

Direct **Action**

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*Looking After The Rich
Never Trust A Politician*



The IWA, NHS, Respect, Situationism, Supermarkets

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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.

Politicians - Don't Ya Just Hate 'Em

Among working class people there exists a healthy level of mistrust in and disrespect for career politicians. One visible sign of this is the declining interest in the whole electoral process in recent years. Even so, and despite the seemingly never ending string of reports about MPs' and ministers' wrongdoings, you don't yet get the impression that parliament is going to be swept aside any time soon.

The recent (and not so recent) revelations have come so thick and fast that a mere quarterly magazine like *Direct Action* cannot hope to comment on every case. But behind each instance of lost data and dodgy funding, behind every passport scandal

and failed or vastly over-budget project, there lurk the lies, deceit, arrogance and downright incompetence of one of those chinless wonders who's managed to con enough people to vote them into Westminster.

lies and deceit

And it's not just a simple case that these incidents reflect the human failings of only a few isolated individuals. No, the whole institution of parliamentary democracy is laced through and through with lies and deceit. And it could not be otherwise for, after all, it is a system that is totally geared towards upholding the privileged positions of the elite, a system that is built on a series of empty promises that we hear repeated



Archer - dodgy politician #667

every four or five years at election time.

These pages have consistently pointed out how social and financial inequality has continued to grow under the present regime; how casualisation and deregulation in the workplace has continued to eat away at our pay and conditions; and how New Labour is just as adept as the Tories, if not more so, in ensuring that the rich have continued to get richer. In this issue we look at some of these themes again, both in general (see *Casualisation Kills*, p.11; *Lackeys of the Rich*, p.12; *No Such Thing as Class?*, p.22) and with a particular emphasis on events in the health and care

sector (see *Silent Nightingales*, p.6; *Death by Superbugs*, p.9; *The Caring Face of New Labour part 2*, p.10).

against all parties

But what is it going to take to bring about a new society of freedom and equality? Of course there are many out there who advise the working class to ditch New Labour in favour of building a 'new socialist' party. While we certainly agree with the view that our class has nothing whatsoever to gain from continuing to support the likes of Brown and co, we do take serious issue with the idea that any other political party, whether or not it calls itself 'socialist' or



Mandelson - dodgy politician #666

‘revolutionary’, is the answer for the working class.

For members of Solidarity Federation, the notion of organising as a political party has two major downfalls which have been consistently pointed out by generations of anarcho-syndicalists before us (see *The International Workers Association*, p.18). Firstly, the political party is a form of organisation that artificially draws a dividing line between ‘economic’ activity in the workplace or union on one hand and political activity in the party on the other hand. For more than a century, this division has meant that, in Britain, class struggle based on the direct action of the working class has played second fiddle to the illusion of parliamentary action carried out on our behalf by the aspiring careerists in the Labour Party.

working class politics

To SolFedders, economic and political activity are actually inseparable. It is the capitalist economic organisation of society that forms the bedrock of the current unequal system, a system which is further



Blunkett - dodgy politician #668

guaranteed and protected by the political and repressive organs of the state. However, to say that political parties ultimately have no useful part to play in the class struggle is not the same as denying that working class organisations should be involved in politics. Far from it. Anarcho-syndicalists argue that political issues are part and parcel of the struggles we face wherever we work and live. This is a view of politics – working class politics – as something independent of political parties.

In fact, we go further than this. The second major flaw in the idea of the political party, especially the kind

of party that sees itself as leaders of the working class, is that they are basically the new ruling class in waiting. This observation is as true now as it was when anarcho-syndicalists were first confronted with the likes of the British Labour Party and the Russian Bolshevik Party. While these parties have travelled different roads, one thing they share is their absolute failure as vehicles for the

emancipation of the working class. As such, our attitude to political parties includes not only the need to act independently of them, but extends to actively opposing their goal of

capturing state power. The bottom line, as articulated by the First International, is “the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the workers themselves”.

Not that the ‘new socialist’ party is likely to be with us any time soon, at least not judging by the recent goings on in the ‘Galloway gang’ (see *Gaining Respect?*, p.14).

also in this issue...

Besides all this, we also take a look at the failing efforts to address climate change (see *A Load of Hot Air*, p.13) and at the effects of supermarket expansion (see *Supermarket Sweep*, p.16). There are also the usual international and reviews sections, while we round off with a ‘closer look’ at situation-

ism and its relationship to anarcho-syndicalism (see *Capitalism is Boring!!!!*, p.32). Enjoy your read and we hope it gives you food for thought. At least it’ll give you a break from the virtually non-stop sychophantic coverage of U.S. presidential hopefuls – don’t ya just hate ‘em!



Hamilton - dodgy politician #669

Al Bangura, Watford FC and the Asylum System

Dear *Direct Action*,

As you know, Al Bangura, Watford FC's midfielder, has been refused asylum and faces deportation back to Sierra Leone. It was really heartening to see Watford fans show their support with banners and placards, and I'm glad for Bangura [now granted a work permit – eds.] that he has the full support of his team and manager, Adrian Boothroyd, who are trying to do everything they can to overturn the deportation decision.

However Boothroyd's quote:

This country seems to allow anybody in to send benefits wherever they fancy and we have one young man here who pays his taxes, has a fiancée and a newborn son and somebody somewhere thinks it's a good decision to send him back to Sierra Leone. It's ridiculous.

shows he is racist towards asylum seekers and immigrants but makes an exception for his player.

According to the Home Office, there are currently under 60,000 asylum seekers in Britain (www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html). Britain has a population around 60 million so asylum seekers make up 1% of the total – hardly a number to 'swamp' the country. Asylum seeker benefits are only 70% of British benefits, meaning most asylum seeker families live well below the poverty line. Most benefits are in the form of supermarket vouchers (including Starbucks vouchers but any family surviving on £35 a week won't be redeeming half their benefits on a few supermoccachinos when they have children to feed and clothe!). So much

If you have any comments about the content, or any other issues, please e-mail or write to us.

for sending benefits home! Additionally, any single asylum seekers whose cases are failed get their housing revoked and their benefits stopped and become destitute (there are an estimated 300 destitute asylum seekers in Newcastle alone!).

Many asylum seekers are pregnant or have young babies and children but this doesn't stop Labour's immigration police kicking doors in and dragging families out of their houses in dawn raids under the cover of darkness, neither does it stop families being deported to 'safe countries' such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

Currently, there are 1635 asylum seekers locked up in privately run detention centres infested with scabies, sickness and diarrhoea bugs and where minimal medical or psychiatric care is available. A report by 'Save the Children' in 2005 estimates that 2,000 children are detained in these centres each year. In fact, many asylum seekers give birth in detention centres.



As for paying taxes, Bangura is lucky to be able to pay taxes legally; the right to work was taken away for asylum seekers in 2001 (a fact not mentioned by the Sun and the Daily Mail as they whip up racism against asylum seekers!). In fact, many asylum seekers who are forced to work illegally and pay taxes (illegally) end up being locked up in prison where they

Mujeres Libres

Dear *Direct Action*,

Great read!

I was thinking about the question posed by anarchists in the book, *Free Women of Spain*, [about the anarchist women's organisation, *Mujeres Libres*, and its activities in the Spanish revolution] – that other disadvantaged groups within communities like elderly people, people unable to work because of disability or illness, children etc. be supported by the broader worker collectives which were forming at the time in Spain. I think this is an important point even though the book only refers to women.

Regards, Michael

work in prison labour!

Whilst Boothroyd has our solidarity in supporting Bangura against his deportation, his view of asylum seekers and knowledge of the asylum system must be challenged. Whether Bangura is deported or not, the situation for the rest of the asylum seekers will remain the same and looks likely to worsen under Labour's New Asylum Model. Individual cases do little for the thousands of asylum seekers who are not lucky enough to have rich white friends and supporters to organise a high profile campaign for them. The only way to change the system is for asylum seekers, British workers and immigrant workers to join together, overcome the divisive, manufactured state and media racism that keeps them from struggling together for the benefit of all, and fight together against this disgusting state of affairs.

In solidarity, Sam (Tyneside Community Action for Refugees)



Silent

Karen Reissmann,

In his 1992 book, *What Uncle Sam Really Wants*, Noam Chomsky attributed the role of the US administration in its interventions in places like El Salvador, Chile and Nicaragua in part to the desire to negate the 'threat of a good example'.

He argued that these countries were showing their neighbours that ownership of the means of production could be re-tained within the country rather than handed over to US multinationals, and that it was possible to run a country reasonably successfully without it being a de facto colony of the US. Such 'good examples' had to be crushed as soon as possible, lest the lesson should spread. Various methods have been used

in pursuit of this purpose over the years, from 'agent orange' in chemical weapons used in Vietnam to the backing of violent coups by US henchmen such as Pinochet and the blood-thirsty Nicaraguan

care to all, regardless of ability to pay, has been well documented in this publication and elsewhere. The deliberate breakup of the service and the subordination of its constituent parts to market principles have

confusing way which leaves many unsure of what is happening, who is benefiting and who is to blame for the endless rounds of cuts and sell-offs. The general feeling among NHS workers has been one of disgruntled



'Contras'. They have, by and large, been successful.

all-out assault

Fast forward to the present and the same principle can be seen at work in our very own National Health Service. The all-out assault on the NHS and its basic provision of quality health-

care to all, regardless of ability to pay, has been well documented in this publication and elsewhere. The deliberate breakup of the service and the subordination of its constituent parts to market principles have

asset-stripping

The whole process is presented by the government and the media in a

confusing way which leaves many unsure of what is happening, who is benefiting and who is to blame for the endless rounds of cuts and sell-offs. The general feeling among NHS workers has been one of disgruntled pessimism. 'What are we supposed to do about it?' and 'hopefully things will turn around soon' are the mottoes of the day and, as long as they remain

so, the asset-stripping of the NHS by private capital will continue.

In this climate, activists within the health service who argue for the kind of response anarcho-syndicalists would like to see are often isolated both by the brick wall of the union bureaucracy and the pessimism of their fel-

Nightingales

the NHS and the 'Threat of a Good Example'

low workers. It's hard to argue for the kind of sustained, collective direct action that is needed to win this fight as an isolated, lone voice, especially when the idea of such a successful fightback seems so far from the meek capitulation which appears to be the norm across the country.

resistance

However, some groups of NHS workers haven't given up quite so easily. A number of strikes have occurred at London's Whipp's Cross hospital by cleaners, domestics and porters who oppose the second rate pay and conditions which have resulted from the use of a private contractor, whilst some of our IWW comrades in the National Blood Service are involved in a promising campaign to catalyse resistance there.

Perhaps the most prominent and successful story of opposition to these attacks, however, can be found in Manchester, where

employees of that city's 'Mental Health and Social Care Trust' have shown us all that where the 'proper channels' fail, direct action can get the goods.

There has been a long standing campaign by the workers' Unison branch against cuts and involvement by the private sector. This culminated in a January 2007 strike which saved over 40 nursing, therapy and support worker posts. It also prevented a hostile regrading by management which would have seen a reduction in pay for many workers.

Activists working in the NHS around the country now had the 'good example' we had been craving – a concrete, contemporary demonstration of a successful fightback that stopped those who are trying to destroy the NHS in their tracks.

