

ORGANISE!

...for revolutionary anarchism

Casual Work

Not Nice If You Can Get It

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 - **Fighting and Beating the Poll Tax**
 - **Youth in Revolt: the Struggle Against Precarity**
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74

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Organise!

The magazine of the
Anarchist Federation

Issue 74 - Spring 2010

Organise! is the magazine of the Anarchist Federation (AF). It is published in order to develop anarchist communist ideas. It aims to provide a clear anarchist viewpoint on contemporary issues and to initiate debate on ideas not normally covered in agitational papers.

We aim to produce Organise! twice a year. To meet this target, we positively solicit contributions from our readers. We aim to print any article that furthers the objectives of anarchist communism. If you'd like to write something for us, but are unsure whether to do so, why not get in touch first? Even articles that are 100% in agreement with our aims and principles can leave much open to debate.

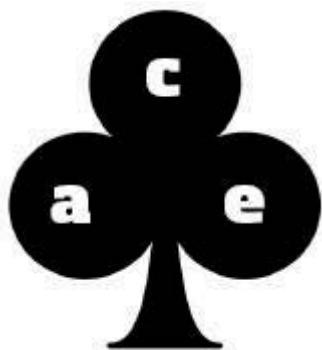
As always, the articles in this issue do not necessarily represent the collective viewpoint of the AF. We hope that their publication will produce responses from our readers and spur debate on.

The deadline for the next issue of Organise! will be 13th August 2010. Please send all contributions to the address on the right. It would help if all articles could be either typed or on disc. Alternatively, articles can be emailed to the editors directly at organise@afed.org.uk

What goes in Organise!

Organise! hopes to open up debate in many areas of life. As we have stated before, unless signed by the Anarchist Federation as a whole or by a local AF group, articles in Organise! reflect the views of the person who has written the article and nobody else.

If the contents of one of the articles in this issue provokes thought, makes you angry, compels a response then let us know. Revolutionary ideas develop from debate, they do not merely drop out of the air!



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Organise! Issue 74 - Summer 2010

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This issue of Organise! deals with one of the key strategies of modern capitalism – its attempts to casualise many jobs on a world scale – and what can be done to resist it. A recent example of this resistance to the onslaughts of capitalism as been the events in Greece, where a mass revolt shook the country. An article in this issue deals with these events.

Organise! also marks the anniversary of another revolt, this time here in Britain. The struggle against the Poll Tax between 1988 and 1991, and the part that this paper and this organisation played in it, are described in detail. The Anarchist Federation tends to modestly hide its achievements but here we can be justly proud of the part that we played in the resistance to the Tax.

Of course new attacks are at this moment being mounted on the working class on a world-wide

scale. This is to pay for the costs born by capitalists for a crisis that they themselves brought on. Whilst the banks are keen to award themselves huge bonuses, the boss class and government are preparing to launch a vicious campaign of cuts which will axe many services – in education, health, transport, the arts etc. – whilst at the same time preparing to reduce redundancy payments and pension deals. Greece itself is bankrupt and the International Monetary Fund is insisting that the Greek government carry out swingeing cuts. The resistance already shown in Greece needs to be launched again. The United Kingdom is in

many ways in the same financial situation as Greece, and there should be no doubt that whoever wins the next election – be it the Tories or Labour – cuts will be attempted on a massive scale. The resistance that defeated the Poll Tax will need to be resurrected. Already workers throughout Europe are fighting cuts, and more and more people need to be drawn into this struggle so that mass action can both resist cuts and begin a project for a new society. Organise! intends both to comment on these forthcoming struggles and to contribute to them in reporting and describing them, and applying a libertarian communist analysis.

Editorial

What's in the latest Organise!

Introduction to Anarchist Communism

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**Anarchist
Federation**

New for March 2010 *An Introduction to Anarchist Communism*

This pamphlet is made up of two parts that run alongside each other. The main text lays out the fundamental ideas of anarchist communism. Various boxes throughout the text give examples from history to illustrate the ideas described in the main section.

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Feature

Casual Work

Not Nice If You Can Get It



For many people in the so-called developed countries of the West, the choice of part-time working is a positive one. But for millions of others here and in the majority world, temporary and precarious work is not only their only choice but a 'choice' that leads to poverty, stress, ill-health and - often - death in unsafe workplaces.

The Extent of Casual Work in the UK

The term 'casual work' is used to describe a vast range of employment types with a similar pattern of constraint and reward depending on the employer, the type of work and the sector in which the work is being carried out. People in telesales or direct marketing will often have no contract or a contract that can be terminated at a moment's notice. They are rarely paid for their time but only according to what they sell. They often work from home or independently and their work can

disappear when the employer disappears or market conditions

change. The jobs - 'assignments' - of agency workers can be short-term (in some cases lasting only minutes or a few hours) or - conversely - can last months or even years without the worker obtaining any better pay or job security.

The rise of casualised working

began in the 1980s as a result of the Thatcherite assault on working rights and the creation of market conditions favouring casualisation. For those who had always worked in sectors characterised by temporary and casual working - agriculture, construction, the restaurant and hospitality trades, garment-making and so on - casualisation intensified work and reduced protections (especially as trade unions were rendered largely ineffective despite some courageous struggles). But casualisation and 'flexibility' also began to be imposed on other sectors: education, the public sector and the NHS. Deregulation and job insecurity makes it easier to get rid of jobs or replace permanent employees with temporary ones or offering less secure contracts through 'restructuring'. Pitting one worker against another - as long as they remain isolated from each other - enables the bosses to get more

Workers are regularly conditioned to lower their expectations and accept lower paid or skilled work than they had hoped for.

work at times and in ways that yield the most profit.

At the same time, casualisation and 'flexible working' make it harder for workers to resist these changes and defend their pay and conditions in response.

In 2009 there were at least 1.4m people working under tem-

porary contracts though no-one knows for sure. High turnover of workers, seasonal and flexible patterns of work are the cause but politically, no-one wants to even try to count the numbers of unregistered and 'precarious' workers. They are a largely invisible part of the economy, a hidden 'army of the reserve' used by bosses as and when it suits them and let go, shifting from job to job, town to town, country to country, frequently alone, with no ties and no friends, unable to find or express solidarity or unity with others in the same boat.

Historically, the unemployed were used to discipline those at work with the fear of unemployment but they were always visible, could organise themselves and be organised around. The abdication of the unions from fighting on behalf of all workers and the decay of political parties as sources of progressive reform and social justice means that this 'reserve army' now offers no threat and no object lesson to the troops. Far better - as we said in 2004 - to siphon them back into temporary and insecure employment alongside permanent employees who therefore get a daily object lesson of what their working lives might become if they stand up for themselves.

Workers are regularly conditioned to lower their expectations and accept lower paid or skilled work than they had hoped for. The benefits system is used as a stick to make it increasingly difficult to refuse low paid work or anti-social hours. Greater regulation of the unemployed is the flip side to the deregulation of the labour market. And through in-work benefits, people are encouraged into the jobs market,

Precarious workers are frequently 'sweated', forced to work long hours at high intensity, in sectors such as garment-making or food preparation. They work in marginal businesses where the boss has no or little interest in either safe working conditions or the health of his or her employees.

often into part-time work, with workers subsidising low wage employers through a regressive tax system.

Choice?

Throughout most of the last decade, almost half of the men and a third of the women making a new claim for Jobseekers Allowance last claimed less than six months previously. In other words they had had a job for less than six months. It's true that the majority of part-time employees do not want a full-time job but conversely the vast majority of temporary workers do. Part-time employment may be a positive choice for some, temporary employment is usually not. Even amongst the 'elite', people with a marketable skill who are looking for work, agency workers, 60% are taking temporary work because they want but can't find a permanent and full-time job.

The lucky ones will have marketable skills and find their way to one of 16,000 known recruitment agencies in these islands. These agencies may be seen and counted but there is also a hidden trade in human labour: quiet

offices above nondescript high streets, suburban houses where people mysteriously come and go, people hired and fired by text, the bosses often unknown and rarely seen, leaving all to middlemen and admin staff who often don't know who their employer is either. Those 16,000 agencies supply around 225,000 employees out of 1.4m temporary workers; so who supplies the rest? And where are they? What are they doing, at what wage? In what conditions? On this the bosses and regulators are largely silent.

The Big Sell

Flexible, casualised, working is often described by the bosses as entirely beneficial to the employee, both indirectly (efficiency = profit = job security) and directly: workers are, apparently, 'empowered'. We gain new 'skills' and possess greater 'autonomy', doing more stimulating work at times we choose, generating a much better work/life balance. Or so they say. The 'high road' of flexible working is presented as a progressive trend, providing stimulating work while creating a pro-social dimension to employment practices. For some, maybe. But there is also a 'low-road' flexibility of increased deregulation, cost-cutting, casuali-



Precarious workers are often atomised, isolated and alienated, suffer from homesickness, loneliness and stress both off and on the job.



sation and work intensification in pursuit of competitive advantage and profit-seeking.

Workers are now multi-tasked, put on jobs formerly done by other workers, taking away time at less intense periods of work they used to enjoy and which ameliorated work. For sure, the productivity of workers has doubled but little of this is due to investment in either them, the factory or office or working practices themselves except by way of increased disciplining and control of work and time at work,

'Flexibility' has also led to casualisation as workers are increasingly offered non-standard contracts, part-time work, 'zero hours' and short term contracts, home working, on-call work and outsourcing. Many are made to become 'self-employed', offered a contract for specified services but actually under direct control and supervision. They are employees in all but name but lack the rights, benefits and protections they would otherwise get. This applies with even more force to casual workers with few marketable skills. Many companies increasingly have only a core of skilled, permanent managers and supervisors, surrounded by an insecure and transient, relatively low skilled 'periphery', replicating the historical pattern in factories a hundred years ago or more: a core of skilled craftsmen and managers and a highly disposable workforce of temporary and transient

less-skilled workers. Casualisation leads to lower wages and worse terms and conditions. But often unseen is the rise in unpaid working and the intensity of that work by people desperate to keep their jobs. Two workforces develop, in most cases in separate industries but increasingly alongside each other: stratified, isolated from each other, unequal.

Whatever the stated aim, in the UK and US and other economies modelled on them, all forms of flexibility tend to follow the 'low road' model of work intensification, low employee control of working terms and conditions and increasing unpredictability in pay, hours and continued employment. In response, we work longer hours, complain less and have higher stress levels at work than in the rest of Europe. There is greater competition for jobs and this leads to extra effort at lower costs to the bosses, worth, according to the TUC, around £23bn a year.

Precarious Working

Before enlargement in 2004, it was estimated that in the nine largest economies of the former EU there were between 4m and 6m people - mostly immigrants - working in the 'informal economy'. While many will have papers and be working legally, a vast number are illegals, 'sans papiers', experiencing precarious work. All of these experience uncertainty, poor working conditions and low wages. They are often over-qualified for the jobs they are



The figure of 2.2m deaths each year does not take into account the number of precarious and temporary workers who commit suicide, are killed by fellow workers in hostels or drinking houses, die of drug overdoses or who simply drop dead from overwork someplace else and are never counted because they never did count except when it comes to calculating profit.

offered or can find, working long hours, enduring occupational instability, and performing physically demanding activities. They may have little knowledge of their employment rights, experience discrimination before and harassment at work and suffer extremely from stress and physical exhaustion.

Precarious workers are frequently 'sweated', forced to work long hours at high intensity, in sectors such as garment-making or food preparation. They work in marginal businesses where the boss has no or little interest in either safe working conditions or the health of his or her employees. You risk hard and physically debilitating work in unsafe conditions, the use of toxic substances with little protection, verbal and physical abuse from bosses and, additionally, if you are a woman, unwanted sexual advances.

