bad and the

whereby the community acts as the focal point, with values such as mutual aid and cooperation taking precedence over selfish individualism. Family life is not structured around a small socially isolated unit in which each constituent part plays a set and distinct role. Extended families and cohort systems mean that if, for example, a parent becomes unable

in the 1930's continue to be relevant and provide further fuel to fan the flames of resistance to the contemporary nuclear family. Reich analysed the various means by which modern human beings have been rendered receptive to authoritarian, hierarchical and class-based culture. Combining radical psychoanalysis with Marxism, Reich concluded

less. One in five adults suffer from a mental illness at some time in their lives, and 1 in 25 are on anti-depressants. Medical treatment usually involves 10 minutes with the GP and a course of tablets; a metaphorical sticking plaster for the chronic malaise of modernity. R D Laing's view of some mental illness as being symptomatic of our attempt to adapt to the madness of society and family life still strikes a chord.

Capitalism, its values, institutions and morality provide profound and powerful forces which erode and devalue the sense of benevolence, good will and humanity common to us all. The disturbing picture that has been painted however, should be countered by the recognition that despite all the depressingly negative influences we are exposed to, acts of goodness still vastly outweigh acts of malice. Maybe there is some hope after all, and it must be conceded that sociological and psychological explanations of behaviour, however astute, can be overly deterministic. What they do consistently demonstrate is that humans are sociable creatures, capable of evolving, rationalising and adapting to completely new social conditions.

The conclusion, predictably perhaps, is that in order for the systematic deterioration in the human condition to be reversed, a completely different type of economic

and social arrangement is required. Founded on the principles of mutual aid, cooperation and a system of production/distribution based on need, the contradictions and inhumanity of capitalism will be forever banished. The new order will not be reliant on force or fear. It will prioritise social justice, forging a community spirit, a culture of tolerance, equity and libertarian socialism. Put simply, life would be much easier and better for all if we worked together. This new world is within our grasp if we are prepared to throw off the shackles of the bosses and state which enslave us. Their primitive, outdated dog-eat-dog ideology (which makes enemies of us all and drives us

round the proverbial bend) must be forever consigned to the dustbin of history. A new era awaits.

Our starting point, building a new society within the shell of the old means not just taking control of the means of production; it is about reaffirming solidarity and social support networks where we live. It is about recognising and challenging oppression whenever and wherever it rears its ugly head. It is about sharing and developing organisations, social clubs and entertainment outside of the control of the system. It is about politicising the community, family, the pub, football ground and the bedroom. In Reich's words it is "finding connection with

the petty, banal, primitive simple everyday life of the broadest mass of people". It is about playing to our own rules, not capitalism's. It is about enabling us to express and explore our sexuality without fear of ridicule, and rejecting the rigid authoritarian morality and roles foisted upon us from an early age.

Ultimately, let it never be forgotten that being loving, kind, unselfish and compassionate is truly revolutionary (spoken like a true hippy!!). In turn, a strong sense of community, reflected in workplace organisation, and interconnected across capitalism's artificially created boundaries, provides a powerful means for social transformation.

Manc Solfed refuse to be gagged

While newspapers have had a significant fall in their sales over the last 20 years, in some cases up to a third of their circulation, the boss class still own and control the mass media through which they are able to manipulate the opinions of a large number of people. Meanwhile the authentic voices of anti-capitalism have to make do with small circulation magazines, papers and leaflets.

However, it seems that even these are seen as a threat to Labour's consumerist utopia. In recent months in Manchester political groups distributing leaflets and selling literature in the city centre have been harrassed by council officials who, among other things, have threatened to have SF members arrested who dare to run stalls distributing anti-Labour material.

We're told that leafletting is illegal without a permit. Not so; the by-law exempts political, religious and charitable groups. We're told that we can't sell magazines; or that we're causing an obstruction - although the distributors of the Manchester Evening Nazi or the various coffee, baked spud and ice cream vending stalls appear to be just fine. They, of course, don't give out leaflets informing people of their rights at work, or attacking the Labour Party, or urging trade union members not to pay the political levy.