Enter stage left Manchester's answer to General Pinochet, new Chief Executive Sheila Foley. Appointed soon after the successful strike, Foley was given

only a twelve month contract and, at 62, seems unlikely to want to work again – especially with the unusually high £135,000 she is being paid for her year in office to fall back on.

example

Subsequent events have demonstrated that Foley was brought in for one purpose and one purpose only – to break the union, crush the workers' spirit and ensure the threat of this 'good example' does not spread any further. She has chosen to do this by making an example herself – by sacking one of the workers for speaking out against the ongoing cuts and sell offs.

Mental health nurse Karen Reissmann's reinstatement campaign has used the slogan 'Silent Nightingales' to highlight the 'gagging' of NHS employees who criticise cuts. In reality the shop steward's statement to the local media was simply the excuse Foley and her henchmen were waiting for to sack a prominent activist and restore the Trust to the 'business as usual' of rampant cuts, sell-offs and ever poorer quality services. It has been clear from the start that the dismissal had nothing whatsoever to do with Reissmann's work as a nurse. Indeed she was farcically promoted for her high quality clinical performance on the



very same day she was fired.

The official reason behind Reissmann's sacking was that she had criticised the transfer of NHS services to a voluntary sector organisation. It is alleged that she claimed such an organisation would find it harder to attract experienced nurses due to its lower wages and less favourable pension entitlements. She was suspended for this 'offence', then compounded this 'gross misconduct' by telling people she had been suspended, telling them that she was innocent, and "allowing the press to print misleading statements about her case".

show trial

Karen's colleagues recognised this for the show trial that it was and went on immediate indefinite strike to have her reinstated. This strike lasted six weeks, during which time donations and messages of support flooded in from across the country. Pickets were well attended and regular lobbies and demonstrations took place, including a large march last November. However, no reinstatement was forthcoming and, following the rejection of Reissmann's appeal on December 11th, the strikers voted to return to work six days



SolFed banners and flags on the march last November

later.

At present the plan is to continue by means of a 'national Unison campaign' involving a tribunal claim for unfair dismissal, an early day motion by Unison sponsored MPs and a national lobby of parliament in the New Year. The 'threat of a good example' appears to have been negated – for now.

This is a dispute that came close to being won. The Trust was struggling to manage without the strikers. Strike pay was being maintained at a reasonable level thanks to over £200,000 of financial support from around the country and the action had the support of most people in Manchester. Crucially, this included service users, who passed a resolution calling for the Trust board to resign

'for the good of the people of Manchester'.

failure to spread strike

The decision to return to work appears to have been based on the fear of losing momentum and strikers returning to work in dribs and drabs, as well as the legal statute allowing workers to be sacked once they have been on strike for 12 weeks, even if the strike is entirely legal. A key factor was the failure to spread the strike. Astonishingly, social workers from a different Unison branch were used by Trust bosses to cover work of those on strike. Apparently they were not allowed to be balloted due to anti-union laws so the strikers were left isolated and were eventually frozen back into work. Whilst those involved insist that they haven't given

up and are still fighting, it is hard to see legal challenges and lobbying of politicians succeeding where industrial action has failed.

One positive feature is the further radicalisation of the workers involved. Many of them travelled around Britain to speak at support meetings, there were active picket lines, a significant increase in the number volunteering to be stewards and a raised consciousness of the depths the bosses will stoop to protect their class interests. One striker explained this general feeling in the phrase "there are now a hundred Karen Reissmanns in Manchester". As such it seems things could flare up again at any time. If it does then we need to be ready to show solidarity once again.

As anarcho-syndicalists, this is exactly the sort of direct action we want to see in defence of jobs and the social wage. SolFed locals did their bit in the wider solidarity effort with financial donations, attendance at demonstrations and awareness raising in our own union branches and among local NHS workers. We need to be ready to mobilise like this again so workers who put our belief in direct action into practice are not left isolated.

Perhaps the most important lesson of this struggle is the capacity for workers to be left high and dry by the unholy alliance of government anti-union laws and the trade union officials who revere them. The key to victory was spreading this strike, but since secondary picketing and strikes are illegal this appears to never have even been seriously considered, an attitude which will always leave workers fighting with one hand tied behind our backs. In future, the likes of these brave Manchester health workers must not be left to fight alone.

We wish Karen Reissmann all the best in the continuing campaign to get her job back. The 'good example' she and her fellow workers gave us is an inspiration we won't forget, even if it appears to have been temporarily snuffed out by the ruling class.

Death by Superbugs

The scandalous legacy of NHS funding cuts, performance targets and privatisation

If one thing reflects the sorry state of the NHS today more than anything else, it is the superbug epidemic. According to recent figures, hospital superbugs like MRSA and C-Difficile are now responsible for 5,000 deaths per year, with up to 100,000 other patients being infected.

Following the Commission for Healthcare Inspection's revelations of 90 deaths due to C-Difficile between 2004-6 in Tonbridge and Kent NHS Trust, there was a public inquest. One key causal factor identified was the Trust's preoccupation with performance targets, which in turn led to practices like patients being told to relieve themselves in their beds rather than in ward toilet facilities. Generally poor standards of cleanliness were observed, as was high bed turnover. One former Consultant reflected that privatisation of cleaning services and repeated management restructures also contributed.

Putting the NHS at the mercy of the market (by both Labour and the Tories) was always going to have this impact. Labour-intensive services such as hospital cleaning can only be made profitable by cutting wages and jobs. Since 1984, Unison figures reveal a fall in the number of cleaners from 100,000 to just 55,000 today. Privatisation has also meant these crucial services have become organisationally detached from the NHS.

The obsession with meeting targets, another outcome of Government policy, focuses services on providing an appearance of efficiency. Unfortun-

ately, reduced waiting times and increased patient throughput are realised largely at the expense of quality of care. As a consequence, ailments go untreated or undiagnosed, leading to further human and financial costs further down the line. So much for 'efficiency'. Taxpayers and patients alike are getting a raw deal to say the very least.

In the wake of the deaths in Tonbridge and Kent, the Commission for Healthcare Inspection reported:

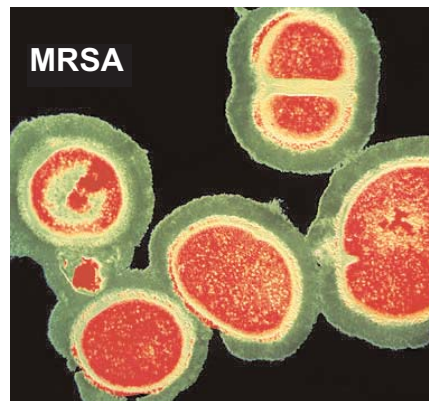
Many staff told us that senior managers were still reluctant to implement major infection control measures such as closing wards or using buffer beds to separate infected patients from

others on the ward. They said this was because of the shortage of beds and the need to meet targets.

The report continued:

The vast majority of nurses and other clinical staff interviewed considered that poor care was in large part due to having inadequate staffing levels.

Health services should be universal, comprehensive and free at the point of delivery. They should be organised, delivered and controlled directly by workers and responsive to patients. The superbug epidemic is symptomatic of privatisation and service cuts started by the Tories, and continued enthusiastically by New Labour. Whilst services remain at the mercy of meddling politicians, bureaucrats and market forces, problems such as superbugs will remain.



The 'Caring' Face of New Labour - part 2

How modern social policy exploits unpaid carers and the elderly

Anyone who has had to give up work to care for a chronically ill or disabled friend or relative will know that the support you get from the state is, to put it mildly, shameful. As well as the emotional and physical demands, severe financial penalties compound an already difficult and often stressful set of circumstances. And, with the increasingly ageing UK population, estimates suggest that those of us engaged in unpaid care could rise to 10 million in the next 30 years.

A survey of 300 carers undertaken by Carers UK last year showed that the current benefits system fails to allow carers an acceptable standard of living, neither recognising nor valuing their contribution – see box below for further details.

Yet the support provided by unpaid carers is estimated to save the state £87 billion per year. But enabling practical support to carers, it seems, is far less fashionable to

Brown and Co. than courting multi-millionaire tax dodgers, fighting imperialist wars and replenishing the costly Trident program.

Unpaid carers aren't the only ones to suffer due to New Labour's market driven social policy. The way our society treats the elderly, particularly those requiring nursing home care, is also nothing short of scandalous.

It is well documented how those requiring residential nursing/care are often forced to sell their homes to pay for it. With 'Continuing Care' legislation healthcare should be free, yet thousands in England and Wales are still charged, as a 2006 *Panorama* programme, 'The National Homes Swindle', confirmed. The relative of one woman with Parkinson's and Dementia who was forced to sell her home, summed up the frustration of many: "*It's outrageous theft and it's going on in this country hundreds and hundreds of times*".

Although New Labour criticised the Tories for forcing 40,000 pensioners to sell their homes, and Blair said he didn't want "a country where the only way pensioners can get

long term care is by selling their home", nothing has changed. This led one lawyer to comment: "*It's dishonest and it's quite astonishing that it's gone on for so long undressed*".

2-tier nursing homes

To make matters worse, a 2-tier model of nursing home care has emerged. Despite massive fees, the standard of care in most care homes is, to say the very least, basic. You might get fed and toilet-ed, a token entertainer or a bit of physiotherapy now and again, but by and large you're just left to vegetate in front of the TV. In some you even have to share a room with someone you've never met before. This is no exaggeration.

Recently, a new breed of 'super care home' has sprung up. With state of the art facilities and activities galore, the sufficiently financially endowed can enjoy their final years in stimulating and dignified condi-



tions beyond the financial reach of most normal folk.

Inhumane social policies wreak untold havoc on vulnerable families and individuals, many of whom, don't forget, have paid tax and national insurance for much their lives. Why should unpaid carers be effectively punished for their benevolence? Why should the elderly be forced to sell up for the 'privilege' of living out their final days in second rate care homes? Such indictments of current social policy speak volumes about our rulers' priorities.

A decent society would promote compassion and provide a good standard of care to all, not just those with money. Carers (paid and unpaid) and those receiving care are an ever-growing body of discontents who need to organise, together with workers, to both expose injustice and take robust action to fight for social justice.

The 2007 Carers UK survey of 300 carers found that:

- 72% are worse off since they started caring
- 65% are not in paid work
- 54% gave up work to care
- 53% say financial worries affect their health
- 33% are in debt
- 30% are cutting back on food or heating
- 10% can't afford to pay their rent or mortgage

Casualisation Kills

Figures released recently by the Health and Safety Commission for 2006/7 indicate an 11% increase in workplace-related fatalities, compared to the previous 12 months. Of the 241 deaths reported to the Health and Safety Executive, the 2 sectors with the highest number of fatal injuries were:

Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing (8.1 deaths per 100,000 workers)

Construction (3.7 deaths per 100,000 workers)

down wages in the process.

The HSE also reported a 25% rise in prosecutions for workplace health and safety violations in the last year, which in all probability represents only the tip of the iceberg. Casualisation kills, end of story.

In raising awareness and fighting for workers' rights in the here and now, we must be mindful that so long as the present economic and political system exists, so will casualisation.