In case you think this is true only in developing countries of north or south, think again. In 2009 the BBC reported that Primark had been buying garments produced by a sweatshop in Manchester. Investigators found illegal workers making and packing garments for 12 hours a day, seven days a week for a little over half the minimum wage. Work was intense with workers being harassed and abused to make up their quotas and meet orders, working in an

Those who casualise their workforce, who exploit insecure workers do it for one reason alone, for profit, literally from the sweat on our brows.

unheated factory and paid in cash so no record of employment could be proven. As if paying employees only £3.50 an hour wasn't bad enough, the firm - TNS Knitwear - subcontracted work to another firm - Fashion Waves - paying only £3 an hour. In Manchester, not Mumbai.

Similarly, the Department of Labour in the US estimates that 50% of the 22,000 registered garment contractors pay less than the minimum wage, two-thirds do not pay overtime and one-third operate with serious health and safety violations. Workers who try to organize and protest poor working conditions are often fired. If so, what do the unregistered ones pay and in what conditions? 4,500 of New York's 7000 garment factories are classed by the DoL as sweatshops, often highly mobile operation of just a few sewing machines or clothes presses which can vanish and set up again after the state has performed its obligatory clampdown to please the liberals and reformers..

The Casualisation of Death

It is estimated that 2.2m people die each year in work-related incidents though the figure is likely to be higher. For instance, in 2005, India reported only 222 work-related deaths while the ILO estimated the true figure was nearer 40,000.

Precarious and temporary workers are far more at risk of death and serious injury than permanent and full-time workers

because they are far more likely to work in unsafe and unregulated workplaces. Injury to them and their deaths are a shoulder-shrugging fact of life for the bosses, a minor inconvenience on the road to profit; after all, there are many more unemployed just beyond the fence or factory wall. In 2004 The Guardian reported that an employee at a high-tech factory in Hartlepool had died two years earlier from a brain haemorrhage after working for 24 hours continuously. Zhang Guo Hua was one of a large number of illegal Chinese immigrants working in sweatshop conditions and living in accommodation housing up to 30 other people. Because Hua had no papers and spoke no English, his death went unnoticed and there was no inquest. For the bosses and the state death has become a casual affair.

Precarious workers are often atomised, isolated and alienated, suffer from homesickness, loneliness and stress both off and on the job. The figure of 2.2m deaths each year does not take into account the number of precarious and temporary workers who commit suicide, are killed by fellow workers in hostels or drinking houses, die of drug overdoses or who simply drop dead from overwork someplace else and are never counted because they never did count except when it comes to calculating profit. A University of Melbourne study in 2007 found that part-time, temporary or precarious workers were between two and three times more likely to suffer depression than permanent workers. In 2008 a Canadian study

confirmed that part-time workers with no job security would develop more physical and mental health problems than full-timers. As well as stress at work leading to a 50% excess risk of coronary heart disease, there is consistent evidence that jobs with high demands, low control, and effort-reward imbalance lead directly to mental and physical ill-health. The cost of treating people with depression, whose health has broken down, who are killed or who kill and must be punished, all these costs are simply passed on to the rest of society by the bosses.

The casualisation of work, sweatshop working, the infamous practices of the docks or piece working were diseases that we were told had been eradicated, like smallpox, from the industrial and commercial world, things that had no place in a 'civilised' country. But casualisation, the casualisation of both employment and work is a fundamental precondition of capital accumulation, one of the foundation stones of the Industrial Revolution and still necessary - and intensifying - in the age of mobile capital and globalisation. It's a disease that can strike anywhere, in any workplace or sector, and that brings with it stress, fear, ill-health, mental illness, oppression, abuse and exploitation. Those who casualise their workforce, who exploit insecure workers do it for one reason alone, for profit, literally from the sweat on our brows.

Youth in Revolt



“This is no mere clash between anarchist groups and the custodians of the law. It’s much more. It is the revolt of an entire generation, the 700-euro generation, which is how much Greek companies tend to pay first-time employees. A miserable salary even by local standards. The unemployment rate among Greek youths is the highest in the EU and the education system is experiencing a profound crisis... Political life is rife with clientilism, cronyism and corruption. ... So the young are revolting against a society in which they feel alien, marginalised and unwanted.”

The Daily Adevărul reflects on the underlying causes of the December 2008 riots in Greece.

A lost generation

Two years ago it was called the “€1,000 generation” – Europeans under age 30 who bounced around in short-term jobs that paid €1,000 a month. Now, even that social label has been devalued. Today it is known as the “€700 generation” – young people entering what amounts to a huge temporary workforce who can’t afford the life and security their parents took for granted. They have little social security, will work far longer hours for much lower pay, and are far more likely to suffer from health problems as a

result of their work. A recent survey commissioned by the Greek General Confederation of Labour found that of those workers finding themselves in this category (currently around a quarter of the Greek working population) 89% were not involved with union labour, 75% have never taken industrial action, 75% work in the private sector, and 64% are women.

Widespread unemployment is of course a huge factor in the growth of this casual, poorly paid work. In Spain, Italy, France and Greece, rates are up to 20-30%. In Britain

20 years ago. There is also widespread dependence on credit to boost what effectively amounts to poverty wages. People are thrust into a vicious cycle of escalating debt and dependence, often being forced to take on multiple jobs to make ends meet.

The UK has never quite recovered from the collapse of the youth employment market in the 1980s. Partly as a result of this, over recent years there has been a huge effort by the state to get more people into full-time further education. The government's widely publicised target of 50% of young

cial insecurity that had spread across Italy in the last few years. He said that the best advice he could think of for her was to find a rich boy, like his son, and marry him! Adding in the end that with a beautiful smile like hers she should have no trouble at all!

We are all workers, we are all precarious

Work has always been and always will be unstable while profit margins rule over human needs. The expansion of capitalism has witnessed massive displacement of labour according to shifts in supply and demand, the collapse

and growth of markets and, of course, the onset of crisis. While capital has been free to expand across the globe, workers have always

had to cope with the volatility of domestic job markets. The type of work we do has also been in a continuous state of change. In the UK jobs in manufacturing, energy and construction work have been in sharp decline since the late 1970s (levels of production have stayed the same). Last year the number of people employed in service-sector jobs more than equalled those in construction, manufacturing, agriculture, mining, energy and water supply combined.

These changing patterns of employment also have an impact on the composition of the working-class movement. Industrial labour has traditionally been the stronghold for workplace militancy in this country. Jobs in the service industry, on the other hand, are far more likely to be on

Lack of well-paid, stable work has an obvious impact on people's general quality of life. The number of adults up to the age of 30 forced to live with their parents due to economic insecurity and lack of access to good, affordable housing has also almost doubled in recent years.

the jobless rate for those aged 16 to 24 is marginally lower at 19.1%. However, this is still on a scale not seen since the early 1990s, and well above the Eurozone average of 15.9%. Many will be forced into temporary labour as a result of the increasingly aggressive benefits system; others will simply opt for anything they can get to avoid the humiliating and degrading experience of going on the dole.

Lack of well-paid, stable work has an obvious impact on people's general quality of life. The number of adults up to the age of 30 forced to live with their parents due to economic insecurity and lack of access to good, affordable housing has also almost doubled in recent years. In Britain, first-time buyers now face house prices that are, on average, five times average incomes, compared with a multiple of three times

people entering higher education, however, was quietly abandoned with the onset of the economic crisis. Universities are already over-subscribed and now face a squeeze on both fronts, with a wave of spending and staffing cuts accompanied by the promise of severe penalties from central government for exceeding recruitment quotas. Meanwhile, a general lack of opportunities is spilling over into the graduate job market, with levels of joblessness increasing by 44% last year alone and even more in sectors hit particularly hard by the recession, such as construction and architecture.

All is not lost, however! In a recent televised broadcast, Prime Minister Berlusconi was able to offer some highly practical advice. He was asked by a female student how she would survive the finan-

a temporary basis, un-unionised and lower paid. Workers are less likely to have sustained and regular contact with their workmates, and the largest firms in this sector are aggressively anti-union. The high turnover combined with little concern for workers rights means it's far easier to simply sack uncooperative employees than listen to their demands. These days widespread industrial action is mostly confined to the public sector where union density is still relatively high and work reasonably stable (although this looks likely to change given the wave of recent spending cuts and "restructuring"). The public sector, however, only accounts for around a quarter of the UK workforce.

For those who entered the workplace through the 1970s to the late 80s, memories of picket lines, scabs and class solidarity run deep. Workers over the age of 50 continue to have the highest and most stable levels of union membership, with almost half of those in jobs for 20 years or more being members of trade unions. This is in sharp contrast to those now entering the workforce, with union density within one year of employment as low as 10% overall and even lower in the private sec-

tor. An experience of collective organisation, class solidarity and strike action is simply non-existent for a new generation of workers. Even in areas where trade unions have traditionally had a strong presence, they have proven to be largely impotent in the face of recent cuts. The strong rank-and-file movement that sustained them throughout the 70s and into the mid-80s is all but gone. Good old-fashioned absenteeism and theft appear to be the only surviving weapons of class warfare. A recent survey commissioned for the British Science Festival in Guildford found more than two thirds of people

have stolen stationery from work, with nearly one in 20 confessing to taking valuable items such as mobile phones or computer hardware. The CBI also estimated in 2007 that 21m working days were lost thanks to workers "pulling a sickie". However this figure is little comfort compared to the 172m days lost due to genuine sickness, the most common cause of which was anxiety and stress-related disorders due to overwork.

Economists have been quick to reassure us that the massive lay-offs prompted by the recent recession will be offset by growing opportunities in the service industry (the only market that continues



This is also the type of generational divide that many of us find between young workers in the service sector and in temporary work and the older generation in trade unions and traditional industry – between those who are able to strike and take to the picket lines, and those who can only take to the streets.

The experience of many young people entering the workforce is almost reminiscent of the early days of organised labour. It is almost necessary to go “back to basics”. Informal links of fraternity and defence, the building blocks of a united working class, are more important than ever.

to expand). Essentially this means a push for even more temporary and poorly-paid labour - the “€700 generation” is big and getting bigger. It would now be fair to talk of a section of the working class effectively excluded from what remains of the gains of the social wage struggles of past decades. There is a generation of people now entering the workforce who, if they can find a job, will likely have no experience of collective organising in their community (with people living at greater distances away from work) or in their workplace, have little knowledge or experience of workers’ rights, and are finding their public services under increasing attack. Holiday and sick days are also a luxury that you cannot afford when you barely make enough to meet your rent and utility bills. In the restaurant, bar and catering industry it is not uncommon to be working a 7-day week or within that to be pulling “AFDs” (abbreviated from “All Fucking Day”), which is anything above a 12-hour shift with no breaks. The best option available when faced with worsening working conditions is often just to leave and hope to find another job.

Not only this, but temporary labour is often employed to actively undermine what remains of the activity of organised labour. During the CWU (Communication Workers Union) actions of late last year, Royal Mail threatened to hire a 30,000 strong “army”

of temporary workers to crush the strike. Around the same time in Leeds, the council spent more than £1m hiring temporary staff to undermine the city refuse workers’ strike. With unemployment rates so high, opportunities so scarce and with so little general experience of even the most basic principles of class solidarity, it’s hardly surprising that bosses are able to draw on such vast reserves of strike-breaking labour.

No Future

The “noughties” have seen the last death throes of social democracy. The notion of progressive social reform as idealised by the old Labour movement has been exhausted. Neo-liberalism has been effective in demolishing both the organisational architecture (for example, a strong trade union movement), and the social philosophy that underpinned the social democratic state. We truly do live in a “century of the self” where rampant consumerism is held to be the highest ideal. Where “labour” parties have attained power they have proved to be highly effective at dismantling working class movements and attacks on the social wage.