However, simply refusing to budge and pointing out to the officials their obvious political motivation soon has them shuffling off muttering about "only advising us that you might get asked to move on". Of course, this never happens and our stalls continue.

In the same boat, on the same journey...

...Egyptian class struggle in 2007

Since December 2006, Egypt has seen a wave of strikes the likes of which has not been seen since the end of World War 2. Tens of thousands of workers have used wildcat strikes and occupations to fight not only their bosses and the Egyptian state but also the General Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions. The prominence of women in the struggle, challenging the patriarchal attitudes of the rest of their class, is another important dimension in a traditionally conservative society. All in all, this outbreak of self-organisation and solidarity deserves a closer look from radical workers the world over.

Lack of 'trickle-down'

The International Monetary Fund has congratulated Egypt on its economic growth since 2003 following economic liberalisation. Foreign direct investment has rocketed, reaching \$6 billion in 2006, among the highest in Africa. However, to say this new wealth has found a little difficulty finding its way

down to the working class would be like saying Marlin found a little difficulty finding Nemo. While inflation runs at 6.5%, wages have largely stagnated and 20% of Egyptians live in poverty. Those lucky enough to work in the public sector typically earn around £20 per month basic wage, rising to £35-38 with public sector profit sharing incentives. Public sector workers have accepted these conditions because they provide secure jobs for life and a pension for retirement, something those outside the sector cannot count on.

It's this security, and the threat to it posed by privatisation, which provided the catalyst for the recent struggles. As part of economic liberalisation, the Egyptian government has pursued a policy of privatisation, selling off many industries to foreign investors, especially in the textile sector. As a result, textile workers have been at the forefront of these recent strikes.

Back in March 2006, textile workers at the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in

Mahalla were pleasantly surprised to hear that their annual bonuses were to be raised from 100 Egyptian pounds (EGP) [= £8.88 at current exchange rate] to two months wages. They were particularly pleased because the last time such a raise happened was in 1984! However, in December, when the new bonus was due, the workers received the same old bonus. Incensed, 10,000 workers walked out on December 7th and gathered at the mill gates chanting "two months! two months!" Riot police just stood there as it became immediately obvious there was nothing they could do to quell the protests. There were too many workers, and they were too angry.

The next morning riot police attempted to break in to eject 70 workers who had locked themselves in the mill overnight. Word also spread that the mill had been closed because of electrical problems. This ploy failed and 20,000 workers turned up outside the factory, holding mock funerals for the bosses and demonstrations of support for the workers.

Security forces were impotent again, merely watching the events unfold, powerless in the face of this level of solidarity. After four days of occupation, government officials offered the workers a 45-day bonus and promised not to privatise the mill. The workers suspended their strike, as both government and trade union officials left with their tail between their legs, humiliated by the workers taking matters into their own hands.

The struggle spreads

Now, you can't keep a good idea down, and the idea of workers' solidarity in struggle took off. The next three months would see 30,000 textile workers in over ten mills around the Nile Delta and Alexandria go on strike, or sometimes just threaten to strike, for what the Mahalla strikers had won. In nearly all cases they succeeded. As in Mahalla, riot police were sent in and, likewise, they failed in the face of the strikers' solidarity.

The struggle also spread beyond the textile indus-

try into a variety of public and private sector industries. Not long after the Mahalla textile workers' strike, cement workers in Helwan and Tura came out while workers in the Mahalla auto-industry staged a sit-in. Railway engineers struck in January, blocking the first class train from Cairo to Alexandria. Taking a lead from this, striking truck drivers shut down the busy Cairo-Ain Sokhna highway on February 5th by parking their vehicles in the middle of the road. Meanwhile workers in the Cairo Poultry Company won their overdue bonuses after two days of strike action. All this, as well as strikes by bus drivers, rubbish collectors, public gardeners and sanitation workers, have meant that the Egyptian press had a new labour struggle to report every day for the first five months of 2007! Now if that doesn't put a grin on the face of every anarcho-syndicalist I'm not sure what will.