Both industries, not surprisingly, employ a high proportion of casual migrant labour. Casualised labour is cheap, flexible and serves the bosses' interests by maximising their profits. At the same time it undermines basic rights and conditions which workers have had to fight tooth and nail for, forcing

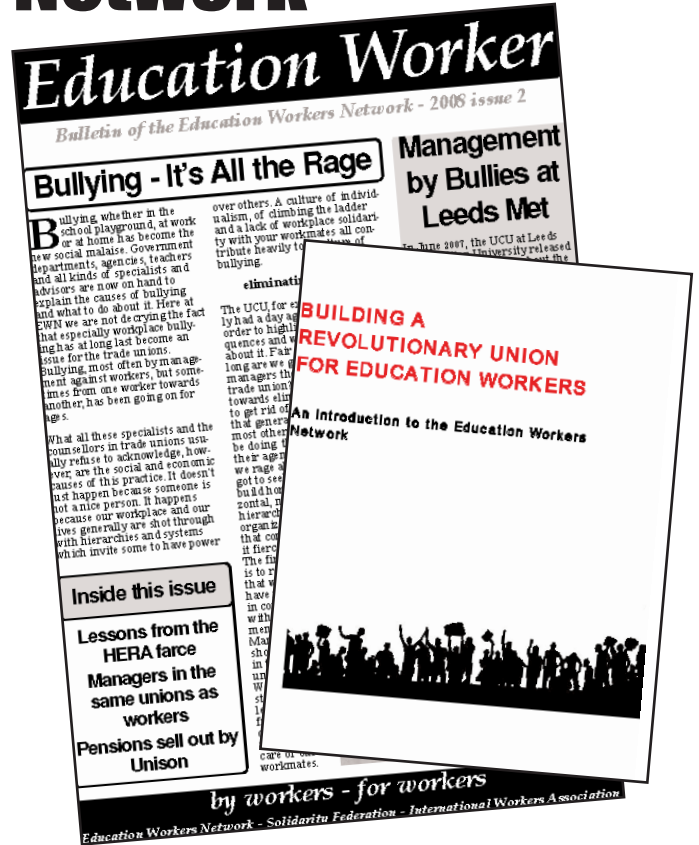
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Education Workers Network



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EWN banner gets a outing at the Karen Reissmann march in November

Safety First

In late 2006, five prostitutes were murdered in Ipswich. This led to a public outcry that women were facing this level of violence. Central to this outcry was an initiative by the English Collective of Prostitutes, the Royal College of Nursing, Women Against Rape, National Association of Probation Officers, church people, residents from red light areas, anti-poverty campaigns, drug reformers and others, called the Safety First Coalition, which aimed to decriminalise prostitution.

Clause 150 of the current Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill introduces 'compulsory rehabilitation', but the Safety First Coalition points out that this does nothing to address the reasons women turn to prostitution. There are no extra resources to address what the bill calls 'assisting the

If, as seems likely, women can't break out of the debt, poverty, domestic violence, unemployment or addiction without additional resources, they're likely to be back in the criminal justice system next time they're arrested. Failure to be 'rehabilitated' will mean a prison sentence is more likely, making the cycle of 'rehabilitation', prison and poverty harder than ever to escape.

The state isn't interested in women's safety, despite claims otherwise. Since Labour came to power, it has further criminalised many areas of sex work and increased maximum sentences, some as much as fourteen-fold. Twice as many women are in prison, often for poverty-related offences. Women 'rescued' in immigration raids on brothels are not given help, but deported.

Women work in the sex trade for all sorts of reasons – they need a safe and healthy working environment as much as the rest of us.

For more info, contact The English Collective of Prostitutes and the Safety First

Coalition at: PO Box 287, London NW6 5QU; ecp@allwomenscount.net www.prostitutescollective.net



Reclaim the Night march, Ipswich, January 2007

offender to address the causes of their involvement in prostitution and to find ways of ending that involvement'.

Lackeys of the Rich

New Labour are the lackeys of the ultra-rich, it's official!!!

Hot on the heels of the report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which showed inequality in the UK to be at a 40-year high, come revelations that the majority of the super-rich pay no income tax and top company bosses' earnings have more than doubled since 2002.

HM Revenue and Customs figures from tax returns for 2003/4, released under the Freedom of Information Act, indicated that only 65 out of 400 UK based individuals whose wealth or direct income would allow them to make £10 million a year or more, declared this as taxable income. In effect, this means that legal loopholes galore are being used to enable the rich to dodge paying tax. Mr Brown, as previous Head of the Treasury, would have been all too aware of this.

In addition, a separate report by the Income Data Services revealed that the average pay of Chief Executives of

Britain's 100 top companies now amounts to an average of £3.17 million, largely as a result of huge incentive payments. Whilst lecturing the rest of us about the need to accept below inflation pay rises, these parasites are laughing all the way to the (offshore) bank. Little wonder that, as the Rown-tree Report observed, they live in



areas segregated from the rest of society.

In a country with the 4th biggest economy in the world where, according to the government's own figures, 1 in 3 children live in poverty, we should be left in no doubt whatsoever whose side Mr Brown and Co. are on. We need to get rid both of the rich who live in opulent luxury at our expense and the puppet politicians who protect their interests.

A Load of Hot Air

Why treaties and other reformist 'solutions' to global warming are a waste of time

Without question, global warming represents one of the most serious and real threats to the continued existence of humankind and planet earth today. Ten years on from the Kyoto Treaty, 3 separate United Nations reports warn that rich industrialised nations are rapidly increasing the pollution which leads to global warming, with "catastrophic" climate change predicted if current trends continue.

For us, these frightening events and predictions are no surprise. The catastrophic effects of capitalism on the eco-system

are all too predictable. The corporate bosses' imperative is short-term profits for shareholders, not long-term concern for the environment. Put simply, if they don't deliver the bottom line, they'll be out of a job. A CEO's decision in London, Washington or Rome is more likely to impact on people thousands of miles away, so in their smug, self-centred view, what the hell.

The politicians' primary motivation is to promote economic growth in a bid to secure and retain the support of big business. Hence it's no surprise at all that George Bush's election cam-



paign was bankrolled by energy and oil corporations, nor that the US is now the world's worst polluter by far. Without constant growth, the economy goes into recession and crisis.

But it now appears that after years of denial, some sections of the ruling class are finally waking up to the alarming evidence before us. However, instead of presenting a solution that deals with the root causes of the problem, the 'green' capitalists and reformists alike suggest technological fixes, tokenistic lifestyle changes and treaties which, however apparently well-intentioned, are destined to fail. Kyoto didn't work and neither will the recent Bali treaty.

Capitalism's unrelenting greed acts without any regard to the havoc it wreaks. Only a society based on need and equality can master technology and productive forces in a socially useful and

ecologically sustainable way which also enables our needs, wants and desires to be satisfied.

With oil reserves predicted to run out in the next 40 years, and rainforests being decimated at a frightening rate, the entire future of humanity depends on the ability of the dispossessed to seize back control from the ruling elites who, unless stopped, will lead us to the brink of destruction. Because, in the words of one Native American visionary, only when they have poisoned the last river, and cut down the last tree will they realise that money does not grow on trees.

"Man's (sic) most visionary dreams of liberation have now become compelling necessities... hierarchical society, after many bloody millennia, has finally reached the culmination of its development" Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*

UN FACTS AND FINDINGS ON GLOBAL WARMING:

Under the 1997 Kyoto Treaty, rich countries undertook to cut emissions of greenhouse gases by a modest 5% of 1992 levels by 2012. Ten years later, evidence shows that the economies who signed up to the agreement have instead **increased** emission levels by 11%.

If everyone on earth emitted as much greenhouse gas as North Americans, we would need nine atmospheres to absorb it safely.

Besides the US and Australia, which rejected Kyoto, China, India and former Eastern Bloc countries have also recorded vastly increased emissions.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that if current trends continue, the Greenland ice-cap will completely melt, raising sea levels worldwide by 30 feet. Harvests in Africa could be halved by 2020, and the Amazonian Rainforests will turn to dry savannah.

From 2000 to 2004, weather related disasters affected over 250 million people in developing countries.

Gaining Respect?

After the euphoria at the election of the 1997 Blair government dissipated the search began for a viable electoral alternative to New Labour. What emerged was the Socialist Alliance made up of various local alliances and left wing groups, the largest within which was the Socialist Party (ex Militant tendency).

The largest group on the left, the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) did an about face to join in 1999, and immediately began manoeuvring to dominate the alliance. As predicted in *Direct Action* back in 2000, the Socialist Alliance was transformed into a one-member-one-vote political party. This new structure allowed the largest and most disciplined group within it, the SWP, to exercise a dominant and controlling role. Again, as predicted, the Socialist Alliance was riven by feuds, mostly concerning the behaviour of the SWP, which resulted in the Socialist Party leaving. After all, you cannot have two vanguards can you?

In 2003 the SWP led the SA into an alliance with George Galloway, key figures involved in the Stop the War Coalition, Members of the Muslim Association of Britain and the Muslim Council of Britain to form the Respect Coalition.

This was always a shaky alliance held together more by the principle of 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' than common outlooks and goals. The SWP viewed Respect as a "united front of a special type" but many others wanted

it to function as a proper political party.

Inevitably the tensions soon began to show. Firstly there was the revolutionary Marxist-Leninist SWP who saw themselves as the repository of political wisdom; people who see further and better than anyone else and assume that what's good for the SWP is good for the working class. Secondly, there was Galloway, who saw Respect recreating the Labour Party of Keir Hardie, and who, like Hardie, is an

It was bound to fall apart as these tensions developed. With Gordon Brown's decision not to hold a snap election last November the time was ripe for a power struggle. A letter from Galloway calling for reforms in its internal management was met by an attack by the SWP leadership who made bizarre claims of a witch hunt. Galloway was supported by Salma Yaqoob, the Respect vice chair. The SWP had previously been staunch supporters of both Galloway and Yaqoob. They thought they could manipulate 'Gorgeous George' by



Lavalette & Galloway - a love/hate relationship?

anti-Marxist socialist heavily influenced by religious ideas. Thirdly there was the Muslim influence with views ranging from those of socialists to overtly pro-capitalist small businessmen and often incorporating reactionary views on sexuality and women's equality.

stroking his ego and even when he appeared on the appalling celebrity Big Brother, they continued to defend him. They saw Yaqoob and others as useful idiots but she proved to have more political nous than they'd anticipated.

October saw the split quickly

develop. By November the locks on the Respect offices were changed by the Galloway faction while the passwords to the website were changed by the SWP. Two conferences were held on the same day after both sides attempted to pack the original Respect conference with pseudo delegates. All this resulted in a split with two rival Respects emerging.

Galloway, having learned his political infighting tactics through the manoeuvrings of the Labour Party, was able to outflank the SWP and their Central Committee

instead of one conference there were two so three years after Respect was born it became twins.

There have been some other strange episodes. In that first frantic month of the split the Preston Respect councillor, Michael Lavalette, attacked George Galloway and tried to whip the ranks of the local SWP membership by claiming that Galloway was going to go on TV denouncing the SWP in public. The Preston Respect meeting on October 23rd was then packed with SWP members from all over Lancashire who

Islamists and unreconstructed Trots was always an arranged marriage too far.

What hasn't helped is the revelation that in August 2007 John Rees, member of the SWP Central Committee and National Secretary of Respect, accepted \$10,000 from a Dubai business linked to privatisation schemes in Britain. He accepted it on behalf of the Organising for Fighting Unions campaign, after it was pointed out that Respect couldn't accept foreign donations, and used the money to pay off debts incurred by a conference they held in Shoreditch last year. Of course, within the SWP organisations the SWP support and promote are seen simply as recruiting grounds, and any money raised can easily be channelled from one campaign to another via the SWP.