In the 2004 documentary “The Take”, a film that tells the story of workers in Buenos Aires, Argentina who reclaim control of a closed Forja auto plant where they once worked and turn it into a worker co-operative – Avi Lewis reflects on this general shift in social ide-

als. One of the subjects of his film is Maddie, a worker involved in the co-operative movement. Maddie is at odds with her mother (Anna), a Peronist who, despite the economic chaos into which the government has thrust the country, still holds the faith that newly elected leaders will bring change for the better. Lewis comments that, “For Maddie government has always been a force that tears things down and sells them off, but Anna like our parents’ generation remembers a time when government was about building things – a national project, a strong public sphere.”

Maddie has no faith in the political system because her experience has always been one of attacks on her class – on her healthcare, her wages, her social security and her job. It is exactly this experience that the Daily Adevărul refers to when speaking of the underlying causes of insurrection in the Greek youth - a society in which they feel alien, marginalised and unwanted; a society which has never offered any hope, only poorly-paid labour, unemployment and insecurity. It is as a result of this that the neighbourhoods of Exarchia burst into flame in response to the shooting of a 15-year-old boy, and that school students, inner-city youth and sans-papier immigrants burn the symbols of the neo-liberal order – the bank, the luxury shop and the police

station – to the ground. This is also the type of generational divide that many of us find between young workers in the service sector and in temporary work and the older generation in trade unions and traditional industry – between those who are able to strike and take to the picket lines, and those who can only take to the streets.

occupations and assemblies in the streets. The past year has also seen the resurgence of the radical university campus. Early this year saw over a dozen occupations across the UK in solidarity with the people of Gaza, and a new wave of strikes and occupations has already begun in response to recent attacks on education. Germany and Austria have also seen

The experience of many young people entering the workforce is almost reminiscent of the early days of organised labour. It is almost necessary to go “back to basics”. Informal links of fraternity and defence, the building blocks of a united working class, are more important than ever. People need to be in control of their own struggles and seek to cut across



The events of Greece and this wider wave of European radicalism are based around different communities than those we would recognise from the traditional labour movement. Although undoubtedly workplace organisation still plays an important role, a critical role even (one of the largest attended popular assemblies during the Greek December was that of the occupied GSEE trade union offices), geographical communities are playing an equally important part. In Greece the squats and social centres of the Exarchia district, and later the occupied town halls, universities and government buildings, played a critical role. In Italy, for the “Anomalous Wave” (rebellion sparked in response to education reform), popular assemblies were the key, with pupils, students and precarious teachers often breaking away from traditional trade union demonstrations to hold

mass occupations. Claimants’ action groups are also springing up across the country and, in a time of such high unemployment and such sustained attacks against social welfare, have a crucial role to play. This is not to leave aside the inspiring examples of occupations of schools, swimming pools, libraries and other local resources that have recently occurred across the country. Riots and inner-city and urban unrest have obviously been a constant feature of working-class resistance, as have occupations. What is important in these examples, however, is the way these social spaces are able to act to unify otherwise isolated working-class people. These other means of organisation are able to act as an expression of class interests, in spite of the fact that in many cases there is a complete absence of the traditional labour movement.

this growing divide, which is more than often also a generational divide, between unionised and non-unionised labour. It is clear from the election speeches of all the major parties that they intend to enter us into an “age of austerity” – that whoever wins the next election, cuts in spending and jobs in public services are on the cards. To those who have only known a post-Thatcher Britain this is nothing more than business as usual. That is not to say, however, that people are not angry and frustrated with the position that they find themselves in. Apathy and disillusionment are at an all time high, but as the many examples of recent unrest show, this does not mean that there is no hope. Quite simply, if capitalism has provided us with no future, then the responsibility we have is to make one for ourselves.

History

*A shadow of... glorious
though strange & good things
to come.*

The Ranters and Libertarian Communism

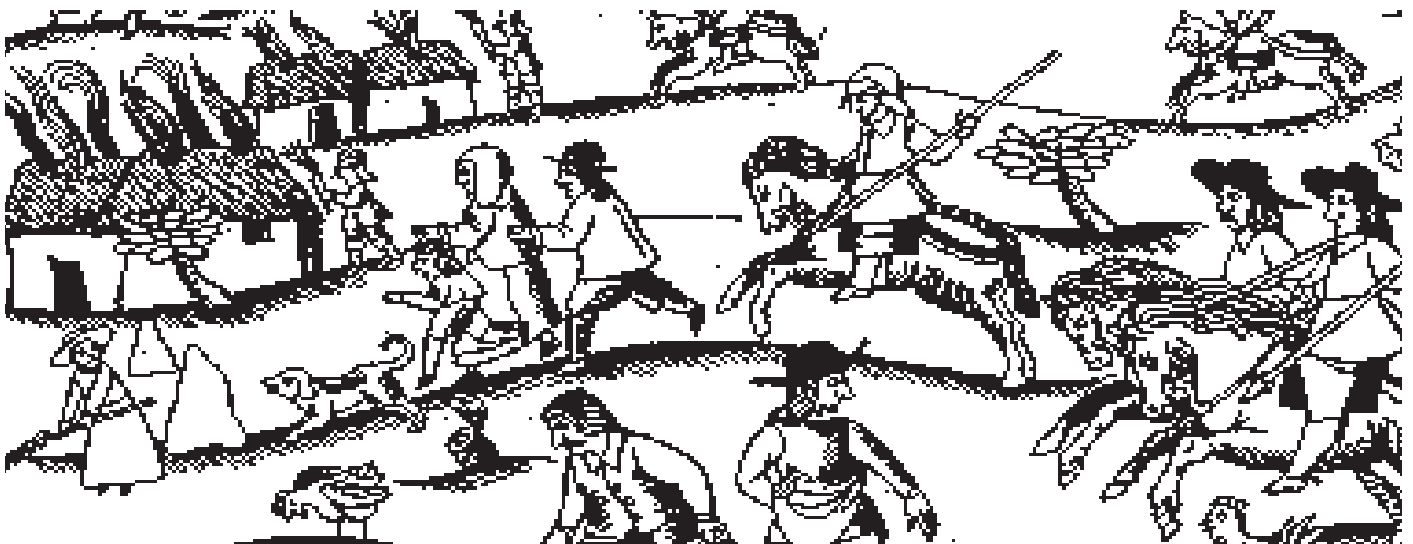
The English Civil War (1641-1651) was a time unprecedented in English history. Although it ended with the victory of the bourgeoisie under Oliver Cromwell and the first moves towards the establishment of capitalist society, Parliament needed to mobilise lower-class support in order to defeat the Royal forces, and the challenge to authority and existing social order that this involved granted radicals a space to argue for their own ideas. For a brief period, anything seemed possible, and, for perhaps the first time in English history, it was possible for movements to arise based around ideals that anarchists and communists today can recognise as being not so far from our own.

1649 was a high point for revolutionary unrest during this period:

King Charles I was executed in January, and April and May saw mutinies by troops over both Leveller political demands and pay issues. At around the same time, a group of soldiers burst into a parish church in Walton-on-Thames in Surrey and declared that the Sabbath, tithes, ministers, magistrates and the Bible were all abolished. This act, which took place near to where the Diggers were setting up their first commune on St. George's Hill, shows how radical the questioning and rejection of established religion had become.

While the Levellers and the Diggers are both relatively well-known groups, the Ranters have attracted less attention, but they were perhaps the most radical of all the sects and groups existing in this period, and many of their

ideas might still have some appeal for contemporary anarchists. Fans of Class War's style might find their approach to swearing attractive: the prominent Ranter Abiezer Coppe is said to have taken the pulpit in a church and sworn continuously for an hour. He himself declared that he'd rather hear "a mighty angel (in man) swearing" than hear an orthodox minister preach or pray, and one account says that "'twas usual with him to preach stark-naked many blasphemies and unheard of villainies". According to another pamphlet, they claimed that "God is so far from being offended at the... sins of drunkenness, swearing, blasphemy, adultery, etc, that he is well pleased... and that... it is the only way of serving him."





‘The merriest of all devils’

The sexual radicalism of the Ranters certainly made an impressive contrast with the repressive society that created them. They saw Original Sin as being lifted, meaning that none of the repressive commandments laid down by the Church through the ages still applied. John Holland’s anti-Ranter pamphlet *The Smoke of the Bottomless Pit* claims that “they say for one man to be tied to one woman, or one woman to be tied to one man, is a fruit of the curse; but they say, we are freed from the curse; therefore, it is our liberty to make use of whom we please.” Another called them “the merriest of all devils, for... lascivious songs... downright bawdry and dancing”, and claimed that the last two were commonly accompanied by orgies. Of course, it is important not to take this too uncritically: unless accompanied by a commitment to women’s liberation, sexual liberation has frequently

just been a way to extend male power. But the Ranters’ relaxed and positive attitude to sexual pleasure still seems vastly preferable to the fear of our own bodies many Christians still promote today.

This attitude to sexuality and swearing was part of a larger challenge to the entire concept of sin and moral order. This wasn’t just an abstract theological debate: the idea of sin was a vital tool for persuading the lower classes not to challenge social hierarchies and accept their role in life. An example of the political implications of sin can be seen in the writings of the Puritan theologian Richard Baxter, who supported a limited, constitutional monarchy because he believed that “every man is by nature a rebel against heaven, so that ordinarily to plead for democracy is to plead that the sovereignty may be put into the hands of rebels.”

Mainstream Protestant theologians explained away all kinds of injustices by reference to God’s curse on humanity after the Fall, as when the Leveller William Walwyn was told that “a natural and complete freedom... was fit for man only before he had sinned, and not since”. In this context, the Ranters’ views had revolutionary implications. Coppe stated simply that “sin and transgression is finished... be no longer so horribly, hellishly, impudently, arrogantly wicked as to judge what is sin.” Other stories tell of Ranters looking for their sins with a candle, and concluding that none exist because none can be found, an indication of the way they were beginning to move away from faith in churches and preachers and more towards relying on their own powers of reason (some ver-

sions of this story end with female Ranters offering to inspect the contents of their male comrades' cod-pieces, to see if they can find any sin in there.)

'Howl, ye rich men'

The Ranters' views didn't stop at individual libertarianism: they were also firmly opposed to private property and class society. They emerged from an atmosphere of tense class conflict: one man in Northamptonshire in 1643 asked "what do you tell me of birth and descent? I hope within this year to see never a gentleman in England", and Charles I himself had warned of the danger that "at last the common people" may "destroy all rights and properties, all distinctions of families." Abiezer Coppe called the abolition of property "a most glorious design" and called for it to be replaced with "equality, community and universal love." One description of their views states that "they taught that it was quite contrary to [nature] to appropriate anything to any man or woman; but that there ought to be a community of all things."

This communism was accompanied by a vicious hatred of the rich: Coppe warned them that "your gold and silver, though you can't see it, is cankered... and suddenly, suddenly, suddenly... shall eat your flesh as [if] it were fire... have all things common, or else the plague of God will rot and consume all you have" and declared "howl, howl, ye nobles... howl ye rich men for the miseries that are coming upon you. For our parts, we that hear the Apostle preach will also have all things in common; neither will we call anything that we have our own." Many believed that all social inequality was about to end, as can

be seen from the title-page of Laurence Clarkson's *A Single Eye*, which declared that it was printed "in the year that the powers of heaven and earth... shall be shaken, yea damned, till they be no more." These ideas seriously scared the ruling 2/ class: the clergyman Nathaniel Homes worried that the common people "much incline" to "a popular parity, a levelling anarchy". (Homes was not the only writer of the period to describe radicals as demanding anarchy, as the Quaker Robert Barclay also published an attack on *The Anarchy of the Ranters* and other Libertines.)