Women on the frontline

One of the most significant strikes was that at the Mansoura Spain Garments Company between April and June. Its importance, however, was not only due to militant tactics or length of the struggle, but to the fact that it was a struggle fought and led largely by women workers.

Workers at Mansoura Spain were told that the bank owning the factory intended to sell, leaving

them facing destitution. As such, 150 workers (of a total 284) occupied the factory, day and night, demanding that the company not be liquidated. They also demanded unpaid monthly and annual social bonuses. For two months they occupied their factory while labour ministers and trade union officials tried to make them give up with assurances that their case "will be looked into". But their resilience paid

only be described as pretty bloody spectacular! The fact that these women occupied their factory meant it was down to their husbands to looking after children. Moreover, the fact that they were sleeping outside the home, alongside men who were not their husbands, meant that the women of Mansoura Spain found themselves fighting not only their government, bosses and trade union but also sexist attitudes

women was not just confined to the small town of Mansoura. In fact, women had been on the frontline from the very beginning. The initial Mahalla textile strike was kicked off by 3,000 women workers downing tools, walking over to the section where the men were still working and chanting, "here are the women! where are the men?!" It was after this that the men came out to spark off one of the biggest explosions of



Egyptian workers celebrate another victory

off when the government intervened to make sure the company would not be liquidated. The workers also secured their bonuses, pay for the time during the occupation and assurances that there would be no victimisation of activists. Now, Egyptian society in general is very conservative and provincial towns like Mansoura especially so. Women taking such a leading role in public life, let alone working class struggle, can

within their class and society in general. One of the company managers threatened to fabricate prostitution charges against the women. One of the workers was even assaulted by her family for her involvement. However, after a delegation of workers, both male and female, visited her family to explain the situation, the family changed their mind and supported her struggle.

The involvement of

autonomous working class activity in the recent Middle Eastern history.

The gains won by the women took three forms. Firstly the bread and butter gains - these women fought for and won food for their families and communities. Secondly, the solidarity and direct action used won them confidence in their collective class strength. One of the Mansoura Spain workers, when asked if she was optimistic about the boss-

es keeping their promises, replied:

The management now knows what we are capable of. We will disband the sit-in after we get paid tomorrow. If they don't give us the rest of our rights we will occupy the factory again.

And finally, in fighting for their class they also fought against the prejudices within it, prejudices that not only hold them down as a section of the class but that holds down the working class as a whole. They challenged the sexist attitudes of Egyptian society, in the face of social exclusion and legal retribution, forging a genuine solidarity within their class and opening up a significant space for the development of a working class feminism in Egypt, if not the whole Arab world. The lead role played by women in the strike movement was so central to its success that to not shout about it would be as good as denying the existence of half the movement.

With friends like these...

In case your grin isn't quite ear-to-ear yet, it's worth mentioning the independence of these strikes from established political movements and official unions.

Since the introduction of the Unified Labour Law of 2003, Egyptian workers can strike legally, but only if approved by the General Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions, which is firmly controlled by the ruling National

Democratic Party. So all strikes since 2003 have been illegal.

With this strike movement, official trade union representatives opposed the strikes and attempted to call them off. The workers, sensing their own power, ignored the GFETU's attempts to abort their movement and there have even been rumblings of setting up an independent union federation. At Mahalla, workers began a campaign to impeach the local union officials who opposed the strikes and were close to the Egyptian security services. By the end of January, 12,800 Mahalla workers had signed a petition demanding their resignation and the holding of new union elections, the union an ultimatum back by the threat of mass resignation. By mid-March, 6,000 workers had made good on this promise and left the union.