Whatever happens the lessons are clear; working *with* the SWP in any alliance means working *for* the SWP. Their sole aim is to build their party. No matter what the rhetoric, that is all they care about. So end all coalitions that bring people together not on the basis of their common interests as a class but on cross class alliances which inevitably mean the compromise of political principles.



John Rees (right), negotiating another dodgy deal?

resulting in them throwing around ever more fantastic accusations as they began to lose their grip.

Internally there were the expulsions from the SWP of three of their leading members who had sided with Galloway in the dispute, and the rupture deepened, with both sides disputing the conference delegation of Respect's largest branch, Tower Hamlets, which is in the constituency of George Galloway. Typically as when most left parties collapse, instead of losing a party, you gain an extra one. On November 17,

"unanimously" declared support for the SWP view of Respect. Yet exactly two weeks later he appeared on the same platform as Galloway in Manchester and spoke of how much he admired him!

Meanwhile the SWP leadership levelled accusations at the Respect Renewal group centred round Galloway and Yaqoob that reflected the criticisms that those outside of Respect had been making for years - only to be accused of 'Islamophobia'. It is not clear what will happen next but their unholy alliance of fundamentalist

As we go to press the news is that, due to legal reasons, the SWP faction cannot use the Respect name for elections. This means that they will have to find another one. It may seem a crazy suggestion for a Marxist-Leninist organisation but they could be honest and truthful and stand as the SWP!

SUPERMARKET SWEEP

An everyday tale of global capitalism and its devastating impact

Love 'em or hate them, there's no doubting that supermarkets are playing a bigger part in all our lives, shaping our environment, health and even the way we interact with each other. But plenty of people are voicing concerns about the behaviour of the supermarkets and their impact on us. Here's why.

tion was overly optimistic: Their 'solution' to the problem of market monopolisation was, you guessed it, more supermarkets! This should come as no surprise, however. In 2000, the same organisation concluded that supermarkets did not have a monopoly in grocery retailing. The evidence needless to say, suggests otherwise. But

small retail market could cease to exist altogether by 2015. Supermarkets argue that they bring jobs to the local community, but the British Retail Planning Forum found in the 1990s that every time a big supermarket opened, an average of 276 jobs were lost within a 1.5km radius.

The Director of the Soil Association succinctly sums up the supermarket dynamic:

"It's not a food chain so much as a fear chain. The supermarket directors live in fear of losing their market share and not being able to deliver endless growth to their shareholders. The supermarket buyer lives in fear of not meeting his or her targets and always wants to buy cheap and sell expensive, the packer lives in mortal fear of having his goods rejected or the price falling below the costs of production. How do you rebuild trust in a chain which is dominated by aggressive players and practices? This is what happens with the twin pressures of globalisation and concentration of power".

Not only do supermarkets want to control where we shop and what we buy; they also profit from our poverty. Tesco now operates nearly five million bank accounts, and like other members of the big four, have moved into the personal loan industry. Through loyalty card schemes, they gather vast amounts of data about us.



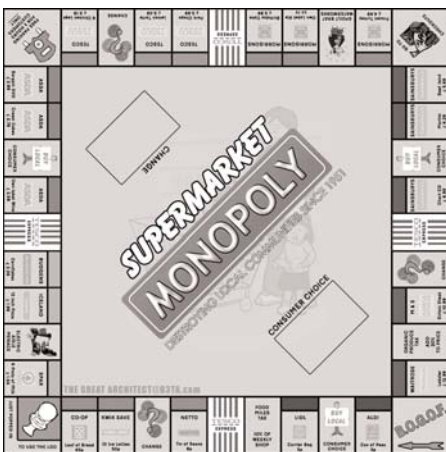
Supermarkets have grown in stature in recent times, successfully squeezing out many smaller localised competitors in the process. Lord Sainsbury is a Parliamentary Undersecretary, 3 of Tony Blair's former advisers are now employed by Tesco. With powerful lobbying bodies fighting their corner, the supermarkets' interests are being well and truly looked after. With the big four (Tesco, Sainsbury Asda and Morrisons) now accounting for 75% of our high street grocery spending, it was anticipated that the Autumn 2007 Competition Commission Report might, at least, place some curbs on their expansion. Naturally, this expecta-

the story doesn't end there...

Bad for local community, workers and environment

The effect of supermarket expansion on local communities and producers has been devastating. One of the tactics used by the supermarkets is land-banking, which involves them buying up land earmarked for development, to prevent their competitors from expanding. Combined with price-undercutting, possible due to their huge scale, competition is successfully eradicated. With 2,000 small retailers going out of business every year, the Parliament Shops Report (2006) predicted that the

Supermarkets have helped to transform our high streets into bland, faceless, corporate monoliths, devoid of character and individuality. They have eroded the relationship between (local) producer and consumer, promoting intensively farmed pre-packaged food that has often clocked up an impressive itinerary of air or road miles before it reaches the shelves. The Financial Times reported in 2001 that a kiwi fruit flown from New Zealand to the UK emits 5 times its own weight in greenhouse gasses. Another bizarre consequence of the neo-liberal global market is the growing practice of food swapping between countries. In 2001 the UK exported 149,000 tons of fresh milk, and imported 110,000 tons. The milk in our supermarkets is more likely to have come straight from the (well-travelled) tanker rather than straight from the cow. According to CorporateWatch, the average supermarket vegetable travels 600 miles. Add this to the excessive and wasteful packaging routinely employed, and it is easy to see why the supermarkets' claims to be green are frankly, laughable.



Action Aid exposed how workers on 'Fair Trade' banana plantations in Costa Rica and Nicaragua (which supply Tesco), are forced to work excessive hours with minuscule pay and no right to organise. Migrant packers in the UK, further down the supply chain, were also found to be subject to sub-

"European governments must face up to their responsibility for abuses committed by corporations based in their countries, which contribute to the widening inequalities between the industrialised and developing worlds. Food sovereignty is currently beyond the reach of the countries of the South, pollution is commonplace throughout the developing world, indigenous peoples are decimated and their cultures destroyed, all because of actions by corporations". (Susan George).

standard working conditions. Wal-Mart, owners of Asda are renowned for their illegal anti-union and other labour-violating practices in the US. In contrast Terry Leahy, Chief Executive of Tesco, earns £1,500 per hour, and Tesco's profits for 2006 amounted to 2.2 billion. Wal-Mart's annual turnover is in the region of \$300 million with its owners in the Forbes top ten rich list.

The fight against global capitalism

Global capitalism, governments and corporations enslave us and wreck ecology. Supermarkets, with their concerted market saturation, exemplify this. Making colossal profits on the backs of workers and suppliers and using aggressive marketing techniques, they damage communities by putting small localised producers and competitors out of business, and employ practices which are environmentally wasteful.

The movement against supermarkets has been unfortunately diluted by a single-issue mentality which has seen some campaigners appealing to politicians to legislate against some of their more barefaced abuses. Instead of viewing the big 4's (Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda and Morrisons) practices as being the inevitable symptom of a merciless profit-driven economy supported by corrupt, conniving politicians, a naïve reformist approach prevails.

Echoing high street trends global-

ly, social and economic power is shifting intentionally towards a dwindling number of transnational corporations. More powerful than many governments, and supported by international trade liberalisation policies, the corporations now routinely relocate production to the poorest regions of the planet, where labour and production costs are minimal, dictatorships often rule and workers' rights are non-existent. Minimising costs, maximising profits is the corporations', and the supermarkets', maxim, regardless of the consequences.

Global capitalism is the prime cause of the acute ecological crisis we now face. Corporate profits are reliant not only upon intensively exploiting labour, but also the natural environment. Economic growth is founded upon new markets being made available. Capitalism's need for constant expansion exists in direct conflict with the finite resources the planet has to offer. As wars are fought over oil and clean water, rainforests are cut down, and the polar icecaps melt, the survival of humanity is threatened.

The struggle against the supermarkets is a struggle against global capitalism which can be won only by workers and local communities taking control through popular direct action. In short, the fight against the supermarkets must be generalised to a wholesale attack on the iniquitous systems and structures which enable them. Anything less is not enough.

The International W

The turn of the year saw the 85th anniversary of the IWA's founding in Berlin. In 1923, the IWA decided to establish an (anarcho-)syndicalist International in the 50 years before the

Many basic tenets of anarcho-syndicalism developed within the 1st International. After the split between anarchists and Marxists in 1872 the anarchist wing of the International, with a membership of 150,000, still had influence beyond its numbers. Throughout the 1870s, it assisted the development of anarcho-syndicalism.

To combat the increasing global centralisation of capitalism it argued for national and international industrial organisation within individual sectors of the economy. The idea was to build a strong, co-ordinated International in two dimensions. 'Horizontally', there would be general workers' organisations, formed on the basis of locality. Then, 'vertical' organisation was envisaged to provide regional, national and global solidarity within industries facing the same problems. This was the basic structure that was to be adopted by the emerging anarcho-syndicalist unions some 25 years later.

In 1877, the International warned that unions aimed solely at improving workers conditions "will never lead to the emancipation of the working class; their ultimate goal must be to expropriate the possessing classes, thereby suppressing wage slavery and delivering the means of production into the hands of the workers".

Soon after, however, state repression and economic downturn forced the workers on to the defensive and the international movement went into deep decline. The 1880s and 90s saw minimal anarchist influence on the workers movement. It was also a period that saw the founding in 1889 of the 2nd International, dedicated to the parliamentary road to socialism, from which anarchists were expressly barred in 1896.

revolutionary syndicalism

However, by 1906 revolutionary syndicalism had exploded on to the scene, driven by growing working class discontent. The possibility of a new revolutionary International was soon raised. Thus, at the 1907 International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam, revolutionary syndicalist delegates discussed closer international links. The outcome was the *Bulletin International du Mouvement Syndicaliste*, financed by syndicalist organisations in the Netherlands, Germany, Bohemia, Sweden and France.

In the next few years, revolutionary syndicalism made rapid headway internationally. Then in 1912 simultaneous calls for an International were issued by the Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL) in Britain and the Dutch Nationaal Arbeids Secretariaat (NAS). Syndicalist unions in Ger-

many, Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Spain and the USA endorsed these calls. However, they were not welcomed by the French Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) which opposed the idea of a revolutionary syndicalist International for reasons peculiar to the development of French syndicalism. As the first union organisation there, the CGT was attempting to organise all workers, including those who supported reformism. Some French anarcho-syndicalists therefore advocated the idea of a 'conscious' group of revolutionaries organising within the CGT to convince workers of the need for revolutionary change and to protect the organisation from reformism.

The CGT revolutionaries extended this to the reformist International, the ISNTUC (International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres). The revolutionary CGT would work to convince the reformist International of the need for revolution. Pointing out that most unions were in the ISNTUC, they called on syndicalist organisations to agitate within ISNTUC rather than set up a separate International. In this call the CGT was alone. Most revolutionary syndicalists were overtly hostile to ISNTUC; many had been separated or expelled from unions affiliated to it.

