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FREE/DONATION

Catalyst

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British section of the International Workers' Association

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER

Statement of intent: Students occupy the roof of Tory Party HQ. Was it the start of a militant anti-cuts movement?

OCTOBER 20TH saw the unveiling of the long-awaited Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), the coalition government's detailed blueprint for attacking jobs and services. Little within the CSR was a surprise, with cuts roughly at the level that had been predicted in the run up. It is significant that the scale was below the 40% that had been mooted, this was a blatant attempt to 'soften us up' and feel lucky the cuts were "only" 20%, as if it had been taken straight out of the pages of 'Negotiation for Dummies'.

These attacks are directed across the entire working class, with no section spared. Savage attacks on the unemployed, sick and disabled sit alongside mass public sector redundancies, attacks on parents side by side with increasing prices through the VAT hike. Despite the government's rhetoric, this is a wholesale assault on us all. The basic safety net of the welfare state is being dismantled before our very eyes. This can't be seen as just a slight rejigging of government spending, but an attempt to significantly shift the balance from the majority of us to the richest, and to redefine the support an individual can expect from society.

The government claim the cuts are needed to reduce the deficit and deal with the recession. Most major economists predict they will have the opposite effect. However, it is not just a case of "nasty Tories" - all the political parties would have been

forced to make very similar cuts at this point.

The only way their plans can be derailed is if we simply do not accept their imposition, and make the country ungovernable.

The capitalist system requires constant attacks on the working class to be profitable, and here it continues. During the recession, boardroom pay went up 55%. While some on the left may lie about or whitewash the past to hide Labour's

complicity in the cuts, it is important that the movement to resist them is not tarnished with Labour's discredited legacy.

As this is an attack on us all, it is only on that basis it can be successfully fought - the opposition to the cuts must be on a class-wide basis. It is no good a multitude of separate contesting campaigns resisting the cuts "in their area". This will allow the government to divide and rule, and if we are arguing over where the cuts should fall we are doing their job for them. Nor can we win just by making good arguments and appealing to the rational

judgement of politicians. The only way to stop these cuts is by making their implementation impossible.

In the early 1990s, the anti-Poll Tax movement refused to go along with the tax and in the end the government withdrew it. In France, millions have been refusing to accept changes to pensions. Here, students have been showing a willingness to fight not seen in decades. The coalition imagine they can overcome any resistance to their plans. The only way their plans can be derailed is if we simply do not accept their imposition, and make the country ungovernable.



'All joined up'

Page 2: Interview with a striking French teacher about the movement.



Housing benefits slashed

Page 3: Catalyst speaks to a claimant.



Opinion

Page 7: Time to act - why class still matters in Britain.

Student riots: the angry, not the anarchists

ON NOVEMBER 10th, the National Union of Students (NUS) and Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) organised a demonstration against cuts in education, which ended in an occupation of Tory offices at Millbank, with smashed windows and arrests. Two weeks later, tens of thousands of students marched in towns across the country, taking over roads and buildings and scuffling with police. The Solidarity Federation, which puts out Catalyst, has been one of the groups suggested in the press as the ringleaders of the trouble. Not only do we refute this, we call for more direct action against the cuts.

Of course some of our members - those studying or working in higher education - were at the demonstrations, but we cannot take credit for the storming of 30 Millbank or the events two weeks later when even a brief look at the video and photo evidence available shows that a wide cross-section of the national student community took part.

It is absurd and grossly patronising to attempt to pin such a widespread outpouring of anger on the heads of an apparent "hardcore of troublemakers" or "protest junkies," in articles that sit alongside footage of student participants confirming that this was their first ever demonstration. Even if we were inclined to manipulate and control crowds, the chances of us successfully doing so as

a small minority in the midst of irate thousands are surely minimal. What must really terrify the politicians is to see how red and black flags and masks have been hugely outnumbered by the hyped-up faces of students rejecting cuts to their education - cuts which now bear the fingerprints of all three major political parties.

Against this backdrop then, the treachery of NUS President Aaron Porter, who called the Millbank occupation "despicable" and accused genuinely angry students of "hijacking" his march, looks worse and worse. We can only assume that Porter is concerned about the effect that this will have on his credentials as a future Labour Party high-flyer, following in the footsteps of Jack Straw, Phil Woolas, and the like in using the NUS as a stepping stone into professional politics. The NUS is out of touch with ordinary students and we recommend they continue to organise themselves, rather than rely on the careerists

- something which happened in places on the 24th.

Following the demonstrations, students occupied universities across the country. Students are already making links with university staff and future students in further education and schools, who are hit particularly hard by the fees as well as the removal of the Education Maintenance Allowance. This can be a truly effective movement if these encouraging developments continue.

We hope students will be the first of many to directly reject the cuts which affect us all and we will continue to organise against this scorched-earth austerity plan in our workplaces and neighbourhoods, democratically and independently of union leaders and politicians bleating the mantra "business as usual." Only through struggle - direct action and solidarity between workers, students, the unemployed and the retired - can we fight back in this class war of the rich against the rest.