Another feature was that the Muslim Brothers, as the 'main' opposition group, were blamed for the strikes. In particular, the largest private sector strike, at the Arab Polvara Spinning and Weaving Company, was pinned on the Muslim Brothers.

These accusations are a little odd. The Muslim Brothers have no history of support amongst the

organised working class. Funnily enough, however, they do have a history of burying their differences with the Egyptian state in order to break strikes. They certainly paid lip service of support for some of the disputes but even here they lacked anything substantial. The workers of the Mansoura Spain occupation complained that their local official, a Muslim Brother, had "only showed up once during the previous strike, and we never saw his face again". This half-arsed response to workers' militancy is, most probably, a direct result of the leadership representing nothing but the desires of affluent Muslim businessmen who couldn't care less about the trials and tribulations of working class Egyptian life.

The truth is that the workers in this struggle have relied on no one but each other to sustain their actions. Workers have found solidarity to be the key to winning their demands and to developing the future Egyptian labour movement. In a statement of solidarity with those struggling in Mahalla, striking Kafr el-Dawwar workers declared:

We, just like you, await...to see if the Minister of Labour will implement our

demands...We do not put much hope on the Minister, though...We will depend only on ourselves to achieve our demands.

We are sailing with you on the same boat, and will embark together on the same journey...We are declaring our full solidarity with your demands, and assert that we are ready to stage solidarity action, if you decide to take industrial action.

Clearly, the workers of Egypt haven't started waving red and black flags and calling their kids 'Durruti', but what we do see is a growing confidence in the strength of direct action from the rank and file to make change happen. This, and a commitment to genuine union democracy, is evident in their words and actions. The establishment of the December 7th Movement, with its dedication to confronting the state-controlled sham unions, is definitely cause for celebration and, alongside recent workers' struggles in Iran and Iraq, represents the regrouping of the working class as a political force in the Middle East. An independent political force, fighting on its own terms, for its own interests, against both Western imperialism and political Islam.

Much of the information for this piece is from Hossam el-Hamalawy's 3arabwy blog which can be found at <http://arabist.net/arabawy/>

Colombian Embassy picketed

As detailed in the last issue of Direct Action the threat of the death squad is a daily reality for any Colombian worker bold enough to stand up to corporate exploitation. As part of an international day of solidarity called by the International Workers Association, Friday 20th July (Colombian 'national independence' day) saw members of South London, and North & East London Solidarity Federation groups picketing the Colombian embassy (3 Hans Crescent, London SW1).

The following text was distributed:

"Colombia: Poverty, Terror and Profit

** 67% living below poverty line*

** 4,000 trades unionists killed*

** Multinationals profit*

** UK gives military aid*

According to the United Nations, 60% of Colombia's population lived below the poverty line in 1995. This had risen to 67% by 2001. During the same period inequality increased leaving the richest 10% of the population earning 60 times more than the poorest 10%.



Since 1988 4,000 trades union leaders have been killed by right-wing paramilitaries, creating a climate of terror which suits the interests of the state and multinational corporations but for which these can deny responsibility.

Human Rights Watch cites 'abundant, credible evidence of continued collaboration with and support for paramilitary groups responsible for most human rights violations' by Colombian state security and armed forces. Under Plan Colombia, the United States has given Colombia \$1.3bn in military aid, allegedly to fight

the War on Drugs.

UK involvement

The UK government has also given military aid to Colombia since 2003, including training for the Colombian armed forces. It refuses to disclose details of this training making its claims that this is in no way linked to human rights abuses difficult to verify. Nevertheless, in 2004 it claimed that 'there has been progress in improving the human rights situation'.

Just weeks after this declaration three trades unionists were killed by the Colombian army. The

UK government has also refused to support an International Labour Organisation Commission of Inquiry into the murder of trades unionists in Colombia.