With only the CGT opposed, a conference took place in London in

BULLETIN INTERNATIONAL

Quatrième année

du Mouvement Syndicaliste

Hebdomadaire

ADRESSE : Christian CORNELISSEN, Bourg-la-Reine (Seine)

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Syndicalisme et antimilitarisme en Allemagne. Un certain nombre de militants des syndicats révolutionnaires allemands se trouvent depuis six semaines déjà en détention préventive après les arrestations pour propagande anti-militariste, qui ont eu lieu à Berlin, dans la

Workers Association

Berlin in December 1922 and January 1923. Here, we look at the struggle to
between the demise of the 1st International and the events in Berlin

September 1913. In attendance were delegates from Britain, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Poland, Spain, Cuba, Brazil and Argentina, representing a combined membership of some 300,000. Also present were observers from various IWW affiliates as well as delegates from propaganda organisations like the ISEL and various anarchist organisations.



scene from the 1913 International Syndicalist Congress in London

The conference attempted to codify the basic principles of revolutionary syndicalism. Nowhere was this clearer than on the issue of political neutrality. While the CGT had never explicitly stated its opposition to political parties, only the need for independence from them, the 1913 conference voiced total opposition to the state, capitalism and political parties of all forms, whose very existence is geared to capturing state power.

However, no new revolutionary syndicalist International was created. The French CGT was greatly esteemed and some were reluctant to set up a new organisation without it. There was also an opinion that the CGT would inevitably split into reformists and revolutionaries with the latter joining a revolutionary International at a later date. Instead a temporary measure was agreed, the Syndicalist Information Bureau in Amsterdam, to coordinate solidarity, exchange information and organise a further international conference. Importantly, the 1913 conference

represents the first effort to bring the various strands of anarcho-syndicalist thinking into one overarching set of basic principles. Delegates departed charged up by a successful conference and the prospect of establishing an International as the first stage in overthrowing capitalism.

Little did they realise that within a year workers would be slaughtering each other in the carnage of World War I. The war halted the moves towards an International and individual syndicalist organisations were left to organise opposition within their own countries which saw, both in America and Europe, numerous syndicalists imprisoned and many executed. Meanwhile many reformist unions used the war to eradicate the growing syndicalist threat of by signing no-strike agreements in return for sole negotiation rights.

It was not until 1918 that an international syndicalist meeting took place. Held in Holland, delegates attended from Norway, Sweden and Denmark, but those from Germany were refused entry. The meeting

agreed to a new international conference but the Dutch government banned this and attempts to reorganise it in Denmark and Sweden were similarly halted.

bolsheviks

By this time events in Russia had cast a shadow causing major splits among syndicalists and disrupting moves towards a revolutionary syndicalist International. There was a lack of knowledge about the real nature of the Bolsheviks but even those anarcho-syndicalists with misgivings saw in it an organisation that had constantly opposed the war calling for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. So, when they called for an international conference many anarcho-syndicalists welcomed it. With both worker unrest and syndicalist organisations growing speedily, many reasoned that world revolution could happen shortly so a united revolutionary organisation was an urgent necessity.

For his part, with the international communist movement still weak in 1918, Lenin needed the support of

syndicalist organisations. Only the Russian syndicalists were not in-vited – in fact the Bolsheviks had banned the 3rd All Russian Conference of Anarcho-Syndicalists a few months before the international conference took place in March 1919 in Moscow. Due to travel restrictions few delegates arrived from beyond Russia. The meeting did little more than establish the 3rd International, or Comintern (CI), and call for the immediate seizure of power by the working class under the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’.

speaking out

After the conference syndicalist attitudes changed. Come the end of the civil war, Russian anarcho-syndicalists who had refused to speak out against the Bolsheviks while the revolution was under threat, now began to do so. The truth about the Bolsheviks increased the doubts about entering an International with them and the Swedish SAC and German FAUD called for a separate syndicalist International.

Hence, the 2nd meeting of the CI in 1920 took place in changed circumstances. Before the conference the Bolsheviks announced a new international trade union body, the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU). Syndicalists were handed a manifesto, *To Syndicalists of all Nations*, with a clear message – the world syndicalist movement was to be subordinate to the communist political leadership in Moscow. It argued for a “close indestructible alliance between the communist party and the trade unions” and for the setting up of communist cells within reformist unions to capture the leadership. Syndicalists rejected this out of hand.

In the conference the Bolsheviks presented a further document stating that the proletariat cannot accomplish revolution without a political party leading it. They argued that the aim of the revolution was to capture state power under the communist party leadership and explicitly repudiated the basic principles of revolutionary syndicalism.

The syndicalist delegates presented passionate and powerful defences of syndicalism. Jack Tanner, from the Shop Stewards’ Movement in Britain, agreed with the idea of a conscious revolutionary minority but pointed out that, if this formed into a party, it would become

detached from the workers’ struggle and a slave to its own power interests.

The German anarcho-syndicalist, Souchy, stressed the idea that “revolutionary theory should derive from the conscious development of the ten-

dencies and means embedded in the workers’ actual struggle with the bourgeoisie”; that a successful International must encompass “the living spirit of the working class movement... found not in the heads of theoreticians but in the hearts of workers”. Replying to the Bolshevik view that workers could not organise the economy without a communist party, Souchy asked: “Who is to organise the economy? Some bourgeois elements which we organise into parties, who are not in touch



Ángel Pestaña

with...economic life, or rather those...near the source of production and consumption?” Perhaps the most telling speech was by Pestaña, from the Spanish CNT, about how revolutions happen. He ridiculed the idea that political parties organise revolutions, arguing that they blossom from complex evolutionary processes. For Pestaña, the revolution would emerge when there was “a spiritual condition favourable to change in the norms that govern the life of the people”, brought about when there was a critical difference between “the people and their aspirations and the organisations that govern them”. He openly mocked the idea that the Bolsheviks organised the Russian revolution, calling their seizure of power a “coup d’état”. As he put it, the Russian revolution was one thing; the Bolshevik seizure of power quite another.

founding the IWA

It took a further meeting of the RILU before the syndicalists abandoned it. In 1920 a syndicalist conference adopted seven points to be accepted by the RILU so that syndicalists could join it. The most important were that the RILU must be completely independent of political parties and that the socialist reorganisation of society could only be carried out by the economic organisations of the working class. All seven points were duly rejected and the final breach between revolutionary syndicalism and Bolshevism had occurred. At the 1921 FAUD Congress, syndi-



Augustin Souchy, 1958

article based on
unit 13, *A History
of Anarcho-
Syndicalism*, 24
pamphlets down-
loadable for free
from
www.selfed.org.uk

calist delegates from Germany, Sweden, Holland, Czechoslovakia and the USA agreed on an international congress in Berlin in 1922 to form a new International of revolutionary syndicalists.

In December 1922 and January 1923 the International Congress of Syndicalists met in Berlin with delegates from the Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (FORA), the Chilean IWW, the Danish Union for Syndicalist Propaganda, the German FAUD, the Dutch NAS, the Italian Unione Sindacale Italiana (USI), the Mexican Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT), the Norwegian Norsk Syndikalistisk Federation (NSF), the Portuguese Confederação Geral do Trabalho (CGT) and the Swedish Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation (SAC). The Spanish CNT, engaged in a bitter struggle with the Spanish state, sent messages of support after their delegation was arrested on the way to Berlin. Though many organisations present had already endured severe state repression, they still totalled several million workers.

Russian lessons

The Congress codified anarcho-syndicalism into several basic principles. In general, this was based on the work of the 1913 conference but also took on board lessons from the Russian revolution.

For instance, earlier advocates of the general strike had argued that workers' economic power was such that a largely peaceful transfer of power could take place. The Russian revolution had dispelled this notion. The Congress recog-

nised the social general strike as the highest expression of direct action. But, as the prelude to social revolution, it would probably have to be defended by violent means. While recognising that violence may be necessary, the Congress stipulated that defence of the revo-



the revolutionary syndicalist minority of the CGT meeting in 1922

lution should be completely in the hands of the workers, organised in workers' militias accountable to and controlled by the wider workers' movement.

Centralism, political parties, parliamentarianism and the state, including 'dictatorship of the proletariat', were emphatically rejected. Also rejected was the Marxist concept of liberation "by virtue of some inevitable fatalism of rigid natural laws which admit no deviation".

The programme also clarified that syndicalism opposed not only economic inequality, but all inequality and dominance. It also stated total opposition to war and militarism. In terms of post-capitalist organisation, the programme envisaged a system of economic communes and administrative organs, based within a system of free councils federated locally, regionally and up to the global level. These would be the basis of a self-managed society in which workers in every branch of industry would regulate production and distribution according to the needs and interests of the community, by mutual agreement and according to a predetermined plan. The revolutionary aim was stipu-

lated as seeking to replace the government of people by the management of things.

The IWA founding congress was a watershed in the development of anarcho-syndicalism. Ideas and tactics developed via practical direct action and self-organisation across the world were brought together and distilled into a clear set of principles. These described the fundamental core of anarcho-syndicalism and remain just as relevant today. For the first time anarcho-syndicalism was clearly defined as an international movement.

postscript

In the next few years unions and propaganda groups from France, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Poland and Rumania affiliated to the IWA. Later, ACAT (American Continental Association of Workers) affiliated en bloc, with unions and propaganda groups from Chile, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, Cuba, Costa Rica and El Salvador.

However, the IWA had formed against a background of mounting repression. Even at the Berlin Congress, the USI warned of the rise of fascism. In the 1920s the USI had some 600,000 members but within a few years of Mussolini coming to power the fascists had annihilated it. This was followed by the merciless destruction of the German FAUD by the Nazis. The CNT in Spain was executed out of existence by Franco during and after the 1936-9 Spanish revolution. By the end of World War II much of the pre-war anarcho-syndicalist movement was wiped out leaving a handful of smaller organisations struggling to keep the movement alive.

No such thing as class?

Politicians, academics and social commentators are continually telling us there is no longer such a thing as class in modern Britain. Notions of belonging to the working class are, we are told, outdated and belong to the era of flat caps, factories, steel works and going down the pit. However no matter how many times we are told this we seem determined not to believe it. In a Guardian/ICM poll in October 2007 most British people still feel bound by class; with a massive majority – 89 per cent – of those surveyed feeling their social standing determines the way they are judged by the rest of society.

In this series we will be reporting on the continuing evidence that keeps emerging showing that there are fundamental differences in our society and that these differences are firmly rooted in social class.

Gap between rich and poor 'widest in 40 years'

Britain is becoming an even more segregated society with the gap between rich and poor reaching its highest level for more than 40 years.

During the past 15 years there has been an increase in the number of households living below the poverty line, with these households accounting for more than half of all families in areas of some cities, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

At the same time, house-



holds in already wealthy areas have tended to become disproportionately wealthier, with many rich people now living in areas segregated from the rest of society.

Since 1970 levels of poverty and wealth in different areas of Britain have changed signifi-

cantly, with the country now moving back towards levels of inequality last seen more than 40 years ago.

The group, which drew up a poverty and wealth map for Britain, said there was evidence of increasing polarisation, with rich and poor now living further apart.

Stating the bleedin' obvious

A recent report by the National Children's Bureau (NCB), Family and Parenting Institute and the Institute of Education, has examined what happens to children at home and in school, and explains the complex dynamics of inherited disadvantage. The report used data from a study that tracked 17,000 people born in 1970. It may be no surprise to know that a child born to a labourer is six times more likely to suffer extreme poverty by the age of 30 than a child born to a lawyer.

CNT Grows in Seville

In London recently, SolFed had a visitor from the Seville local of our Spanish sister organisation, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT). We were able to learn about the local's activities over the last seven years, where, in his words, they changed from being an anarchist group to a union organised on anarchist principles.