'The greatest curse that ever came into the world'

Along with the class conflict that formed the Ranters' views, there was an especially strong opposition to the church hierarchy. As far back as 1589, Bishop Cooper had warned of "the loathsome contempt, hatred and disdain that the most part of men in these days bear... towards the ministers of the church of God." Archbishop Sandys added that "the ministers of the world are become contemptible in the eyes of the basest sort of people." In 1634, a Joan Hoby from Buckinghamshire declared that "she did not care a pin nor a fart for my Lord's Grace of Canterbury... and she did hope that she should live to see him hanged."

*the loathsome contempt,
hatred and disdain that
the most part of men in these
days bear... towards the
ministers of the church of
God.*

Unsurprisingly, the Ranters also turned this hostility to the church up as far as it would go. Coppe denounced "the Ministers, fat parsons, Vicars, Lecturers, etc. who... have been the chief instruments of all those horrid abominations, hellish, cruel, devilish, persecutions, in this nation which cry for vengeance." He urged the pious to give up their formal religion and declared that "the time is coming, that zealous, holy, devout, righteous religious men shall... die for their holiness and religion."

This view was shared by numerous other preachers, such as Thomas Tany, who thought that all religion was "a lie, a cheat, a deceit, for

the Ranters existed in a period before capitalism had finished creating a class of dispossessed urban wage-labourers.



there is but one truth, and that is love”, and publicly burnt the Bible “because people say that it is the Word of God, and it is not.” Holland said that “they call [the Bible] a bundle of contradictions... Another said it was the greatest curse that ever came into the world, for, said he, the Scripture hath been the cause of all our misery... and there would never be any peace in the world, till all the Bibles in the world were burned.”

The Ranters’ hostility to established religion combined aspects of anti-rational mysticism with the beginnings of what we can recognise as a rational, materialist worldview. Clarkson, a repentant ex-Ranter looking back on his past, wrote that “I conceived, as I knew not what I was before I came in my being, so for ever after I should know nothing after this my being was dissolved”, rejecting the entire idea of an afterlife (while still believing in some kind of God).

Holland explains that “they say there is no other God but what is in them... and that men ought to pray and seek to no other God

but what is in them. The titles they give God are these: They call him The Being, the Fullness, the Great Motion, Reason, the Immensity.” When a religious group reaches the point of not recognising any God other than their own powers of reasoning, the practical conclusions of their doctrines come close to complete atheism. One young shoemaker in St. Martins used to laugh at any mention of God, and say that he believed “money, good clothes, good meat and drink, tobacco and merry company to be Gods.” Similarly, many denied that there was any Heaven other than earthly happiness, or any Hell other than feeling sad.

‘Such men and congregations should be suppressed... that we may have truth and peace and government again’

As you may have noticed, we haven’t been living in a stateless, classless, secular utopia for the last three and a half centuries. So what went wrong? First of all, the Ranters immediately (and unsurprisingly) attracted

harsh repression. In August 1650 Parliament passed an Act for the Punishment of Atheistical, Blasphemous and Excerable Opinions, which made it illegal to say that “there is no such thing... as unrighteousness, unholiness or sin... or that there is neither Heaven nor Hell”, among a number of other heresies. This law was accompanied by harsh action: a W. Smith was hanged at York “for denying the Deity”, Jacob Bau-thumley was burnt through the tongue as punishment for writing a Ranter tract called *The Light and Dark Sides of God*, and in 1656 Alexander Agnew, also known as Jock of Broad Scotland, was hung for denying the divinity of Christ, the effectiveness of prayer, and the existence of the Holy Ghost, souls, heaven, hell and sin.

The same year, the radical Quaker James Nayler rode a donkey into Bristol in imitation of Jesus and was condemned to be whipped through the streets of Bristol, then had the letter B branded on his forehead, his tongue pierced with a hot iron, and was given two years of hard

labour. Faced with this kind of repression, it's not surprising that radical movements like the Ranters collapsed, especially since a worldview that celebrated pleasure and denied the existence of an afterlife offered little reward for martyrdom.

However, the collapse of the Ranters was not entirely due to state repression. A wide variety of other factors worked against them, such as the fact that they only rose to prominence after the failure of the less radical Leveller movement. While this defeat meant that many ex-Levellers became Ranters, it also meant that they faced a powerful, united state which had successfully put down the dissident elements in its army. They also had to compete with a wide variety of other sects, especially the Quakers: the Quaker Leader George Fox boasted about how a judge had admitted that if it wasn't for Quakerism "the nation [would have] been overspread with Ranterism and all the Justices in the nation could not stop it with their laws" (although this statement almost certainly shouldn't be taken at face value, since Fox would have had a definite interest in exaggerating his sect's importance, and the ruling class often get hysterical about any threat to their power).

In addition, the Christian elements that remained in Ranterism led many of them to a disastrous pacifism: Coppe famously stated that he was for levelling, but not in favour of "sword levelling, or digging levelling." Despite all the advances that they'd made towards an atheistic, materialist worldview, they still ultimately believed that they could wait for God to come along and destroy property and class society, rather

than having to do it themselves. It's also possible that the Ranters were just ahead of their time: the anarchist and communist movements have been products of industrial capitalism and the working class it creates, and the Ranters existed in a period before capitalism had finished creating a class of dispossessed urban wage-labourers. Their tendencies towards rationalism would probably have been much more pronounced and appealing if the scientific knowledge needed to underpin a materialist understanding of the world had existed, and their championing of sexual liberty could have had disastrous consequences (especially for women) in a time before effective contraception was widely available.

So what can we take from the Ranters today? It's certainly true that they failed to turn the world upside down, but then who has? All the insurrections of the past have ultimately ended in failure, but they've also shown us a brief glimpse of what another world might look like. Perhaps the last words should go to the Quaker Edward Burrough, who told the restoration government that they could "destroy these vessels, yet our principles you can never extinguish, but they will live for ever, and enter into other bodies to live and speak and act." More than 350 years after the Ranters and their fellow radicals were crushed, their principles of liberty and community are still entering into new bodies, and our resistance still threatens to shake the powers of heaven and earth.

The title is a quotation from Abiezer Coppe's Fiery Flying Rolle, cited on p. 334 of C. Hill's The World Turned Upside Down (Harmondsworth, 1975)

GLOSSARY

Anabaptists: Named after their practice of baptising adults instead of babies. The implications of this were more radical than might be immediately obvious, since while both Catholics and mainstream Protestants saw the Christian faith as a community that everyone had to be involved in from birth, the Anabaptists believed that faith was something each believer had to come to individually, and so it couldn't be imposed from above. The German Anabaptists led by Thomas Müntzer launched a war against all existing authorities and attempted to establish a social order based on total equality and communal ownership of all property, but were harshly suppressed.

Antinomianism: Literally meaning "against law". Not a specific group, but a term used to cover all those who rejected external law in favour of their own personal moral code. Antinomian ideas spread widely during the period discussed in this article, and posed a radical challenge to social hierarchy and Christian moral order.

Diggers: Also known as True Levellers. Radical group led by Gerald Winstanley. Called for the abolition of private property and communal cultivation of land. They set up a series of communes, most famously on St. George's Hill in Surrey, but were driven away by landowners. Saw the monarch, clergy, lawyers, and buying and selling as all being linked: "If one truly fall, all must fall".

Levellers: Political movement aiming for equality and democracy. Less radical than the Diggers and Ranters, but still challenged the existing social order by calling for freedom of religion, equality for all under the law, and something close to universal male suffrage. Had a considerable base of support in the New Model Army, and troops supporting the Levellers challenged Cromwell's authority and launched several mutinies.

Ranters: Perhaps the most radical of all the groups existing in this period. As well as supporting communal ownership instead of private property, also denied moral law, the existence of sin, Heaven and Hell, and saw God as existing in all things, which often led to denying that an external God existed in any traditional sense. Almost unique in their championing of total sexual liberty during this period.



Political photography is often characterised by a sense of being in a protective armour. As powerful and as beautiful as it can be, it can also be a gate by moving beyond the visually literal to the metaphorical, conveying a sense of alienation in a

Noise. Solitude. Escape.

- Gregory Povey

It's too noisy. That's my central belief. Everything in or around me is informed by and filtered through this. My photography exists within this noise; its value is debatable, and its quality is certainly limited. Although in the noise, it sits happily in the calm part of the world that is "barely." Barely Activities are things that you can do, but barely require you to divert your attention to them. They are barely being done, you can continue to do whatever it was you were doing anyway, and don't really remember having done them.

I approach my camera with a semi-disdain. By its own manufacture, it is a "toy camera" — plastic lens, light leaks, clunky winding wheel and three distance settings (near, far and infinity). I don't have to be precious with it. I don't need a tripod, lighting or aperture measurers. I barely need to do anything to use it. Point and click, change the film every twelve clicks. That's all. No more demanding.

The three photographs included here represent that struggle with noise and the barely-nature of documenting the world around me. Sorry, I sound like a second year art student who really wants you to critique their paintings, only to cry when you say they're shit. I'll try again. Three photographs: three different parts of the same point:

Noise. Solitude. Escape

mountanalogue.wordpress.com

Journey into Sheff: Bottom Left, Night trees: Top Left, Stoke/Man: Front Cover

erised by images of brick throwing black blockers, placard waving protestors or lines of bored looking cops dressed in
 as some of these images are, we sometimes forget that photography can, just as with any art form, inspire and insti-
 eral. Here, two artists have used experimental methods to subvert and ultimately detach us from our visual referenc-
 a viscerally haunting way. If you wish for Organise! to exhibit your art work, feel free to email: organise@afed.org.uk

Ghost. Midsummer Murders.

Man in Shopping Centre.

- Jasper Murphy

I had the processed film rolled up in its plastic canister and sat it on top on a hot external hard drive with a piece of clementine and let it fester for a while. Some of the film gunge had bubbled up over the canister and stuck it to the hard drive. I took it to the bathroom, took the clementine out and unravelled the film, some of the gunge stuck to itself and was peeling off itself and it was just generally a mess. I hung it out to dry in my room and scanned the negatives using a home negative scanner.

Photography's always been relatively accessible to the working class as a medium, and I think that's especially true now. We're living in a time where objects are piling up and becoming surplus, and as people move on to digital and leave their film cameras unused it's possible to get an array of quality (or cheap plastic) film cameras free or cheap, through either hand-me-downs or internet trading. Though film and printing can be expensive – if you just process the film and scan the negative digitally the cost gets manageable. It's also possible to buy film in bulk cheaply on the internet, sometimes expired film which can render colours in a nice way. People also talk about their film-damaging experiments online, so it's a good place to get inspiration.

I'm interested in the boring. Things that are everywhere. So I tend take photos of stuff that forms the backdrop to boring everyday life – like shopping centres, or eating my dinner in front of Midsomer Murders. The gunged film draws attention to its beauty and also to the idea that the everyday is warped and absurd.

Ghost: Top Right. Midsummer Murders: Middle Right, Man in Shopping Centre: Bottom Right



FIGHTING AND BEATING THE POLL TAX



A RETROSPECTIVE

A good deal has been written by anarchists about the defeat of the Conservative government's Poll Tax (or 'Community Charge', its official name) because we were one of the tendencies building the community revolt that resulted in this working class victory. This year sees the twentieth anniversary of the start of non-payment in England and Wales, inspired by mass refusal in Scotland, where

implementation had started a year earlier. There was also escalating confrontations with local government, Labour and Tory alike, as councils caved in to government pressure to set rates and collect the tax forcibly, imprisoning even those they knew couldn't pay.

Anarchists, not least the Anarchist Communist Federation (as the AF was then called), recognised the significance of the anti-Poll Tax struggle. Our members were involved in fighting as a federation and as members of local community campaigns. This is reflected in articles in ten consecutive issues of *Organise!* and the writing of two pamphlets that set the scene for much of what followed, and which were widely re-published by anarchists and community campaigns. This article



is a member's observations on what we wrote and the context in which we wrote it.