It is no coincidence that British multinationals such as BP and Anglo American make huge profits in Colombia. There are estimated to be between 30,000 and 50,000 Colombians living in the UK. Most are fleeing poverty and violence, although the government often refuses to recognise that people fleeing paramilitary violence are genuine refugees."

For more information on the situation in Colombia see the links on the SolFed web site:

<http://www.solfed.org.uk/colombia/index.htm>

The Penan of Sarawak

How mass-scale logging is threatening the habitat of one of the last nomadic peoples of Borneo

The Penan are one of the few remaining nomadic peoples of the rain forest. They live in a diverse forest intersected by rivers and the world's most extensive network of caves and underground passages.

Their world threatened as their homeland in the Malaysian state of

Sarawak is undergoing one of the highest rates of logging on earth. The destruction of the forest is forever altering the lives of the Penan and the other indigenous peoples of Borneo.

Some Penan are also threatened by a massive dam project. The proposed Bakun dam will flood 70,000 hectares of land,

displacing indigenous peoples and wildlife and destroying even more rain forest.

Traditional Penan society is nomadic and survives by hunting and gathering. Only a handful of such societies remain on earth. The nomadic hunting-gathering lifestyle represents the original human condition,

and was the way our own ancestors lived for millions of years.

Until a few decades ago, thousands of Penan wandered through the forests of Borneo's interior. Today, only a small number of them continue to practice this ancient lifestyle. Most Penan now have permanent homes by the riversides but they continue to make long journeys into the forest to collect food, medicine, and other jungle products. The physical and spiritual well-being of all Penan, whether nomadic or settled, depends on the survival of the forest.

The Penan, like other nomadic hunter-gatherers, have an egalitarian society with no social classes or hierarchies. All food is shared and each band has a headman who acts as a spokesperson but wields no power. Although certain tasks are reserved for men and others for women, there is



no obvious sexual inequality, and neither sex exercises coercion over the other.

Today the Penan find themselves overwhelmed by the frenzy of logging that has gripped Malaysia over the last three decades. It is a rate of forest destruction twice that of the Amazon and by far the highest in the world. In 1983 Malaysia accounted for almost 60% of the total global export of tropical logs. By 1985, three acres of forest were being cut every minute of every day. With the primary forests of peninsular Malaysia becoming rapidly depleted, the industry turned to Sarawak.

The politics of timber in Sarawak begin and end in money. In 1976 the value of timber exported from Sarawak was US\$138 million; by 1991 the figure had reached US\$1,292 million. In a state where a majority of the 1.5 million inhabitants are subsistence farmers, this income represents a staggering concentration of wealth. Far from benefiting the rural poor, forest management in Sarawak has been subverted to serve the interests of the ruling elite. The authority to grant or deny logging concessions lies strictly with the Minister of Resource Planning.

More than 98% of Sarawak's timber is exported in the form of raw logs, virtually all of it destined for Asian markets. The role of Japan in the Sarawak timber industry is pivotal. The country depends on

Penan statement issued on February 13, 1987

"We, the Penan people of the Tutoh, Limbang, and Patah Rivers regions, declare: Stop destroying the forest or we will be forced to protect it. The forest is our livelihood. We have lived here before any of you outsiders came. We fished in clean rivers and hunted in the jungle. We made our sago meat and ate the fruit of the trees. Our life was not easy but we lived it contentedly. Now the logging companies turn rivers to muddy streams and the jungle into devastation. Fish cannot survive in dirty rivers and wild animals will not live in devastated forest. You took advantage of our trusting nature and cheated us into unfair deals. By your doings you take away our livelihood and threaten our very lives. You make our people discontent. We want our ancestral land, the land we live off, back. We can use it in a wiser way. When you come to us, come as guests with respect.