In the year 2000, refuse collectors in Tomares, near Seville, went on strike. The CNT got involved and did a lot of solidarity work, both physical and financial, with the result that the workers involved joined after they won. In 2001 they had to strike again, and again they won.

This was important because it gave the local union a lot more confidence. They began training militants in labour and contract law and negotiations. The new confidence also led to approaches to groups of workers in struggle, such as the strike of train hostesses on the AVE (high speed railway) in Andalusia in 2004, which was won. In 2005, the CNT aided the AUSSA tow truck drivers strike,

which was also eventually won. Since then, there have been strikes of cleaners at both universities in Seville, in newspaper distribution and disputes in supermarkets and hotels. In the German-owned Plus supermarkets, the FAU (German IWA section) were able to offer solidarity though, unfortunately, this was the only dispute in the period that the CNT lost.

grown tenfold in Seville in seven years. This growth hasn't been unique to Seville; in other cities, especially Barcelona, there have been similar experiences. The effect of the Mercadona supermarket strike in Barcelona has been to make the CNT the first point of call for workers in that supermarket in other parts of Spain.

The key factors in this growth have been self-confidence; approaching workers, rather than waiting for them to come along; using the internet and other technologies (some disputes have been won merely by making a blog about the company); training militants and legal support.

The CNT has



AVE train hostesses picket line



strikers in Tomares doing a 'full monty'-style publicity stunt

CNT in the Madrid Metro Strike

Early January saw the end of a CNT Metro cleaning workers' strike in Madrid. The Sindicato de Oficios Varios, the general membership branch of the Madrid local federation of the CNT, after a long struggle which relied on direct action, demonstrations and the strike itself, views the result of the action as only a partial success.



While those sacked and on disciplinaries got their jobs back and while management stood down, the workers eventually signed an agreement with Metro bosses that would stop any mobilisations and strikes until 2012. The CNT refused to sign the agreement with management, a stance that was not taken by most other unions in the dispute. The

communist CCOO did not even back the strike, letting its members go in to work, and the socialist UGT and the "radical" CGT held meetings with bosses behind the backs of the Strike Committee and reported agreements made to workers' assemblies. The CNT constantly fought for the workers' assembly to be

the decision-making body in this and other disputes. Instead, many workers' assemblies were conducted like political meetings with parties and other unions telling workers what to do.

On the one hand, as the CNT is one of many unions organising in the Madrid Metro; this shows its weakness. But, on the other hand, the fact that the CNT was often the only union to go on demos, to picket and inform workers and the public of what was happening, together with its arguments in favour of horizontal decision-making shows how powerful a workplace-based union can be that is not dependent on massive state subsidies (such as the UGT, CCOO and CGT receive). The Madrid Metro workers' strike shows yet again how unions that accept positions on Workplace Committees and monies from the state for their participation in union elections can never reflect their members' views and needs. Only a union that is fully controlled and accountable to its membership can produce the goods.

For further info in Spanish see: <http://www.cnt.es/sovmadrid/comunicamos4.htm#tomapazymoja>.

On yer Strike Bike

Abicycle factory in Nordhausen, Germany became a flagship of workers' resistance for 5 days. Instead of taking the threat of insolvency of the factory lying down, 122 of the original workforce of 135 took the initiative by occupying the factory. To support themselves, the self-managing workforce produced 1,837 of the distinctive red 'strike bikes', paying themselves an hourly wage of 10 euros.



The insolvency administrator has moved in, changed the locks on the factory and appointed a 'rescue' company. This has not dimmed the resolve of the workers who continue their defiance with the assistance and support of the Free Workers' Union, FAU and others. It is hoped that more strike bikes will be made in the future. An upcoming newsletter of latest developments will shortly be made available on: www.strike-bike.de.

Strikes 'n Struggles in Russia

The following report is adapted from one sent by the Confederation of Revolutionary Anarcho-Syndicalists (KRAS), SoFed's sister organisation in Russia.

The strike movement in Russia is linked to high inflation. Prices for food and some other necessities have increased 50-70% since the beginning of 2007 and this is far from the end. Economists say prices will rise again by 50% during the winter! The inflation, strikes and the brutal reaction of the Russian state have one source – the criminal structure of Russia's social, political and economic system.

The economy of Putin's Russia is based on monopolies. They are almost everywhere and all of them are connected to some state bureaucrat or other, or with friends of friends of Putin. (Naturally these monopolies pay big money to the bureaucrats.) This third world economy has only one aim - to provide prosperity for the gangsters at the top of the pyramid of the new rich and state functionaries. At the top is Mr Putin whose untold wealth equals about US\$40 billion.

These people are not interested in any 'negotiations' with the workers and many are former criminals or KGB offi-

cial and don't understand what 'negotiations' mean. However, all the functionaries know their time is limited; they can lose power during a struggle to the death between different factions.

With Putin having to stand down as president under the constitution, it is urgent for these people to make money as



ford workers during a previous strike

fast as they can. They use any methods available against strikers and protesters – judicial prohibition as well as police and criminal violence. For example, the courts have declared almost all strikes 'illegal' in the past few months and some union leaders have been attacked by the police or mafia.

It is against this background that a strike broke out at the Ford car factory in Saint Peters-

burg last November. About 1,700 workers joined the strike out of a total workforce of about 2,200. The main demand of the workers was for a 30-40% wage increase (i.e. less than inflation). At present Ford workers earn about US\$500 per month, which is quite good by Russian standards. In Saratov (with one million inhabitants) the salary of industrial

workers, doctors and teachers is about US\$150 dollars per month and it is quickly shrinking because of inflation.

KRAS called on the workers to stop following the union leaders and to organise a general assembly and make all decisions themselves. The factory was occupied by the OMON special police forces. Union leaders were very angry at the propaganda from KRAS.

As for the workers themselves, they told us privately that they understand that their trade union cannot help them, but they are afraid to take direct action, and they are afraid of the state law and police. They also had financial problems in sustaining the strike and returned to work in mid December after Ford agreed to raise wages

but not by the full amount claimed and to negotiate a settlement regarding other matters by February.

Ford was not the only strike in St Petersburg in November. The dockers' union paralysed the port on November 13th. However, the courts ruled this action was illegal and the union called off the strike after a few

days.

KRAS say that the unions' insistence on following the letter of the law and obeying orders to stop strikes will prevent them winning. They note that this approach is "madness everywhere in the world because of the neoliberal politics of capitalism. But especially it is madness here in our third world primitive rude dictatorship of criminals and the KGB!"

Indigenous Struggles in Venezuela

The following is adapted from the November 2007 edition of *El Libertario*, circulated by Comisión de Relaciones Anarquistas, CRA, de Venezuela. *El Libertario* has an English section – see <http://www.nodo50.org/elibertario/english.html>.

At the second Zapatista/indigenous international meeting in Mexico during July last year, members of the Wayuu, a Venezuelan indigenous community, reaffirmed their autonomy from the government of Hugo Chavez. The Zapatistas declared them “the first Venezuelan indigenous community to come without the red shirt and cap” (this being associated with Chavez).

The Wayuu delegation, participating fully in the workshops, pointed out that the information then in circulation via the Venezuelan state and

from speeches by Chavez outside Venezuela, gave a false impression. Instead, everything was not okay with the indigenous communities in Venezuela. They reported that “no deputy speaks in favour of the indigenous communities threatened by coal interests”; that “all the Perijá mountain range [on the Venezuela-Colombia border] was going to be given in concession”; and that “the indigenous ministry was managed by the government, not by the indigenous people..., [who] did not vote to found the ministry....”

Wayuu delegate, Jorge Montiel, continued to *El Libertario*: “We also made clear that we are not chavistas or anti-chavistas: we are indigenous people against imperialism and capitalism. If we were antichavistas we would be running for high



‘no to coal in the Sierra de Perijá’

positions in the opposition. If we were chavistas we would be running for deputy in the assembly, the legislative council or running for councillor. We are in the middle, standing for our own interest, which is the land.”

Some of this did not go down too well with North Americans present, who favoured the Chavista approach, but it was pointed out that they had not been to the area and were unaware of the real situation.

The Wayuu established relations with organizations from France, Italy and Spain. Montiel explained: “They are going to visit us and we are going to visit their countries to speak about the indigenous consensus. We also had relations with anarchist groups, and they are going to

visit us too. We are multiplying and growing and we have no fear because we are fighting for our rights.”

Wayuu people, after this trip to Mexico, have started to suffer attacks and other retaliation. They had been invited by a state radio station to a National Venezuelan Radio workshop but all of a sudden they got notification they were no longer invited. The reason? Because they signed the letter delivered to the Zapatistas, regarding the Venezuelan indigenous situation. Asks Montiel: “Can’t we criticize anything?”, answering his own question thus “In Mexico we said: probably from now on there is going to be police persecution against us and our fellow ecologists...that’s the way coal people, transnational companies and their friends act



Wayuu territory straddles the Venezuela-Colombia border

The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life - by Georgy Katsiaficas



AK Press 2006 – 299 pages – £12.00 – ISBN: 9781904859536

This book traces the origins and histories of the European autonomists, dealing mainly with Germany and Italy from the late 60s to the mid 90s. There are accounts of strikes, occupations, riots and street fights with fascists and cops. The ‘subversion of politics’ is the author’s term for autonomous politics (“the complete uprooting of authoritarianism in our everyday lives”).

Italy’s ‘Hot Autumn’ of 1969 was a time of intense class conflict, as 5.5 million workers went on strike. Demonstrations, factory occupations and industrial sabotage were the order of the day. The Mirafiori Fiat plant in Turin was occupied with the explicit purpose of providing a base for the revolutionary organisation of workers.

In the mid 70’s the women’s movement in Italy began to impact on society. Feminists organised consciousness-raising groups, bookshops, journals, and women’s centres; they fought for reproductive rights and opposed male violence against women. 100,000 women demonstrated for abortion rights and illegal women-run abortion clinics were set up. Reclaim The Night marches began in Rome – “no longer mothers, no longer daughters, we’re going to destroy families”.

In February 1977 thousands of students occupied the University of Rome, in response to the shooting of unarmed student demonstrators by fascists. After the occupation was crushed by police 50,000 marched in Rome against

the police, the unions and the communists (PCI), and students went on strike all over Italy. In March Bologna police fatally shot an activist in the back. Two police stations were burned down and the main train station occupied. Police attacked the University and thousands of students and youth counter-attacked driving the cops back.

The West German anti-nuclear movement began with local opposition to a new nuclear plant in Wyhl. Hundreds of protesters occupied the construction site when building began in 1975, only to be brutally dispersed by the police. A few days later 28,000 demonstrated again and hundreds stayed on to establish a peace college dedicated to stopping the plant’s construction. At Brokdorf, near Hamburg, where 75% opposed a new nuclear plant, extra security measures were taken to prevent occupation. The site was surrounded by a moat, fence and barbed wire. When 30-45,000 protesters held a rally, 2,000 pressed through police lines, bridged the moat, tore down fencing and occupied a section of the site. Brokdorf was again the scene of a massive battle in 1981 as 100,000 attended a banned demonstration, converged on 10,000 police and soldiers, attacking them with sticks, rocks and molotovs.