1871

The Paris Commune: Insurrectionary workers seize the city and create a radically democratic commune run by the workers themselves.



1917

The Russian Revolution: Workers form free councils and overthrow the government. The Bolshevik party disbands the councils and drowns the revolution in blood.



1936

The Spanish Revolution: The Spanish working class responds to a fascist coup by launching the most far-reaching social revolution yet.



1956

Hungary '56: Workers rebel against the so-called 'workers state' and again form free councils, until Stalin's tanks roll in.



1968

Mai '68: French students riot and 10 million workers join an unofficial general strike. Similar struggles ripple around the world.



1990

The Poll Tax: London burns from heavy rioting, but it was the direct action of 17 million people refusing to pay that finished the tax - and Thatcher - off.

DIRECT ACTION

With the growing student movement not content to simply march, direct action is the word on everybody's lips...

Direct Action is a notion of such clarity, of such self-evident transparency, that merely to speak the words defines and explains them. It means that the working class, in constant rebellion against the existing state of affairs, expects nothing from outside people, powers or forces, but rather creates its own conditions of struggle and looks to itself for its means of action.

- Émile Pouget

What is it?

DIRECT ACTION is, as the name may imply, action taken without any mediator between those taking it and the desired aim. Rather than pleading with our 'betters' to make changes for us, direct action is the practice of simply doing it for ourselves. Recognising that in a society defined by rule of the capitalist class - bosses, politicians, bankers - over the rest of us, all that we can achieve is what we can force from the capitalists with our collective strength. The practice of direct action is therefore about imposing our collective power, and leaving those who run society no choice but to accede to what we demand. Directly in opposition to party politics, direct action sees that only when we act for ourselves - without being represented by politicians, unions or any other would be representative - do we have the ability to change the world, and begin to shape it in our interests.

"100,000 proletarians armed to the teeth are nothing if they place their trust in anything beside their own power to change the world."

Some direct action methods

Verbal protest // walkout // partial strike // go slow // work-to-rule // limited strike // checkerboard strike // indefinite strike // picket line // occupation // demonstrations // economic blockade // rumours // discrediting // sabotage // reappropriation // (unauthorised) sale of stock // autonomous production // unauthorised work // 'good work strike' // boycott // civil disobedience // generalised strike // general strike // insurrectionary general strike // expropriatory general strike... and many many more.



What is it not?

DIRECT ACTION has nothing to do with voting or party politics. It has nothing to do with publicity stunts like dressing up in a superhero costume and climbing a landmark. Direct action is not violence, nor is it necessarily non-violent. Direct action is not necessarily illegal, although effective methods are often criminalised (such as the flying pickets used successfully to spread strikes in the 1970s). Direct action is not a form of protest: protest complains about a problem, direct action does something about it.

These are all however popular misconceptions, spread by both the media and many activists alike. But in divorcing the practice of direct action from the class struggle, by associating it with individual stunts or creative forms of protest, such misconceptions help deprive workers of the most powerful weapon we have: ourselves, and our collective power to change the world.

2011?

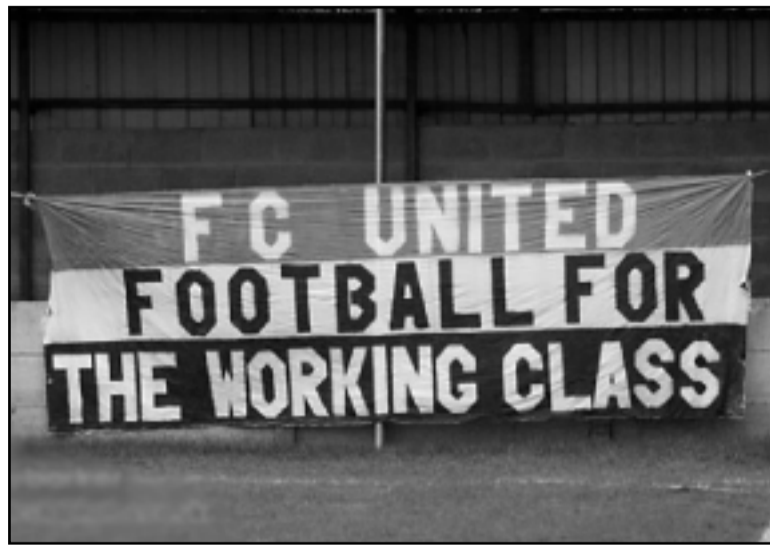
This is just the beginning: To beat the cuts we must make history!

“Making friends not millionaires”

ONE EVENING in May 2005 at a curry house in Manchester a group of disillusioned Manchester United fans decide they'd had enough. Billionaire Malcolm Glazer's takeover of the club was the final straw in a long line of events, including changing kick off times for the benefit of television and ridiculously priced tickets. They decided to do the unthinkable; form their own football club.

Fast forward to Bonfire Night 2010 and that club, FC United of Manchester (FCUM) beat Rochdale in the first round of the FA Cup. Over 3,500 FC fans celebrated this achievement of a club that set out to do things in a radically different way.