We, the representatives of the Penan people, urge you: Stop the destruction now. Stop all logging activities in the Limbang, Tutoh, and Patah. Give back to us what is properly ours. Save our lives, have respect for our culture. If you decide not to heed our request, we will protect our livelihood. We are a peace-loving people, but when our very lives are in danger, we will fight back. This is our message."

Malaysia for more than 85% of its tropical wood imports.

Japanese banks provided the start up loans for local logging companies. Japanese companies supply the bulldozers and heavy equipment necessary to extract the logs. Japanese interests provide the insurance and financing for the Japanese ships that carry the raw logs that will be processed in Japanese mills and dispensed as lumber to construction firms often owned by the same concern that first secured the wood in Sarawak. Once milled in Japan, the wood produced by the oldest and perhaps richest tropical rain forest on earth is used principally for packaging material, storage crates, and furni-

ture. Roughly half of it is used in construction, mostly as plywood cement forms which are used once or twice and then discarded.

In 1987 resentment and anger over the impact of logging reached a flash point. After having appealed in vain for over seven years to the government to put an end to the destruction of their traditional homelands, the Penan began to resist.

On March 31, 1987, armed with blowpipes, a group of Penan erected a blockade across a logging road in the Tutoh River basin. By October, Penan from twenty-six settlements had joined the protest.

This was the beginning of one of the most remarkable resistance move-

ments ever mounted by an indigenous people. Whole villages moved onto logging roads, building makeshift shelters directly on the right-of-way. Often the protests lasted for months, and when they were finally suppressed by government forces new ones sprang up in other areas. At their peak, the blockades halted logging in half of Sarawak. Although frequently assaulted by armed police, soldiers, and company goons, the protesters remained peaceful. In every instance, the actual barriers were mere symbols, a few forest saplings bound with rattan. Their strength lay in the men, women and children who stood behind them.

"The Price of Fire": Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia

Author: Benjamin Dangl

AK Press, 226 pages, £12.



Bolivia has been described as the Tibet of Latin America. This remote land is the most isolated of the South American republics. The majority of the country is sparsely populated, especially the lowlands of the Amazon basin. Most of the population live in the Altiplano, a dry, barren plateau which is over 3,000 metres in height.

Bolivia has the largest indigenous population, with 70% being Indian. The whites constitute just 5% of the population, but also form the elite of the country. The indigenous people have endured a long history of exploitation and oppression. A large part of the population is illiterate, speaking only Indian languages such as Quechua or Aymara.

Until 1952 the country was ruled by a series of military dictatorships. In 1951, the election was won by Victor Paz of the MNR, but the existing government refused to recognise the result and handed over to a military junta. The radical and militant tin-miners reacted immediately and revolution broke out on the 9th of April 1952. Two days later the junta sur-

rendered to MNR militia.

The MNR government then nationalised the mines, introduced universal suffrage, broke up the large estates and redistributed the land ending the feudal conditions in rural areas of Bolivia. In the aftermath of the revolution, the COB (Bolivian Workers Central) union federation became a major political force in the country. The giant tin and mineral barons, Patino, Hochschild and Aramayo, lost their political and economic influence, but a new political leadership developed that was to dominate Bolivia's political life for almost 50 years.

The book "The Price of Fire", while dealing mainly with the recent struggles of the Bolivian people, does attempt to cover the background of these struggles and the history of the region, beginning with the first rebellions against Spanish rule and ending with an up-to-date focus on the social movements of the last six years. The book looks at similar struggles in nearby countries, the new "leftist" regimes in South America and the administration of the Bolivian indigenous president, Evo Morales.

Bolivia has been a long-time 'lab-rat' for Neoliberalism, a system that was supposed to deliver an improved standard of living and greater personal freedom, but actually increased poverty and wrecked public services. Later, when the system failed and the people offered resistance, the State applied the policies with the barrel of a gun.