Our first pamphlet, *The Poll Tax and How to Fight It*, was in print around October 1988 and was inspired by resistance in Scotland, where, for example, 75% of homes in Edinburgh had 'Won't Pay' posters in their windows. In this period we advocated non-registration in Scotland (including mass-sabotage of the process) as well as the non-payment that was to follow. We celebrated the first community anti-poll tax groups being set up north of the border and, rather optimistically as it turned out, we appealed for non-implementation of the tax by council workers, even suggesting what action they could take. It was clear even at this stage that we were going to have a different strategy from the left, who wanted people to cooperate by registering, even if they were going to protest later.

In 'What lies behind the poll tax?' (*Organise!* 14: Feb-April 1989) we outlined exactly what would be in store for our class in England. This article is a little softer on the councils than the pamphlet.

The focus is primarily on the tax as an attack on jobs and services. Looking back, it seems that as an organisation we still didn't quite understand how the struggle would contrast with traditional campaigns that defended state provision. The article missed the fact that the campaign in Scotland already heralded a class on the offensive for the first time since the defeat of the miners' and printers' earlier in the decade, and that in many senses the struggle against the Poll Tax had more in common with the widespread inner city unrest of 1980s.

In 'Poll tax crunch point' (*Organise!* 15: May-July 1989) a Glasgow member exposed Labour's indignantly entitled 'Stop It!' campaign against the 'Tory Tax', and they advised activists in England and Wales not to be side-tracked by local politics but to work instead for blanket non-registration from the start. They also suggested what kinds of organisational structures

were working best at this stage, including resisting Trotskyist attempts to takeover community-based campaigns. We said of the left, 'watch out for these people, their authoritarian politics will alienate people and destroy effective action'. Again we advocated trying to involve council and other workers from the start as a key strategy.

'Mass non-payment takes off' (*Organise!* 16: Aug-Oct 1989) celebrated the success of mass non-payment in Scotland and bailiff 'reception committees' on estates, and also the impetus that the delivery of registration forms in England and Wales had given those embryonic campaigns. We spared no venom in exposing the hypocrisy of the Labour councils, who amongst other things had frozen the bank accounts of 130 people who had refused to register in the Central Region and deducted money from them. **Again** we advocated

We spared no venom in exposing the hypocrisy of the Labour councils, who amongst other things had frozen the bank accounts of 130 people who had refused to register in the Central Region and deducted money from them.

and celebrated solidarity activity by council workers, still with little evidence of it taking place, let alone being effective. With hindsight, we read as though we would have simply been uncomfortable not doing so. We were class-struggle activists, and class struggle will inevitably involve the workplace, right? But what we did get right was the centrality of area-community fight back.

In 'Militant and other parasites on the poll tax struggle' (*Organise!* 17: Nov-Jan 1989-90), ahead of most anarchists and most of the Left, we had worked out that class strength in fact lay almost **entirely** in the community and not in

Our second pamphlet *Beating the Poll Tax* (March 1990) again drew its inspiration from Scotland, being published ten months after poll tax demands were sent out there, noting that by December 1989 Lothian council had already admitted that it would have to write off huge amounts of unpaid tax and have to take 100,000 non-payers to court, such was the scale of non-payment and community solidarity. By now bailiffs needed police protection on Scottish estates, as they tried and failed to gain access to non-payers' homes and were confronted by organised and well-planned collective resistance.

Near-terminal damage

As we said in *Beating the Poll Tax* about Militant, 'every decision they have made on their campaigning strategy has been based on what they think best serves the interests of their struggle within the Labour Party, not on what's best for beating the poll tax.' In that pamphlet we noted that Militant had just launched what we knew to be a front organization, the All Britain Anti Poll Tax Federation 'in a bid to stamp their leadership on the movement.' With hindsight, it is hard not to smile at this understatement, given the almost terminal damage inflicted on autonomous community struggle by the ABAPTF.

The enemy was the same enemy, the state and capitalism, but the industrial defeats of the 1980s had destroyed workers' confidence in the workplace as a viable arena of struggle...

some idealised 'yin-yang' 'workplace-community' harmony. At the same time we waged war on the authoritarian left and in particular Militant. With horror we realised that this Trotskyist tendency within the Labour Party had ditched its other campaigns to apparently concentrate on a community fight back as well. Having watched with amusement the soap opera that was the Trotskyist Left for some time, we realised and exposed in detail their real strategy in arguing for mass non-payment and simultaneously signing up the unwary in community campaigns to the Labour Party. They were trying to take over the Party by getting kicked out of it. It was mad but true! This article's insight would still make Tommy Sheridan's blood run cold, if it's warm in the first place, and is probably the most important to appear in *Organise!* in this period.

Registration had been sabotaged in England and Wales to the extent that many local councils were months behind schedule in sending out demands. Already Birmingham's Labour council predicted at least 120,000 non-payers. In *Beating the Poll Tax* we argued that communities needed to organise not merely **outside** of the Labour party, councils and union bureaucrats but **against** them. The pamphlet concludes with a chapter exposing the left for cynically trying to lead the class to an inadequate and misguided conclusion about the Labour Party: that it wasn't doing enough to **support** the struggle against the poll tax, when they knew that it was out to destroy that struggle, and throughout the campaign had in fact endorsed successive acts of sabotage by Labour bureaucrats.

Still we were looking to council workers to support non-payment. Desperately trying not to rule it out, we noted that 'the strength of organised resistance to the poll tax is – **currently** – rooted in the community-end of the campaign' and 'the spread of community-based organisation has not – **so far** – been matched by a similar level of workplace and industrial activity' (my emphasis). True, in Edinburgh, council workers threatened to strike if any of them was penalised for non-payment, and we made much of a dole office strike in London when workers refused to become poll tax 'snoopers' for the council. But it was clear that it was primarily from the communities that the real resistance was coming.

TUC get off your knees!

The non-emergence of workplace opposition changed the landscape of class struggle as far as we were concerned. The enemy was the same enemy, the state and capi-

talism, but the industrial defeats of the 1980s had destroyed workers' confidence in the workplace as a viable arena of struggle, and the unfolding collaboration of Neil Kinnock's Labour Party and the TUC with the implementation of the tax did nothing to help the situation. With only three months to go until the first bills would be issued in England and Wales, we were nervous, but in *'Labour's poll tax panic'* (*Organise!* 18: Feb-April 1990) were able to report on what was already turning into a mass mutiny. As reported in *'Poll tax fury'* (*Organise!* 19: May-July 1990) demonstrations took place all over England as local councils set poll tax rates. In many places these were so heavily policed that riots broke out. This repression and resistance to it culminated in the mighty 'Poll Tax Riot' in Trafalgar Square on March 31 1990: *'The Peasants Revolt'* (also issue 19).

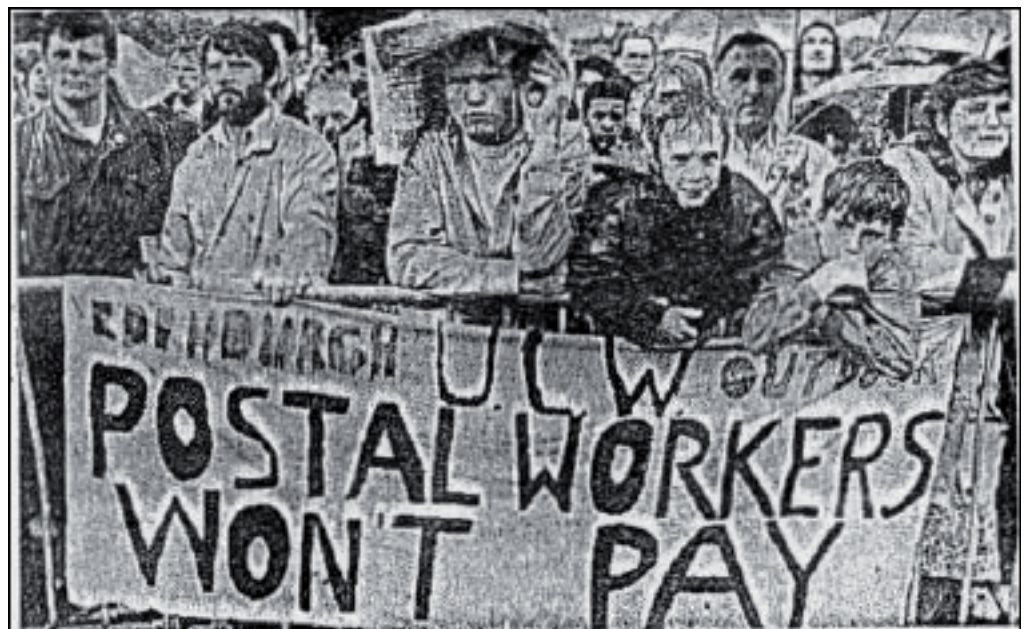
Flattered as anarchist organisations were to be given credit by the media for orchestrating the most exciting insurrectionary upheaval since the inner city riots of 1981, we ourselves were genuinely taken aback and in awe of what our class is capable of. Arguably the riot was the product of the thwarted aspirations of the 1980s. On one level, we were merely defending our right to march on the capital without being mown down in a pre-meditated attack by police horses and vehicles. But within minutes of that first wave of batons, it was clear that we had been bottling up something painful and powerful for too long, and that the state had no concept of what it had unleashed. For every blow struck back at the police, and for every shop window and Porsche trashed later in the West End, our real power was most evident in the speed with which barricades were erected, maintained and defended by people who had never met before; promises between strangers to look out for each other were made and kept; people targeted by police were de-arrested, and de-arrested again; and the struggle was generalized in the way that only class-struggle can be generalized: the South African Embassy got torched. There was more laughter than shouting; more hugs than bandages (on our side).

Stand or fall

The level of spontaneous self-organisation amongst the 'rioters' genuinely fooled some people into thinking that the people were indeed the puppets of some sinister secret force. But we weren't. It began as "Stand together, fast, or fall" and a defensive stance against a police charge directed at young and old, male and female, the 'up-for-it' and the 'scared-out-of-my-wits' alike. It was a point of no return for ordinary people, many, possibly the majority, on their first ever demonstration, certainly in the capital.

'The Peasants Revolt' in *Organise!* 19 took a lot of work. We didn't want to make excuses for class violence. It wasn't a last resort. It was provoked, yes, but we could have fled and we didn't. There were several points when the article resonates with a love of our class and the beautiful destruction it is prepared to unleash when its back is against the wall. And like Class War, who's individual members suffered far worse in the backlash than ours did, we refused to apologise for the violence (as though it was 'ours' to justify

the state
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concept of
what it had
unleashed...





anyway). But the article is slightly pious nonetheless and reflects our sense that other anarchists would revel in the violence rather than interpret it accurately and that, as usual, good analysis fell to the ACF. On reflection, we should have admitted that we had had fun too. The clampdown following this event was extensive of course. Not only were the press and the Met seeking out the identities of rioters, but Labour's Roy 'exemplary sentences' Hattersley and Militant's Steve 'we will be naming names' Nally, were for once of one mind. 'The state goes on the offensive' (*Organise!* 20: Aug-Nov 1990) comments on police operations after the event and on the establishing of the Trafalgar Square Defence Campaign and the amazing extent to which a working class already struggling financially was prepared to show really

meaningful solidarity with the defendants. Outrageously, the ACF even advocated 'masking up' as routine on future demos! We were right because, as we reported in 'Fighting on the poll tax front' (*Organise!* 21: Dec-Feb 1990-91) the police would not only attack further demonstrations, starting with one on October 20th, again in London, but would seek to ban them, beginning the criminalisation of protest in Britain. And of course the Met wanted a rematch after the hammering they had received in March. And almost without noticing it, we had stopped calling on fellow workers to act in the **workplace** and were engaging with those same workers where we actually **had** some strength; on the streets and in our communities.