In December 1980 police attacks on squats in West Berlin spiralled into mass arrests, street fighting and further occupations. Despite the increased state repression the number of squats increased dramatically both in West Berlin and

West Germany. Larger buildings were also taken to create cultural centres as well as living space.

After re-unification in 1990 the Autonomien’s energy was focused on the revitalised neo-nazi movement. Foreigners were being murdered and punks and squatters attacked by neo-nazi skinheads every month. The autonomists helped to physically defend immigrants from fascist attacks and fought street battles with fascists and police.

In rejecting the state, capitalism and power politics anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists share much with the autonomists. Likewise, the rejection of hierarchy and political leadership, emphasis on direct action, antagonism towards authority and property, and internationalist, anti-imperialist, anti-patriarchal perspectives all sound strangely familiar. Against theory for its own sake, for “building a new world in the shell of the old” and acting independent of and against union or party control, the parallels between anarcho-syndicalist and autonomist thought are striking.

It would appear that, not only did anarchists participate in these movements (which the author admits) but that anarchist ideas also proved extremely influential, whether acknowledged as such or not (although Katsiaficas seems intent at times on showing the opposite). Nevertheless, this is a thoroughly researched and interesting book which shows the massive potential of the militant self-organisation of a radical and combative working class.

Anti-Fascist Action: an Anarchist Perspective

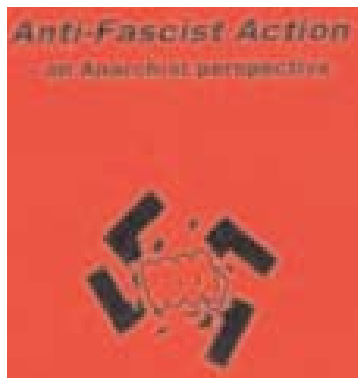
by an ex-Liverpool AFA member

Kate Sharpley Library 2007 – 22 pages – £2.00 – ISBN: 9781873605493

Anti-Fascist Action was formed in 1985 to counter the increasingly belligerent activities of the British National Party. At that time, the far right had embarked upon a strategy of provocative demonstrations, inevitably accompanied by racist attacks, which they had termed 'March and Grow'. Rising fascist movements have always placed great emphasis on controlling the streets, intimidating their opponents and presenting an image of strength.

AFA aimed to put a stop to all that by physically opposing BNP marches and by arguing that class, and not race, should command the allegiance of working people. AFA was open to everyone who accepted this basic approach of 'physical and ideological opposition to fascism'.

Though individuals could and did join AFA on this basis, it was organisations such as the Direct Action Movement (the forerunner of our very own Solidarity Federation), Red Action and Workers' Power from which AFA's steering committee drew its members. Despite their different political outlooks, these groups were able to co-operate on the basis of AFA's agreed policy, and organised a highly effective campaign which was largely responsible for



frustrating the aggressive tactics of the BNP. In November 1991, AFA mobilised 4,000 people for its own march through East London. The following year AFA again brought out big numbers to wreck a major

London gig by the Nazi music front, 'Blood & Honour'.

However, it would be a mistake to see AFA as a purely 'physical force' organisation. In addition to countering the BNP on the streets, it held public meetings and speaking tours, produced literature and a regular magazine, 'Fighting Talk'. It also launched 'Cable Street Beat', a network of bands and artists committed to spreading the anti-fascist message through gigs and tours. That 10,000 people attended AFA's 'Unity Carnival' in London in September 1991 was testament to the effectiveness of its work in areas contested by the BNP.

With far right marches and events being attacked, BNP members began to drift away and the party leadership split. For the time being, at least, it was anti-fascists

that had prevailed.

Ironically, success caused problems for AFA. Lacking the focus of regular mobilisations against a chastened BNP, differences of opinion surfaced as to the way forward for militant anti-fascism. One of the big differences was over electoralism. Red Action launched the Independent Working Class Association to contest local and national elections – partly to counter the BNP's new tactic of working through the ballot box, and partly to provide a working class alternative to Labour. Anarchists within AFA obviously disagreed with the possibility of bringing about change through councils and parliament, and the organisation declined.

This excellent pamphlet, written by a former member of both AFA and DAM/SF, does more than just tell AFA's story. It is a useful reflection on the problems and potentialities of anarchists working with others in broad anti-fascist movements. It documents an important and inspiring period in British anti-fascism. Moreover, at a time when support for the BNP is at worryingly high levels, it poses important questions for anarchists and other anti-fascists

as to how best to counter the far right now that it has largely abandoned street confrontation, toned down its overt racism and hidden its Nazi sympathies.



Emilio Canzi: An Anarchist Partisan in Italy and Spain

by Paolo Finzi & others

Kate Sharpley Library 2007 – 50 pages – £3.00 – ISBN: 9781873605295

Kate Sharpley Library, the anarchist archive and publisher, has a great tradition of reminding us of forgotten episodes of libertarian history. The Spanish Civil War and anarchist resistance to fascism are just two of the areas the KSL specialises in. Their latest pamphlet touches on both of these topics, telling as it does the astonishing story of Italian anarchist, Emilio Canzi.

Canzi was born in Piacenza in 1893. After service in the First World War, he became radicalised and joined the anarchist movement. By 1921, murderous fascist assaults on the Italian labour movement were being met in kind by a people's militia, the *Arditi del Popolo*. Canzi's military experience made him a natural trainer for the Arditi, and he was heavily involved in fighting fascism in the Piacenza area. After the death of a prominent local fascist in one such clash, Canzi moved to Rome, and thence into exile in France to escape jail, or worse. In Paris, he was active within the émigré anarchist community which had settled there.

When Franco tried to seize power in Spain, Canzi did not



hesitate to take up arms against fascism once more. He was one of the first foreign fighters to cross the border, and joined a CNT column on the Aragon front. But he found that not all enemies of freedom were in the trenches opposite him. In Barcelona in May 1937, he

witnessed the communist and republican attempt to seize power and destroy workers' control, and took part in the fighting there.

With the militarisation of the anti-fascist militias, Canzi joined the International Brigades, commanding a division of mainly Italian volunteers. Wounded in the assault on Huesca in June 1937, and increasingly disillusioned with the crushing of the early revolutionary gains by Stalinist and statist elements on the anti-Franco side, he returned to Paris, engaging in solidarity work

for the Spanish anarchists.

In October 1940, Canzi was captured in France by the Nazis and sent to a concentration camp in Germany. In 1942 he was returned to Italy, where he was given five years for his anti-fascist activities, and sent to the prison island of Ventotene. Escaping when Mussolini was overthrown, Canzi returned to Piacenza, forming the first armed group in the area and rising to command the resistance in the entire region. In 1945, Canzi oversaw the liberation of Piacenza from fascism, a task he had begun over 20 years earlier.



This pamphlet contains a series of articles examining various aspects of Canzi's extraordinary story. One author, Orazio Gobbi, concludes that "The human and political life of this anarchist constitutes an exemplary marriage of thought and deed...His ethical-political example remains valid for the present and for the future".

KSL is to be commended for continuing to publicise anarchism and restoring lost episodes of anarchist history to their rightful place.

KSL, BM Hurricane,
London, WC1N 3XX

Got no Time – cd by Drowning Dog – Entartete Kunst 2007 **Relive – cd by Deletist – Bitter Pie Records / Beats per Revolution 2006**

Two releases, one from Drowning Dog on DA's favourite no-field electronica label Entartete Kunst; the other from The Deletist whose previous release was also on Entartete Kunst.

'Got no time' is twelve tracks of hip hop produced by Malatesta and vocals delivered by Drowning Dog: it is politically up front class con-

scious anarchism. The beats are more relaxed, mixed with sampled spoken word and overlain by Drowning Dog's unhurried vocal



delivery – the tracks address class, minimum wage dead-end jobs, poverty, political power, the military industrial complex and the potential of anarchism to change all this for the better.

'Relive', a limited edition of 500, was recorded on the move across Europe and the US and is beautifully atmospheric music – it could be the soundtrack to a perfectly somnambulant European art house road movie. Mixing electronica with 'proper' instrumentation and occasionally vocals set back in the mix, if this was on vinyl it would be in danger of being worn through by



now.

For details on how to order, and for further info, check out:

www.entartetekunst.info
www.myspace.com/drowningdog
www.myspace.com/djmalatesta
www.deletist.info
www.myspace.com/deletist

Monarchy: Politics of Tyranny and Denial **by William Gladys with illustrations by Andymac**

Derek Books 2004 - 72 pages - £4.95 - ISBN: 9780954757502

The fine illustrations are laid out on alternate pages with the text on opposite sides explaining the issue and the cartoon. The author gets into most of the nooks and crannies of the 'Royals' and their antics – from their origins and name changes to querying Phillip's (referred to as Herr Battenberg!) 'citizenship' application.

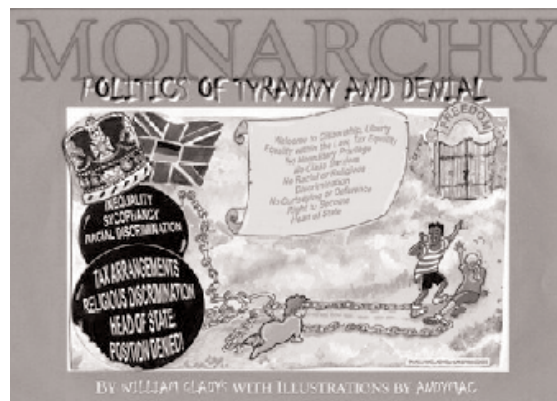
William Gladys points out that this book is dedicated to parents and children throughout the world who still have to endure this or any other form of absolute rule. Although the book contains cartoons the objective is to "put a smile on its reader's faces". The main endeavour is to help eradicate the scourge of monarchy from Britain and other countries unfortunate enough to continue being

chained and subjugated by it into the 21st century.

The text is 'politically' light with the aim, no doubt, being the younger reader. Nevertheless it's a fine attempt to fight back against the continual onslaught of 'Betty in the big house' propaganda and the added illustrations make it attractive all round to a younger readership. The author con-

cludes with this plea: "Parents and children: your charge is to eliminate inequality, and promote justice in Britain and throughout the rest of the deprived world, where autocratic Monarchy exists. Monarchy is a tyranny that denies people their natural choice of Citizenship and so much more."

A fun read.



Realizing the Impossible: Art against Authority

by Josh MacPhee and Erik Reuland

AK Press 2007 – 319 pages – £16.00 – ISBN: 9781904859321

This monochrome book arrived shortly after an interview with Banksy, the “graffiti artist”, had been aired on the BBC. A commentator went along to a working men’s (sic) club in Bethnal Green to view Banksy’s diversion of yellow road markings across the pavement and up the wall to blossom into a flower. Banksy says in the book, “Imagine a city where graffiti wasn’t illegal...a city which felt like a living breathing thing which belonged to everybody, not just real estate agents and the barons of big business”. The club secretary was quite pleased to leave it there. But not all graffiti is of artistic merit and many regard it as degrading the environment. Do graffitos adorn their own dwellings thus?

This is not one of those large-format books designed to grace middle-class shelves but is firmly entrenched in anti-authoritarian activism “towards anarchist art theories”. Whether we need anarchist art theories is a moot point.



“Just do it”, perhaps.