Much of South America's economic policy over the years has been dictated by financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. In 2000, however, the world's attention was focussed on Bolivia by the Cochabamba Water War, when the population of Cochabamba rebelled after the Bechtel Corporation bought their public and communal water supply. This was a classic failure of the privatisation of a basic essential. The company's price rises triggered a revolt that continues to reverberate throughout the country's social structure.

The events that Dangl describes have given rise to social movements which have defended workers and their families. Each of these movements led to

occupations which had as their watchword, "Occupy, resist, produce!" This slogan typifies the struggle of a people and is in essence a succinct definition of Anarcho-syndicalism.

Better worlds have been glimpsed through the actions of the Bolivian community organisations. Since the 11th September the United States has been fixated on the Islamic world and revenge on Al-Qaida. However, there is another 'world' closer to home which is spinning out of control. Ever since the election of Hugo Chavez as president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in 1998 there has been an erosion of US influence in Latin America.

Bush and Blair (and now Brown) are attempting to establish a neo-con Empire. They are in danger of biting off more than they can chew. The chances of a wide, full-scale war in the Middle East are quite high, but the US forces are very stretched. If the Middle East were to go apeshit, then South America would possibly follow suit.

Although the context of social struggle in South America is very different from that of Europe and Britain, Dangl's book gives an inside view of what is going on in Bolivia. Some of the actions and struggles do have lessons for us in Britain: so let's occupy, resist and produce!

Take back the people's game

How capitalism has colonised football and stolen it from the workers

With the new football season already upon us, it's obvious that the sport is, more than ever, infected by cynical profiteering and burgeoning corporate interests with ordinary supporters treated with disdain and contempt.

The success of clubs is increasingly dictated by the ill-gotten fortunes of their respective owners, not to mention their ability to exploit their club's commercial potential worldwide. The final league position of teams at the end of the season is becoming ever more predictable as clubs outside the top 4 or 5 in England, or the top 2 in Scotland, cannot compete financially or otherwise with their more illustrious rivals. Market forces have effectively rendered games between clubs in the same league as encounters of David and Goliath proportions. This parallels closely the high street grocery market where the big



FC United players, celebrating a second successive promotion

supermarkets have monopolised, obliterating smaller concerns in the process.

Teams at lower levels that do not attract the lucrative sponsorship deals of those in the top flight struggle to survive. A rising number entering administration have subsequently been punished with large points deductions by the league admin-

istrators and, in Boston United's case, relegation. In these less glamorous climes, clubs are faced with having to sell or release players in order to survive. As with all other areas of capitalist society, the wealth at the top fails to trickle down. The top clubs, however, in true parasitical form, rely heavily on the lower leagues to supply a large

proportion of their players.

Top stars such as David Beckham have become celebrity media icons, groomed as huge marketing commodities for fashion houses and brand labels. The football grounds themselves have also been progressively transformed into massive advertising hoardings. Lush corporate suites



Leeds United Chairman Ken Bates, asking the referee for a loan

developed for affluent supporters and corporate hospitality events contrast markedly with the stark facilities endured by ordinary fans.

The sordid world of transfers between top clubs is blighted with a culture of shady deals, unscrupulous agents and widespread allegations of 'bungs' to secure players' signatures. The cut-throat battle to stave off the indignity of relegation and cultivate success comes at a high cost and, needless to say, it is the fans who pay the price.

Prices for Premier League games have spiralled to such a degree that those on modest incomes are being priced out to fund the massive transfer fees and the wages of players.

Manchester United's season ticket holders found their loyalty rewarded with a 12% hike in prices for the present season, with a further condition being that they are now automatically charged for their seat for some cup games whether they wanted to attend the match or not.

The extortionate costs of ever-changing branded replica shirts (invariably bearing the name of the club's sponsor) and other paraphernalia aimed at supporters is understandably the cause of further consternation. That many of the leading sport brand labels such as Nike rely heavily on cheap sweatshop labour for their products goes without saying.