But it would be a huge mistake to imply that the riot either marked the anti-poll tax campaign out from other working class struggles or that it was the final straw in terms of the tax itself. It was merely the last great street battle of the era. Ordinary people had been prepared to force the state to show its true, violent nature in the inner-cities and on miners' and printers' picket lines too. And when the fuss died down, the community campaigns were still there, encouraging and supporting non-payment; still leafletting, making decisions through well-attended open meetings, sharing information and creating knowledge, seeing off bailiffs, and supporting their prisoners. It was their dogged determination that eventually made the battle too costly for the state.

Our next article, 'Fighting the poll tax: news from Leeds' (*Organise!* 22, March-May 1991) showed the extent to which the system was collapsing under its own bureaucratic weight, in terms of the scale of non-payment and the chaos that ensued whenever the courts tried to get to grips with it. Typical of larger cities, Leeds had around 40 local campaigns and 10 less active workplace campaigns, and practical lessons were being learned in terms of how to approach court cases collectively and learning what powers local councils and bailiffs did and didn't have. The same issue points to the strain that campaigns were now under to support the people who had been imprisoned whilst keeping our nerve and helping other people keep theirs. Could we continue to keep many more of us from being sent down for non-payment, for 'rioting', and for a myriad of other offences? Tyres on bailiffs' cars were proving very flimsy, and dogs for some reason took a real dislike to bailiffs trousers; custard pies got thrown at city councillors in Nottingham by people dressed as Robin Hood, for

It became clear also that the success of government boils down to its willingness to use violence and physical coercion against us.

heaven's sake! I remember mainly being exhausted, for months on end, and knowing that my phone number was on hundred of leaflets with a promise that we would come and defend anyone who called saying they had a bailiff at their door (and we did).

Militant opposition

I don't recall that it was ever necessary for anarchists to actually call attention to the ham-fisted and transparent attempts of Militant to sell out autonomous community campaigns. They poured the party's energies into dominating the anti-poll tax resistance nationally and have to be condemned because of the amount of time genuine, autonomous campaigns had to put in to try to stop being taken over. They

packed meetings, passed resolutions in the absence of autonomous activists (for example, by calling local meetings and not inviting everyone), insisting on hierarchical structures that could be dominated by them, and ultimately establishing the ABAPTF and claiming it represented every anti-poll tax campaign in Britain. What we did have to do was explain to people in our groups why this was happening, because the significance of the internecine warfare within the Labour Party was not immediately apparent. A counter structure to the All-Britain Federation had to be formed, the '3-D' network, in which significant community fight-back organisations like Haringay Solidarity Group were represented. But it would be entirely unfair to give the impression that Militant members did no meaningful community work. Many of them worked hard in the interests of ordinary people faced, for example, with appearing in court for the first time in their lives. Some of these genuine activists left the party once its more cynical agenda became apparent to engage in genuine community fight-back.

By the next issue, 'A fairer tax?' (*Organise!* 23: June-August 1991) it was over. The poll tax was dead! Re-reading an article warning against over-celebration





(‘yes, we have got rid of the poll tax, but we are still being ripped off. There is no such thing as a fair tax’), makes me wish we’d had the energy instead to reflect the joy and pride we had in our communities at that point. We just moved on to the next struggle. Twenty years on, we still haven’t caught up on the sleep (and it shows). But looking back on the struggle against the poll tax brings a ready smile to the face of any comrade who was part of it.

Revolutionary potential

In 2010 we seem closer than ever to the culmination of Thatcher’s dream of destroying class, collective identity, and undermining societal-bonds and responsibilities that the state and the market do not control. And no one needs *Organise!* to tell them that Thatcher’s dream has formed the basis of Labour’s ideology too. So it is important to reflect on the defeat of the Poll Tax not only as a celebration of a past victory for the working class in a period in which other mass struggles were crushed by the state, but as a struggle which had some of the key ingredients for social revolution within it. It really was that significant.

These elements include a working class expressing its self-interest in explicitly class terms. For example, at no stage was an alliance between community and business leaders on the cards, even though local businesses too were outraged at the principle of the new Uniform Business rate (UBR), and the CBI warned of mass bankruptcy and redundancies. It became clear also that the success of government boils down to its willingness to use violence and physical coercion against us. That’s quite a wake-up call. Through this came an understanding of the importance of well-coordinated local and national networks capable of offensive and defensive action. Above all, for many working class people this was our first experience organising within non-hierarchical, decentralized yet highly effective and well-coordinated community campaigns, all the more empowering because they won! And common cause with other struggles emerged, for example with the prison riots of the period. Anarchists who can identify these elements are the ones best placed to be able to devise strategies for ‘making-revolutionary’ the current struggles we are involved in.

A realistic understanding of the potential of workplace resistance was also achieved, involving the recognition that the ‘workplace’ was still dominated by ties to the unions and TUC which were adamantly **against** the non-registration campaign, let alone non-payment. A whole article could be devoted to poor old Christie Campbell of the Scottish TUC, and what became known as the ‘tea-break against the poll tax. And in an attempt to recon-



...to organise our lives for mutual benefit not for a small class of employers or property owners... The fight against the poll tax remains one battle in an on-going class war.

cile the unreconcilable – supporting both implementing and resisting the tax - he advocated a 12-week refusal campaign, after which people would pay, even though his opposition to the tax stemmed in part from the reality that people simply **couldn't** pay. Needless to say, people still didn't pay! And the legislation allowed people 3-months grace anyway! But through this process the danger of the stifling, parasitical grip of Trotskyism on community campaigns became apparent: they don't only want control of the factories and town halls, you know.

The class for itself

It is important to be clear about the extent to which the fight against the Poll Tax transformed working class culture. Even anarchists had little tradition of fighting local councils as part of the state, and they did so this time not so much from the predictable libertarian perspective of opposing taxation, but from the point of view of refusing to accept that central government **alone** was responsible for the tax, poor services and lack of funding and the councils merely victims. This attitude has informed anarchist attitudes to the local state ever since.

“Ding dong, the wicked witch is (nearly) dead”

Finally, re-reading our 1988 and early-1989 material now, it seems as though for ages we didn't actually believe the struggle would be won! We seem to be trying to make it seem worth fighting and resisting mainly so that the working class could move on confidently to the next struggle (as it did). Fortunately, the working class does not look to political organisations for permission to win! But something that is a key role of revolutionaries is to help our class remember that it **can** and **has** won, because for some reason it tends to forget. By the time we published *Beating the Poll Tax* we were more confident. We noted that crushing the tax would increase the class's confidence and enable it to do away with the system and 'create a society in which we are able to exercise real control over our lives...to organise our lives for mutual benefit not for a small class of employers or property owners...The fight

against the poll tax remains one battle in an on-going class war'. And then we **did** win, and it was worth so much more than that, because 'the community' - in the many ways we seek to define, recover and celebrate it - has stayed at the heart of struggles since.

All that remains to be said is "See you in Traf. Square the Saturday after you-know-who croaks her final death rattle". In the mean time, some further reading:

For our two pamphlets, an index to Organise! issues covering the poll tax period, and the articles noted above:

<http://www.afed.org.uk/org/polltax/>

Cl@ss War Classix (Durham) have reprinted the special edition produced by Class War in the period leading up to March 31st 1990. For some local colour, see <http://thesparrowsnest.org.uk/scans/polltax/>

This article was written using The Sparrows' Nest anarchist archive in Nottingham.

On The Frontline Redux

The Problem with Unions

The last Eighteen months have seen some of the largest attacks on living standards in Britain in recent times. Mass layoffs, attacks on pay and conditions, spiralling unemployment, cuts in services and attacks on claimants all paint a bleak picture which doesn't look to be brightening any time soon – indeed it appears that they are the opening salvo in the biggest attack on the working class since the 1980s. However, 2009 also saw some inspiring struggles in which workers were willing to take on seemingly impossible odds. Secondary picketing and factory occupations burst back onto the scene as militant workers flouted anti-strike laws, while months of local disputes in the Royal Mail (including a number of wildcat walkouts) led to national strike action by postal workers as the year came to a close.

Such action deserves ongoing solidarity and support. But beyond providing this to workers we should be aiming to help bring struggles together. On top of this, as well as supporting the actions

of fellow workers, we are faced by our own battles on a day to day basis; battles which stem from the same predicament anyone who has to pay the bills regularly faces. Winning a better world requires a working class willing to fight in its interests; and building this kind of confidence among our fellow workers requires a strategy. But does that strategy currently exist?

Early last year, the Anarchist Federation published *On the Front Line*, its workplace strategy. Distributed in pamphlet form, the document was an attempt to clarify the organisation's thinking on the problems we face at work, and the practical avenues for workplace organisation in different kinds of workplaces (unionised, non-unionised, etc). On the Front Line made no secret of the fact it was provisional, and the product of discussions which remained far from conclusion, stating in its introduction, "There is one last thing that this document is not. It is not final. We present this as provisional, as all

revolutionary ideas must be. Our commitment to developing these ideas in the light of new ideas and experiences is absolute."

In this spirit, we want here to revisit the discussion of the nature and role of unions. We aim to help clarify the nature of the problems we face at work and what we can do about them. We seek to contribute to ongoing discussions within both the AF and pro-revolutionary circles on workplace strategy; discussions which we feel are vital in laying the groundwork for co-operation between members of different class struggle political tendencies – co-operation we see as essential given the brutal conditions the working class currently faces.

In this article we do not want to respond to all the criticisms made of the pamphlet, or to return to all the issues it covered. Here we want to focus on clarifying the critique of unions, and address some of the ambiguities visible in *On the Front Line* with what it calls "syndicalist and grass-roots unions".



The union was faced with workers taking action in their own interest and on their own initiative... Its response was to isolate the struggle, and attempt to take the initiative away from the workers concerned.

This is largely a question of analysis, and we do not propose any detailed industrial strategy here – though of course the basis of any practical strategy is its analysis of the world we live in, and we hope to contribute to this process. We recognise one of the major criticisms of the pamphlet – that it describes events but does not really advance any real strategy, instead describing “tendencies” – but cannot detail in depth what we advocate here. We hope that this article will assist the development of a shared strategy on the part of class struggle anarchists. Insofar as we do this, we are doing it as individuals and not reflecting the collective view of the organisation, which at date remains that advanced in *On the Front Line*.

The argument we want to make here is that the problem with unions isn't that they aren't under the control of their membership, but that their function within capitalism is to negotiate the conditions of exploitation of their members. They are the mediating organisations of labour-power, and serve to mediate the conflict of interests between employers and the workforce. It is this representative function which is the problem, and remains the problem whether or not the mediating organisation is a bureaucratic TUC-affiliated union or a member-controlled union with a revolutionary constitution. Insofar as they are the recognised representatives of workers, and seek to make deals on their behalf, they stand to run into the same pitfalls.

To elaborate further, we want

here to examine significant workers' struggles which have taken place in Britain in the past 18 months, with a view to analysing both the behaviour of the unions in these situations, and the reason why this behaviour takes place. In the final section of the article, we want to look at whether there is any scope for “syndicalist and grass-roots unions” to behave differently in Britain in 2010. One of the most significant criticisms of *On the Front Line* was its lack of reference to historical evidence or recent struggles. We aim to rectify this here, by looking at three major struggles of 2009, and the role the union played.