The work is wide-ranging: Picasso and Cubism, the forgotten women of Dadaism; Christiania in Copenhagen; the use of discarded x-ray film to create stencils for spray-painting slogans by Argentinean activists; Crass album covers; Zapatista “Insurgent Radio” and street puppetry; YouTube; video and more. The illustrations vary in quality and the lack of colour lessens the impact of some. Obviously colour would have pushed the price through the roof. There is more text than illustration with



lengthy essays that require attention, some being more academic.

As you would expect in such a work, ideas on the conventional art system and galleries vary. Luis Jacob, a Peruvian born artist living in Canada, manages to work within it, claiming that “at some level it is the gallery that must adapt itself to what I do as an artist”. Meanwhile Clifford Harper (“I don’t regard myself as an artist, by the way, I am a craftsman”) fulminates: “The whole thing – artists, art works, art theorists, art critics, art galleries, art schools, art money, the whole dismal thing is so compromised, so hopelessly fucking with the state – fame, greed, wealth, prestige – that it’s best left to its own degradation.”

Artists need to make a living in this capitalist system and in this they, like us, are compro-

mised. As Marianna Cortéz, the partner of Carlos Koyuikatl Cortéz, interjected when he was asked how he would advise anyone struggling to support themselves through art, “You need to have someone else working for you!”

Rudolf Rocker said, when writing of Rembrandt, “The artist became a rebel against his time and drew with keen clarity the boundary between his art and the national Philistinism of his land (*Nationalism and Culture* p.502). The artists in this work are rebels against the manipulating Philistines of our time. In the final essay Cindy Milstein writes, “The creative act – the arduous task of seeing something other than the space of capitalism, statism, the gender binary, racism, and other rooms without a view – is the hope we can offer to the world”.

This book is useful, not to encourage copycat actions, but to foster the imagination. There is inspirational work here aplenty and this review cannot encompass its breadth. A good buy.

Capitalism is a closer look at Situationism and why it

During the late 1950s and 60s the Situationist International (SI) developed arguably the most profound and far reaching critique of modern society for many decades. Although it now seems the height of hipness for arty intellectuals to make passing reference to situationism, few genuinely appreciate the distinctly revolutionary overtones of the SI's ideas. Often criticised for specialised language and abstract concepts (with some justification), these ideas nevertheless hold tremendous relevance today, perhaps more so than ever.

anarcho-syndicalism

Situationism has influenced, and been influenced by, anarcho-syndicalism. Larry Law, in one of the excellent *Spectacular Times* pamphlets, noted: "The remedies offered by the SI were taken from the history of autonomous workers' uprisings and, despite their protestations to the contrary, looted from the theories and experience of anarcho-syndicalists".

Resisting any attempt to pigeonhole their ideas, the SI emphasised real

life activity, continually experiencing and reinventing itself in preference to static, rigid ideologies like Trotskyism. Thus situationism is open to some degree of interpretation. The central idea underpinning it, however, is that workers are systematically exploited by capitalism, both in work and 'free' time. To liberate themselves from this, solidarity, organisation and ultimately taking control of the means of production is necessary, and free democratic workers' councils would form the basis of a new society.

The perceived limitation of this (a criticism often levelled

unfairly at anarcho-syndicalism) is that free collectivism, in organising workers as workers, merely ensures continuation of 'work' as defined by capitalism. Therefore workers' self-management must be seen only as a step in the longer term transi-

tion to a free society. Collectivising Tesco, McDonalds and Alton Towers is not what we're about. Revolution must be seen as a continual, dynamic process of reconstructing economic, social and interpersonal relationships.

In modern western societies, as the situationists noted, many no longer live in absolute poverty or spend 12 hours a day immersed in the grime of fields, factories and mines (largely due to the workers' movement in the last 150 years). But instead of being beaten down by overt and savage state repression, we are subjugated by the

poverty of everyday life.

distorted reality

Capitalism, they argued, subjects us to a distorted view of reality through a carefully concocted montage of 'spectacles' promoting mass consumption, social alienation and passivity. The spectacular images are a poor substitute for reality, serving our rulers' needs by reducing us to spectators and constantly reinforcing the values, structures and power relationships which capitalism holds so dear.

The capitalist spectacle, with its huge advertis-



Founders of the Situationist International, 1957. Left to right: Guiseppe Pinot Gallizio, Piero Simondo, Elena Verrone, Michele Bernstein, Guy Debord, Asger Jorn, and Walter Olmo.

Boring!!!!

is more relevant than ever

therapies, eco-friendlying machine, feeds us empty promises and an endless supply of consumer goods as the key to satisfying our desires. That most of these goods lack the life changing characteristics bestowed upon them by the flash imagery and celebrity-driven hype matters little. As Raoul Vaneigem argued, "the consumer cannot and must not attain satisfaction".

For example, it is common for magazine images of women to be manipulated so waist sizes are smaller and breasts larger in line with the projected 'ideal'. This ideal is further reinforced by fashion, TV and advertising. The resulting dissatisfaction prompts spending on a range of products and services, from 'because I'm worth it' cosmetics to major reconstructive surgery, in the pursuit of elusive perfection. This manufactured discontent sells literally millions of consumables. That the social cost is £1.3 trillion worth of UK consumer debt and prevalent feelings of inadequacy (reflected in eating disorders etc.) is irrelevant to capitalism. Profit for a few and the needs of the market are the overwhelming priorities.

foods, investment opportunities, investment opportunities Exploited both as producers and consumers, we buy back in our leisure time what we produce in work time. Far from being free, our leisure is increasingly mediated by an endless stream of commodities - Coca-Cola, Big Macs, Miramax movies, PCs, TVs, DVDs, CDs, MP3s or all manner of branded toys, gizmos and clothing. Leisure activities with their rules, user manuals and all-too-predictable outcomes, undermine our natural creativity and imagination. But the spectacle is not just confined to promoting wage-slavery and consumerism. All areas of our life are contaminated by it.

no government

Political elections, for example, feed us the illusion of choice and control over who rules us. In reality, the differences between the main parties are negligible. They all promote capitalism, economic growth and market economics. That these cause appalling social injustice, war and the hastening destruction of the natural world is immaterial. We can vote for whoever every five years, but the inference is that government is intrinsically good, not

tunities that it sanctions repressive social and economic relationships on behalf of a small elite. We cannot vote for no government.

Recently TV channels have been exposed for repeatedly rigging phone-in results. Political elections are no different; for all the appearance of 'choice', the outcome is a forgone conclusion.

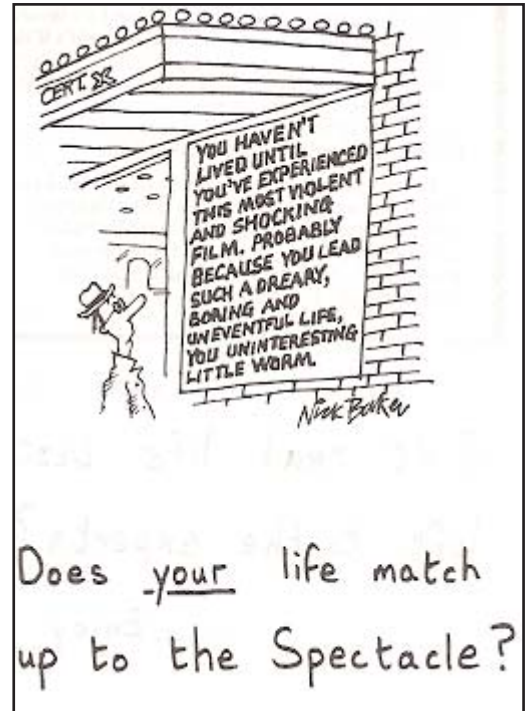
Real democracy involves freedom from coercion and exploitation and the ability to exercise choice and control over all decisions which affect our everyday lives.

recuperation

Another situationist concept, explaining how capitalism's spectacle maintains itself, is 'recuperation'. This is its ability to absorb a real threat, make it safe and sell its shadow back to us. Examples are all around us. The iconic image of Che Guevara sells everything from clothing to cigarette lighters. One current advert for a well-known

corporate pizza chain features a red Bolshevik-style background emblazoned with the heading "Join the Revolution". Pop culture is also laced with spurious opposition. For all their token rebellion, song titles such as "I predict a riot" offer nothing but a pretentious, tokenistic knee-jerk. The punk movement, for all its mutinous swagger, was pounced upon and engorged by market forces the minute it posed any threat. Both punk and hippy fashions have been aggressively marketed with their rebellious imagery gracing both the catwalk and high street boutiques.

Radical social movements as well are all too easily hijacked by capitalism. Flick through *The Ecologist* magazine where articles on environmental protest sit safely among a plethora of ads for alternative



therapies, eco-friendly foods, investment opportunities and dietary supplements. Reject the mainstream, but whatever you do, keep on consuming. Single issue campaigns like environmentalism, by projecting the issue as an isolated one, divert the well-intentioned down a fruitless blind alley by failing to expose the real sources of the problem: government and capital.

negotiating exploitation

The present trade unions are also part of the spectacle. Hierarchical, bureaucratic structures managed by professional leaders, they give the appearance of representing their members. Dividing workers by trade and workplace, they assist the bosses in negotiating the terms of our exploitation, rather than advocating and fighting for workers' control. As defensive organisations they often accept attacks on working conditions and living standards with barely a whimper. Proven (syndicalist) methods of organisation and effective industrial direct action are definite no-nos. Like single-issue campaigns, they nullify the threat of militancy by appealing to those in power, rather than actively challenging them. The bosses' fundamental 'right' to exploit us is never in question.

Vaneigem's classic quote that "people who talk about revolution and class struggle without

referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints, such people have a corpse in their mouths", is a poignant reminder of the limitations and stagnant authoritarian dogmas of the political left. Notably, most socialist (state-cap-



demonstration in Paris, May 1968

italist) regimes uphold highly autocratic and sexually repressive moral codes, reflecting deeply flawed ideologies.

In the last century (Kronstadt 1921, Spain 1936, Hungary 1956), the vanguardist left were instrumental in brutally suppressing workers' attempts to take control themselves. Since then, striking miners, G8 and poll tax protestors and others taking direct action have also been roundly condemned by Trotskyite groups for lacking the 'correct' analysis. This reveals a true contempt for the masses and ultimately a fear of any move which

may undermine their true intent to continue the spectacle of a few commanding the many.

Put simply, anything less than a complete attack on all oppressive social hierarchies and economic conditions which enslave us is not enough.

The situationists explained how authentic

ern social control retain enduring relevance.

Situationism, for all its 'we have a world to win and nothing to lose but boredom' sloganeering, was less descriptive however, in providing a practical strategy to realise its goals. This criticism can also be levelled at some anarchists and libertarian

Marxists. As Larry Law noted, "freedom could seem a bit empty if there is nothing to eat and the sewage is running in the streets".

Anarcho-syndical-

ism does rather better at articulating such a strategy. By promoting rank and file workplace solidarity, and through the process of struggle, it enables us to realise our strength to commandeer the means of life where it matters most, at the point of production. On the other hand, situationism forever warns us against the dangers of recuperation and complacency. True social liberation must supplant all relationships based on hierarchy and power, not just those in the workplace. For this reason, revolutionary change must be seen as a permanent and never-ending process.

may 1968

The pinnacle of the SI's influence was in the Revolt of May 1968, when 10 million French workers went on general strike, bringing France to the brink of revolution. Today the significance of situationism remains immense. The observations on the cultural influence of consumer-capitalism and analysis of the spectacular mechanisms of mod-

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