On a positive note fans are not taking all this

lying down. The proliferation of fanzines and web forums has given fans a voice and promoted friendships and solidarity. Games have been boycotted in protest against inflated ticket prices, and protests organised against club owners. Manchester United fans, in response to the Glazer family's takeover of the club, plastered the city with 'Love United, Hate Glazer' stickers. One breakaway group went further and formed non-league club, FC United of Manchester, their adopted motto being "making friends not millionaires".

There are still, of course, many obvious areas for improvement. Although violence between supporters of rival clubs seems to be on the wane, it is still

sadly evident, as is the far-right and tabloid-fuelled jingoism which afflicts the national game. Sexism in the sport is also ubiquitous, reinforced robustly by the right wing media. Women's football, although in the ascendancy, receives considerably diminished coverage. The tabloid/celebrity mags coverage of WAG's shopping, dieting or vicarious affairs, reduces the role of women to that of devalued accessories. The soft porn of Nuts, FHM and page 3 casts females as cheap objects of lust and titillation. Enduring proof, if it were ever needed, that capitalism doesn't just oppress us on the basis of social class.

As with workplace issues, the collective ability of supporters to resist the forces of darkness relies upon solidarity, organisation and a common recognition of the prevailing political, social and economic interests conspiring against us. This also entails challenging reactionary elements within our own ranks.

The players, (not all of whom are pampered millionaires, quite the opposite), also need rank and file organisation to fight for greater rights in an industry where, like other workers, they are treated as commodities which can be discarded with impunity once they have fulfilled their perceived usefulness.

It is high time the people took back the people's game.

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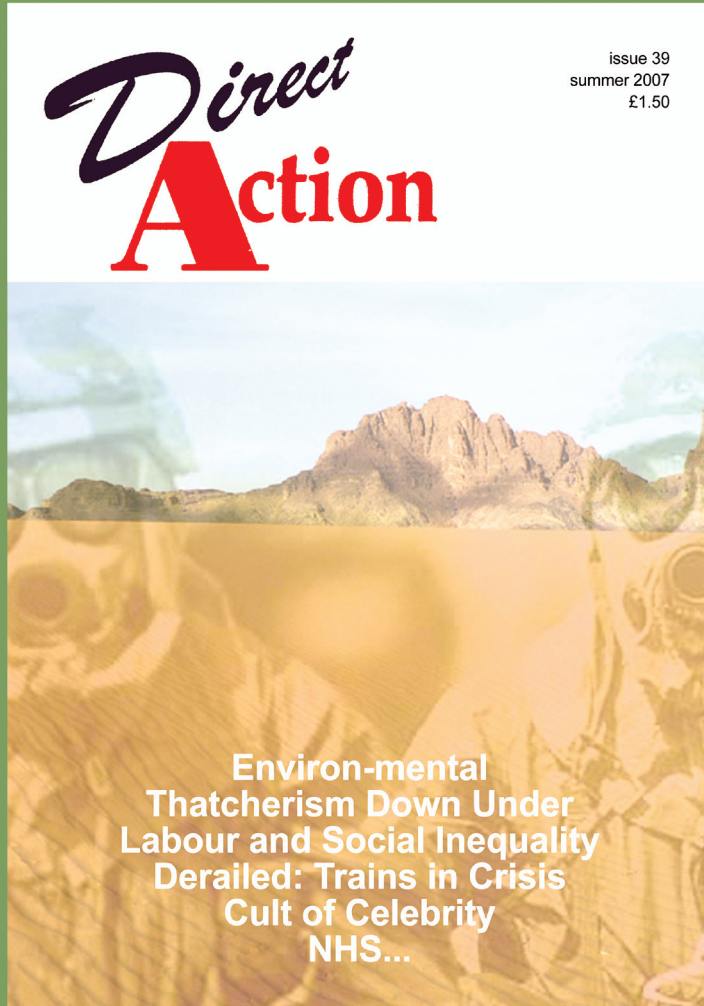
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