The Visteon Occupations

On the 31st of March 2009 the car parts manufacturer Visteon announced its bankruptcy, with the closure of three of its plants in the UK and the loss of 610 jobs. After flying visits by receivers to the factories, the workers were sacked without notice and with no guarantee of any redundancy or that they would see their pensions. Management, who were fully aware of the impending bankruptcy of the company had kept the staff working right up until they were fired, knowing full well they would not be paid for the hours they worked. Management had already secured their pensions in advance, and the evidence points towards the company having been run into the ground deliberately.

In response, workers at the Enfield and Belfast plants occupied the factories. Workers at Basildon occupied too, but finding nothing of value left on the site, they

trashed the offices. They were evicted by riot police, and began a 24-hour picket of the plant. The Belfast occupation received strong support from the start; many of workers, who were split evenly between Protestant and Catholic backgrounds, lived locally. Meanwhile, support groups sprung up to provide supplies, funds and practical solidarity to the workers at the three factories.

Most of the workers were members of the Unite union, and had paid subs for years. Despite this, the union gave no financial support until the end of the struggle, and the only contact between the union and the workers was through the site convenors. At Enfield, union bosses arrived only to give erroneous legal advice (they told the workers they faced jail for their actions – they didn't) and pressured the workers to end the occupation. Other legal advice from the union was similarly useless, and it was their supporters who had to point out that squatting is not illegal, and they didn't face arrest for it. Funds came from supporters and union branches, and Unite didn't recommend that its members support the struggle or even publicise it on their website.

The union was faced with workers taking action in their own interest and on their own initiative. This was a threat to its own role as official representative of the workers. Its response was to isolate the struggle, and attempt to take the initiative away from the workers concerned. To this

The union was put on the back foot, having to play catch up with the movement that was not under its control.

effect, it was successful in pressuring the workers to leave the plant (giving up their own leverage – control over the fixed capital of the company) so that it could negotiate. Though the union claimed that this strengthened negotiations, it seems the opposite happened – workers were now only able to negotiate from a position of weakness. In fact the only reason that Ford came to the negotiating table was ex-Visteon workers organising delegations to Ford sites, to attempt to get them to “black “ Visteon products. The threat of unofficial secondary action was more of an incentive than the entreaties of the union. In the end, after union bosses flew out to America to broker a deal, leading to improved redundancy pack-

ages. However the question of pensions remained unresolved, and although workers voted to end their action it remained a partial victory.

Oil industry walkouts

On 28 January 2009, approximately 800 Lindsey Oil Refinery workers went on strike following the announcement by the Italian construction contractor IREM that Italian and Portuguese workers were hired to work on the site, rather than local workers. On 30 January, around 700 workers at the Grangemouth Oil Refinery in central Scotland walked out in solidarity. They were also joined by walkouts at Aberthaw in South Wales, at the ICI site in Wilton, Teesside and

at the British Petroleum site in Saltend, Hull.

When workers at other refineries and power station sites walked out in solidarity, Mass meetings were organised to decide how to take the struggle forward. They were joined by other workers at pickets and demonstrations outside various power stations and refineries. They showed little sign of being concerned about the illegal nature of their actions as they showed solidarity with their fellow work colleagues. They were angry at the prospect of unemployment and ever worsening living conditions.

From the outset, the strike movement appeared to be trapped in nationalism. With workers standing on picket lines with banner and placards proclaiming “British Jobs for British Workers”. The media and trade unions encouraged this outlook; it was never the



demand of the workers as discussed and decided at their mass meetings. The principal demand of the strikers as ratified by a mass meeting, was that the NACEI Agreement cover all workers. Also, 200 Polish workers came out in support of the strikers, furthering undermining the initial nationalist perspective of the struggle.

On February 5th, a deal was reached, after several days of discussion between TOTAL and GMB. The deal created 102 new jobs in addition to the ones awarded IREM.

The strike at Lindsey resumed on 11 June 2009, after a subcontractor at the site laid off 51 employees. The strike was quickly followed by sympathy strikes at Cheshire's Fiddlers Power Station on 15 June and Aberthaw on 17 June. The strikes escalated on 18 June, with walkouts at four further sites. On the 19th of June 2009 nearly 700 construction workers at the Lindsey Oil Refinery were sacked. The sackings came following 1,200 workers walking out unofficially at the plant in the jobs dispute. These were followed by walkouts of 3,000 workers at other sites around the country in support of the Lindsey workers.

These unofficial strikes forced the Total oil company to withdraw the sackings. They also won the jobs back for the 51 construction workers whose redundancies sparked the walkouts.

The Lindsey workers did not wait for the union with their secret ballot and rulebook to walkout in support of their sacked colleagues. Nor did the workers at other sites. The union was put on the back foot, having to play catch up with the movement that was

The reason the union acts in the way it does, co-opting and sabotaging its members, is because of its function as established, recognised, and legal representative of the workers. In this role its job is to negotiate deals on their behalf, and establish the terms of their exploitation.

not under its control; although initially the union leadership called on workers to go back. They were forced, faced with emergence of the movement against the mass sacking to try and recuperate it back within union control. The two main unions representing workers involved in the action were GMB and Unite. They instantly sought to enter into negotiations with Total in order to take the initiative away from the developing movement and end the dispute. Also this struggle was fought on a much clearer basis, this time the strike movement that was much larger and without the reactionary slogan "British Jobs for British Workers".

2009 Postal Strikes

On October 8th, postal workers voted in favour of taking strike action. Strike action occurred at Royal Mail offices in London and Edinburgh in response to the announcement of potential job and service cuts which breached the 2007 Pay and Modernisation Agreement (this agreement was struck to end the strikes at Royal Mail in 2007). This also occurred in the aftermath of a series of local walkouts during the summer, forcing the CWU to open a national ballot for strike action.

The CWU decided to have a series of two and three day strikes. But in early November, they had reached an 'Interim Agreement' with Royal Mail management. This agreement brokered by Acas, called off the national postal strikes.

The agreement will further the process of eroding the conditions of workers at Royal Mail. Introducing changes to present working practices meaning workers can be expected to work all sorts of different shifts, with management having the ability to use posties at any time. Also group working will be introduced which sets responsibility for dealing with large volumes of mail traffic on the shoulders of individual postal-workers.

Many postal workers struggled at a local level initially, but when the CWU took ownership of the strikes calling national staggered strikes and to then call them off unilaterally in order to negotiate. It is inevitable that workers will be demoralized, having lost wages (postal workers in Liverpool and London lost three weeks wages). Trying to defend themselves from attacks on their living conditions, to be sold a deal which was hardly distinguishable from the offer on the table at the outset.

We argue for an industrial network of militant workers who would put forward the perspective that workers should control their struggles through mass meetings and act as a militant presence in a workplace, sector or industry and for the extension of struggles when they arise.

Grassroots and syndicalist unions

As we have seen from these events, there is a tension which keeps appearing between the union and the workers – when faced with an angry workforce looking to take action, the union has two real options – subvert and sabotage it, or attempt to co-opt it under its control. In practice, the examples above shows that both tend to happen. But why does this happen? And can the “syndicalist and grass roots unions” we describe in *On the Front Line* pose an alternative?

The reason the union acts in the way it does, co-opting and sabotaging its members, is because of its function as established, recognised, and legal representative of the workers. In this role its job is to negotiate deals on their behalf, and establish the terms of their exploitation. They sustain a bureaucracy of well-paid professionals whose job is just that. Beyond these organisational weaknesses, the structure of union laws precludes any alternative, and in practice, the anti-strike laws are a godsend to unions who use them to terrorise workers out of action, whether the legal threat is real or not (as was the case at Enfield and in the early days of the Lindsay walkout). There is a legal obligation for workers to jump through the hoops facilitated by their union, the demoralising process of negotiation, meetings, consultative ballots, more negotiation,

strike ballots, etc. This legal context is real, and provides unions with carte blanche to sabotage militancy which looks set to exceed what is tolerable – no union leader, no matter how “left”, will allow their organisation to be crippled by the litigation open flouting of union laws would represent. This is what we see as the major problem for “syndicalist and grass roots unions” as a strategy in Britain in 2010, a problem that isn’t really engaged with in *On the Front Line*.

In the pamphlet, the only current example we gave of these “syndicalist-type” unions is the Industrial Workers of the World. Though the IWW seeks to become a functioning union, it has had few job shops in the UK, and has less than 1000 members. In practice, it is used by its members as a form of industrial network, and many of its advocates point to this side of the IWW as its most promising quality. While we recognise this, and see any networking between pro-revolutionaries and other militant workers as important, this is not without its own problems.

Part of the problem is that despite this the IWW isn’t clear about how it sees itself – and in *On the Front Line* we repeated this uncertainty. On the one hand it is an expressly radical organisation, with a preamble and constitution arguing for the abolition of wage labour and “industrial democracy”. As we have

seen, its members frequently posit it as a network for radical and militant workers to stay in touch with each other, Dual-carding with other unions in their workplace in order to agitate a more militant line. On the other hand, it posits itself as a “union for all workers”, seeks legal recognition as a functioning union and the ability to organise workplaces itself. Insofar as we treated the IWW as a useful networking tool in *On the Front Line*, we failed to square this with how it sees itself and its stated function as a “union for all workers”.

In its incarnation as a “union for all workers”, it styles itself as the answer to the problems of TUC unions: “We are a grassroots and democratic union helping to organise all workers in all workplaces ...We are NOT:

- Full of stifling bureaucracy or linked to any political party or group.
- Led by fat cat salary earners who carry out deals with bosses behind your back.
- Going to sell you services, life insurance or credit cards”

But why do unions “carry out deals with bosses behind your back”? It is because of the obligatory representative functions that legal unions carry. They have a legal obligation to enforce anti-strike legislation on their mem-



bers, with the threat of the union being crippled by legal action from employers otherwise. If the IWW became the functioning union it aimed to be, it would still face these realities. It would have the option of either enforcing the atomising and demoralising legal processes of building to strike action on its members, or it would have to have named representatives with the legal responsibilities they carry. Whether the IWW wanted to or not, the organisation would be required to either police its membership, or be litigated out of existence. It isn't ultra-

left dogmatism to recognise this – its about understanding the legislative reality of 21st century Britain.

To take an example from above, how would the IWW have acted if it was the union representing construction workers during the disputes in oil and construction sector last year? Perhaps it would have been less nationalistic in its rhetoric, but ultimately it would have been forced into the same position as the TUC unions – between attempting to take control of the struggle and sabotaging it. If it openly participated in organising secondary action it would be faced with the full weight of anti-strike legislation, and crippled through the courts. This means its options would have had to have argued against secondary action and unofficial walkouts, or to advocate them and risk its own future as an organisation. Likewise the mass meetings at Lindsay which decided on demands and voted on whether to accept offers would have had only faced the difference of what union to ignore, as decision-making power was in their hands and they weren't bound by the same legal strictures

Of course, it is all well and good to criticise something, but in the absence of an alternative the exercise isn't a positive one. In contrast we argue for an industrial network of militant workers who would put forward the perspective that workers should control their struggles through mass meetings and act as a militant presence in a workplace, sector or industry and for the extension of struggles when they arise. In contrast to the IWW in its incarnation as a legal, functioning union, it would not seek to negotiate deals with management, but would seek for mass meetings of workers to make decisions – in the teeth of anti-union laws and the machinations of the unions. Unlike a legal, registered union, it would not aspire to organise any shops as the representative union; it would have no named officials (whether called "delegates" or not) and not be bound by anti-union laws.

Reviews

Yevgeny Zamyatin and the novel *We*

Yevgeny Zamyatin was born in Russia in 1884. In his youth he was involved in a Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, and began a hazardous writing career in the years following the 1905 revolution, in which he was arrested, imprisoned and twice exiled before being granted amnesty in 1913.