Owned by its fans, FCUM is based on seven core principles including the board being democratically elected by members, decisions taken on a one member, one vote basis, a commitment to avoid outright commercialism and remaining a non-profit organisation. Two slogans of the club are “Making friends not millionaires” and “punk football”: its radical outlook has secured links with others including the infamous Hamburg club FC St Pauli.



Last year FCUM and the Working Class Movement Library commissioned the Outcasts exhibition to commemorate the centenary of the 1909 strike by players from Manchester United who refused to relinquish their membership of the players union and were called “Outcasts FC”. For a club so aware of its roots and history, it was no surprise to find that the day after the biggest night in their short history the club declined to appear on the BBC's Football Focus in solidarity with

a strike by the National Union of Journalists members at the BBC. Although strike-breaking BBC staff told FCUM officials that the dispute only involved newsroom journalists and didn't cover sport, this subterfuge was quickly discovered by the club. Subsequently, Football Focus carried a brief report from Old Trafford about FCUM's victory without interviews from players, board and supporters, but the location of the programme, provided a stark, and ironic, contrast to the principles of FCUM.

Sudoku

Fill the grid so that every column, row and 3x3 square includes all the numbers from 1 to 9.

8	7			2			1	
4	1	6				9		
		3		7		8		
	5		3		9			
	9						4	
			5		7		8	
		5		8		1		
		7				4	5	2
9			2				7	8

Pensions under threat

Divide and rule game looks to undermine private **and** public sector workers' retirements

THE NUMBER of people with final salary pensions in the private sector has declined dramatically in recent years. There are now only 3.6 million private sector employees in company pensions and many of those are in middle and upper management. The savaging of private company pensions has left millions more dependent on the meagre basic state pension in old age, a state pension that an OECD report published in June 2009, found to be one of the worst in the developed world with income on average just 31% of pre-retirement earnings.

To add insult to injury the government now intends to force people to work even longer to earn the poverty level state pension. The coalition government has brought forward Labour plans to increase the pension age starting in 2020 when the retirement age will rise to 66 years old. The justification for this rise in the pension age is that we are all living longer. What the government fails to mention is that some are living longer than others. For example a manual worker in Glasgow retired at 66 would have

13 years (on average) of retirement left. A man in Kensington & Chelsea would have 22 years to enjoy.

Furthermore the government claims about living longer fail to take into account health inequalities that exist prior to the death. Study after study have shown that manual and low paid workers begin to suffer with serious health problems far earlier than the middle classes. This means that not only do the low paid workers die younger their quality of life in retirement due to poor health is much worse than the better off. Increasing the retirement age can only increase these health inequalities. Forcing people already in poor health to work longer can but lead to a further deterioration in their health and increase the likelihood that they will die even sooner.

With increasing number of private sector workers dependent state pension the government has now set about destroying public sector pensions provision. In order to justify their attacks they have filled the newspapers with stories of public sector workers receiving massive pensions. These stories



are largely nonsense, for example the average pension in local government is just £4,000 a year, dropping to £2,800 for women.

The value of these already paltry pensions is set to fall under government plans, in the future they intend to link public sector pension increases to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Currently pensions are linked to the Retail Prices Index (RPI) which typically measures

inflation much higher. The switch to the CPI will mean that the true value of pensions will be continuously eroded by inflation. This will mean that as the real value of public sector pensions declines, state workers, like private sector workers, will be increasingly dependent on the state pension in old age.

The defence of public sector pensions should be central to the campaign against cuts - but the

fight must not end there. The government hopes to divide public and private sector in order to weaken opposition to the cuts. This can be countered by linking the fight to defend public sector pensions to a demand for a massive increase in the state pension and opposition to the increase in the retirement age. The government hopes to divide workers; the pension issue is the means to unite them.

Catalyst

Catalyst is the free newspaper of the Solidarity Federation (SolFed). SolFed is an organisation of workers who believe in taking control of our lives where we live or work, rather than leaving things to the dictates of politicians, managers and so called 'experts'.

Our members are workers across all industries, students, pensioners and unemployed. Through solidarity and acting together, we can deal both with our local problems and at the same time work to change the bigger picture, and change

the system that means power and profit for the few.

We believe we should apply the same principles to actions we take around local issues to those we take at work. Across industries, we organise in Networks; geographically we organise in Locals, to support each other in our struggles and to fight for our interests, both in and out of the workplace. We are part of the International Workers Association, organising with like minded people across the world.

To comment on Catalyst, get copies to

distribute or if you are interested in getting involved, contact us at:

catalyst@solfed.org.uk

If you are interested in the Solidarity Federation, we can be contacted at:

PO Box 29
South West D.O.
Manchester M15 5HW
solfed@solfed.org.uk
www.solfed.org.uk
07984 675281

In addition to publishing Catalyst, Solidarity Federation also publishes Direct Action, our twice-yearly magazine. If you would like a copy, or are interested in subscriptions, get in touch at:

DA-SF
PO Box 29, SW PDO
Manchester M15 5HW
www.direct-action.org.uk

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