By 1917 he was no longer a member of the Bolsheviks and threw himself into the great artistic and cultural ferment triggered by the Russian Revolution. Hurrying back from a job in England, he served on the editorial boards of several publishing houses and taught at writing workshops.

Whilst some writers believed that literature should be totally subordinated to socialism, Zamyatin became a leading figure

in the Serapion Brethren. This group had different styles and approaches, but were united in their belief that writers should have creative freedom, and that literature should not be uniform and monochrome but varied, experimental and above all crafted. The Brethren supported Zamyatin's declaration, in the essay 'I Am Afraid', that: "true literature can exist only where it is created, not by diligent and trustworthy officials, but by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels, and sceptics."

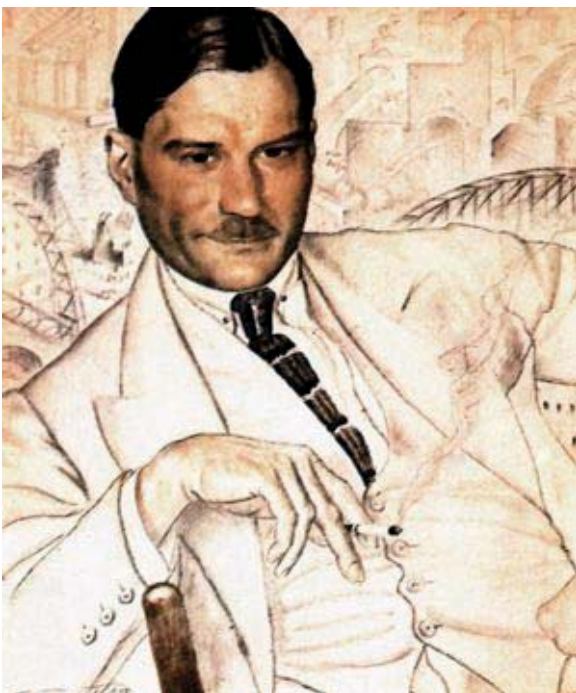
He wrote *We* in 1920-1921 but was not permitted to publish it. It was the custom to read new works out at meetings of the All-Russian Writers' Union, and *We* provoked a series of vicious attacks by Party critics and tame hack writers.

As the grip of the new bureaucratic class tightened on all aspects of Russian life, Zamyatin came increasingly under attack. He was fear-

less in his opposition to calls for total submission to the Communist Party. In his 1926 essay, 'The Goal', he wrote that he found it: "difficult to imagine a work by Lev Tolstoy or Romain Rolland based on improvement of sanitation."

By 1929 the regime had set up the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers. RAPP pursued a campaign to wipe out any independent writing in Russian literature. Many publishing houses and magazines were closed down and there was a wave of suicides by writers and poets.

Zamyatin and his fellow writer Pilnyak were singled out for a particularly nasty campaign of vilification. Whilst *We* was never published in the Soviet Union, its translation and publication in a Russian émigré journal in Czechoslovakia was used to denounce him (even though its first publication in English in 1924 and in Czech in 1927 had gone unnoticed). Pilnyak cracked under the pressure and recanted. Zamyatin refused to give in. Faced with the



"true literature can exist only where it is created, not by diligent and trustworthy officials, but by madmen, hermits, heretics, dreamers, rebels, and sceptics."

withdrawal of his works from publication, shops and libraries, Zamyatin wrote to Stalin asking permission to leave Russia, as he regarded this ban as a living death.

Surprisingly, permission was granted, thanks to the intercession of Gorky, the grand old man of Russian literature. He moved to Paris in 1931, but life was still hard for him. He had little in common with the Russian émigré community with its reactionary ideas. He was lonely and lived in great poverty. He died of heart disease in 1937, with just a few friends attending his funeral. His death passed unremarked in Soviet papers and his name was deleted from all literary histories and encyclopaedias. He became a non-person, tippexed out from history.

But his great dystopian novel has survived despite all of this. Unlike Orwell's 1984 (which was much influenced by Zamyatin) it carries a message of hope. As Zamyatin's heroine I-330 says in *We*: "We shall break down all walls - to let the green wind blow free from end to end - across the earth."

Rights of Common: the Fight Against the Theft of Sydenham Common and One Tree Hill by Betty O'Connor (29 pages, Past Tense, 50p)

This interesting little pamphlet describes the struggle to stop the enclosure of common land – open to all for pasturing, hunting and foraging – in one particular area of south London. In 1614 Abraham Colfe and 100 others

marched to petition the King to stop enclosure. Meanwhile others tore down the fences that had been put up by enclosers. Each time fences were put up they were torn down by crowds. Eventually the Privy Council had to rule that the fencing was illegal. This victory saved Sydenham Common until the 1750s, when Coopers Wood (a section of the Common on the south) was fenced off. In 1754 fences were torn down. This struggle against enclosure continued into the 19th century, until the Common was enclosed by an Act of Parliament in 1810.

As the 19th century progressed the struggle against enclosure was transformed into struggles for open space for recreation. One Tree Hill had always been an open space. In 1896 it was suddenly enclosed by a golf club. A local committee was set up to fight this. However the committee refused to sanction direct action to tear the fences down, and whilst this did happen it was without the committee's approval. On October 15th as many as 15,000 gathered at One Tree Hill and started pulling down the fence. The house of the groundskeeper was attacked and the police were called in. The following day a very large crowd gathered – estimated between 50,000 and 100,000. They faced 500 police who fought against several attempts to smash the fences. The crowd began to stone the police. Ten were arrested. Whilst crowds continued to gather at the weekend at the hill, the riots never revived over the next few years. Eventually the land was compulsorily purchased by the London County Council in 1904 and reopened to the public. Without the actions of the crowd, this might never have happened. As the author notes: "These battles are two

examples of a process that went on for centuries and as the more recent struggle against development in part of Crystal Palace Park shows, in some forms is still continuing. It remains important not only to remember the spaces that have been stolen, like Sydenham Common, and cherish the spaces that have been saved, like One Tree Hill; but also to fight for the places we love when the developers come to call in the future."

Spot the Workers' Autonomy: May 68 by Mouvement Communiste (54 pages, Past Tense, £2.00)

This text, translated from the French, raises some questions about myth and reality in the May 1968 revolt in France. As well as the student revolt and occupations of the universities, there was strike action by 10m workers. The pamphlet analyses the stranglehold of the French Communist Party (PCF) and the PCF-controlled CGT union, and asks how autonomous the strike wave was and how much workers broke from the structures of the CGT and PCF. It contains some interesting first-hand accounts from participants in the events, strikers and militants.

The introduction by Past Tense criticises the Mouvement Communiste approach as too narrow a view of class struggle. It feels that the 1968 events themselves left the legacy of a widened vision of the importance of forces outside the workplace as vehicles of social change, but without ignoring the institutionalisation and recuperation of many of these social movements.

Rabble Rousers and Merry Pranksters: a history of anarchism in Aotearoa/New Zealand from the mid 1950s to the early 1980s. Toby Boraman. Katipo Books and Irrecoverable Press (2007). 144 pages. No price given.

This is a history of a small movement which did not exist as a continuous tradition before the late 1950s. Boraman touches upon syndicalist influence in New Zealand, especially the formation of a section of the Industrial Workers of the World in the years preceding World War One. He gives an overview of the period between 1956 and 1967, with the emergence of the early New Left and the later appearance of an anarchist tendency within it. He then deals with the burgeoning anti-Vietnam War movement and other movements that flourished during the late 1960s and early 1970s. He goes on to look at anarchist involvement in the new social movements of the early 1970s to early 1980s, finally dealing with the anarchist and situationist groupings between 1973 and 1982.

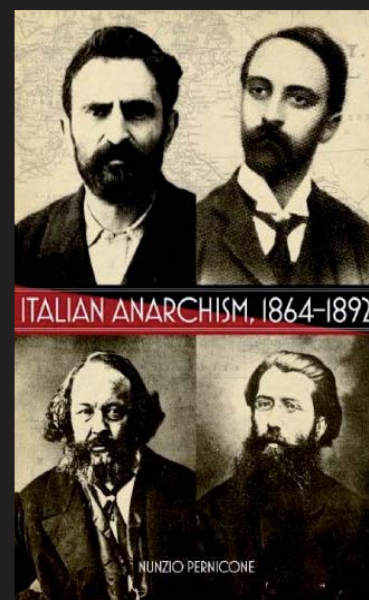
Boraman approaches the subject from a class-struggle perspective. In regards to the prankster politics of some anarchists, he quotes Sean Sheehan and Ken Knabb. Sheehan comments that capitalism can easily accommodate pranks, no matter how comical they are. Knabb, remarking on the Yippies (Youth International Party, an American group that influenced the NZ movement), says they “entered the spectacle as clowns to make it ridiculous”, but “created diversions which, far from promoting the subversion of the spectacle, merely made passivity

Italian Anarchism, 1864-1892 by Nunzio Pernicone (321 pages, AK Press, £16.00)

This is a welcome reprint in paperback of the book first issued in hardback by Princeton University Press in the USA in 1993. It covers the coming to Italy of the Russian Mikhail Bakunin and his efforts there to build the First international, the first major international organisation of the radical working class. It describes his efforts to make this come about in Florence and Naples. As the great Italian anarchist Malatesta was to say of Bakunin’s endeavours in Naples: “For some Bakunin was the barbarian from the North, without God and without country, without respect for anything sacred, who constituted a menace to holy Italian and Latin civilisation. For others he was the man who brought a breath of healthy air to the dead millpond of Neapolitan tradition, who opened the eyes of the youths who approached him to vast new horizons. And these – Fanelli, De Luca, Gambuzzi, Tucci, Palladino etc. – were the first socialists, the first internationalists, the first anarchists of Naples and Italy.”

Bakunin had organised a revolutionary organisation called the International Alliance of Socialist Democracy, and he intended that it should enter the First interna-

more interesting by offering a spectacle of refusal”. Boraman asks pertinent questions about what revolutionaries should do in a period of passivity but ends this interesting little book with the optimistic: “Events can swing in a more anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist direction quite



tional en masse. His French and Italian comrades alike disagreed with this, and wanted to maintain the Alliance and operate as a public body. A compromise was agreed whereby the Alliance joined the International but operated as a public body, rather than as a secret grouping within it as Bakunin himself had wanted.

The book goes on to describe the growth of anarchist communism within the Italian section of the International, the insurrections launched by Malatesta and others in the south, the state repression of the anarchist movement its various crises and its resurgences and its ultimate isolation from the masses. An epilogue deals with the period from 1892 onwards and ends with the Indian summer of Italian anarchism in 1919-20 before it was crushed by the Fascists. An exciting and interesting read.

rapidly, and so there is no need to be permanently pessimistic about the chances for radical transformation. I believe this is a crucial lesson to be learnt from the period. During a period of mass working class unrest, people can quite quickly discover new practices and adopt new ideas in the process of their collective struggles.”

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Aims & Principles

of the Anarchist Federation

1 The Anarchist Federation is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a world-wide classless society: anarchist communism.

2 Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. This divides us, causing a lack of class unity in struggle that benefits the ruling class. Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as a political level.

3 We believe that fighting racism and sexism is as important as other aspects of the class struggle. Anarchist-Communism cannot be achieved while sexism and racism still exist. In order to be effective in their struggle against their oppression both within society and within the working class, women, lesbians and gays, and black people may at times need to organise independently. However, this should be as working class people as cross-class movements hide real class differences and achieve little for them. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.

4 We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide and political and economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class. We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class. The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.

5 As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and the destruction of the environment.

6 It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without their use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.

7 Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part in its overthrow. Trades unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc). Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation of the workforce. The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different from ours. The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow. Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.

8 Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the shaping and creating of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and struggle, people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.

9 As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation. We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method. We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise on a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.

10 We oppose organised religion and religious belief(s).