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# Direct Action

Magazine of Solidarity Federation



Unions, Poverty, War, May Days, USI, Sex

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### To contribute

If you would like to help out or contribute articles or photos, work is entirely voluntary.

We welcome articles of between 250 and 1,500 words on industrial, social/community and international issues; on working class history; and on anarchist/anarchosyndicalist theory and history.

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

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## Aims of the Solidarity Federation

**T**he Solidarity Federation is an organisation of workers which seeks to destroy capitalism and the state. Capitalism because it exploits, oppresses and kills people, and wrecks the environment for profit worldwide. The state because it can only maintain hierarchy and privilege for the classes who control it and their servants; it cannot be used to fight the oppression and exploitation that are the consequences of hierarchy and source of privilege. In their place we want a society based on workers' self-management, solidarity, mutual aid and libertarian communism.

That society can only be achieved by working class organisation based on the same principles - revolutionary unions. These are not Trades Unions only concerned with 'bread and butter' issues like pay and conditions. Revolutionary unions are means for working people to organise and fight all the issues - both in the workplace and outside -

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

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

# Them and Us

## class war, the credit crunch and a culture of resistance

*Notions of belonging to the working class are...outdated and belong to the era of flat caps, factories, steel works and going down the pit.*

Such denials by various academics, politicians and other commentators of what is as plain as the nose on your face are one clear reflection of the ongoing class war. Another is the inequality that is rife throughout most aspects of Brown's Britain. It is with this in mind that the latest installment of our series 'No such thing as class?' (see page 11) has a look at class divisions as shown up by poverty and access to education and health services.

### expenses, fiddles & pay-offs

Yet another way the class division is manifest is in how people expect to be treated when things go wrong. Or to put it another way – it's one rule for them and another rule for us.

What would you expect to happen if you were to completely mess up your job? A £¾million golden goodbye plus £2.5million pension pot? Maybe not, but that's what Adam Applegarth, incompetent



Applegarth - got something to be pleased about?

former chief executive of Northern Rock has walked off with after master minding the first run on a UK bank for over a century. No such luxury though for the 2,000 Northern Rock staff set to lose their jobs as a direct result.

What would you expect to happen if you were caught siphoning off tens of thousands of pounds of your employer's money to family and friends? A 10 day suspension and then just

carry on as if nothing had happened? No? Well that's exactly what happened with Tory MP, Derek Conway, after it emerged he'd paid his son a full salary and parliamentary expenses for three years for not a tap of work. A stark contrast indeed to the treatment of those on or below the poverty line who come under the merest suspicion of fiddling their benefit claims.

These are just two of the more prominent examples of how the system is stacked in favour of our rulers and bosses. We can add the revelations regarding Prescott's food bills, Blair's TV licence, Brown's cleaning costs and Cameron's mortgage payments, all claimed

from public funds. We can add the case of Rose Gibb, the NHS boss who presided over Britain's worst superbug outbreak which contributed to over 300 deaths at Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust. Gibb has rejected a £75,000 pay off and has begun a legal claim for a bigger pay-off, reported to be in the region of £¼million.

We could go on, but the point is that these people not only get treated differently, they absolutely believe they are entitled to it. And with the coming economic slowdown guess who they think should bear the brunt.

### culture of resistance

And the attacks have already begun. The



Gibb - not enough to be pleased about?

recent budget has removed the 10p tax band while the government is trying to impose a 2% ceiling on public sector pay rises over the next three years. If this goes ahead it will amount to

pay cuts for millions of workers since, as everyone knows, the real inflation rate is far higher than the massaged figure the Treasury works with.

However, there are signs of resistance. The coordinated one day strikes by teachers and civil servants that are due to go ahead as we go to press are to be applauded. If Labour's attacks on the British working class are to be beaten off, anarcho-syndicalists and other workplace activists must use the anger and momentum that is building to revitalise and reestablish workplace based organisation and links between workplaces that go beyond the divisions imposed by reformist trade unions. It is only this kind of escalating pressure for action that



can wrest control of the struggle from our union leaders, prevent them from doing shoddy and inadequate deals behind our backs and go on to establish the basis of a genuine culture of working class resistance to capitalism. Such recent offerings by the likes of the Unison leadership and the way forward are the subject of 'With friends like these...' (see page 6).

Beyond the workplace too, the slowdown will inevitably exacerbate the yawning inequality that a decade of New Labour has only served

to widen. However, here there are also hopeful signs of the growing culture of resistance. One inspiring development involves the use of direct action principles to tackle official shilly-shallying and outright illegality in areas like housing provision (see 'London Coalition Against Poverty', page 8). The potential for this kind of approach to empower people at the sharp end of Labour's anti-working class offensive are very clear.

#### also in this issue...

Besides this, we have

provided some war commentary (see 'War is murder for profit', page 14, and 'The first casualty of war', page 16) while this issue's historical focus is the Barcelona 'May Days' of 1937, which were a major turning point in

the fortunes of the anarcho-syndicalist led social revolution that took place during the Spanish Civil War (see page 18). Amongst our international coverage we have an interview with a militant of the USI, our Italian sister organisation, which gives some insight into the issues facing workers and anarcho-syndicalists in Italy (see page 23). As well as the usual review section we also take a closer look at the relationships between patriarchy, capitalism and religious morality in 'Anarchism, Sex and Freedom' (see page 31). Enjoy the read.

### **Anarchist Writers & Publishers' Bookfair & Conference**

**1in12 Club**

**21-23 Albion Street, Bradford,  
West Yorkshire, BD1 2LY**

**Bookfair - Saturday 17th May  
12.00 - 6.00**

**(followed by disco 8.30 - 11.30 !!)**

**Conference - Sunday 18th May  
10.00 - 4.00**

### **Manchester Anarchist Bookfair**

**Saturday 7th June - 11.00-5.00**

**Jabez Clegg**

**2 Portsmouth Street,  
Manchester, M13 9GB**

**(opp M/cr University Students Union)**

**www.bookfair.org.uk**

**manchester@bookfair.org.uk**

## your letters

# Footie Fans Bite Back!

Dear *DA*,

Since your article on the colonisation of football by capitalism ('Take Back the People's Game', DA 40), there have been some interesting developments.

Recently, Manchester United announced annual profits of £212 million, officially making themselves the second richest club in the world. The visit of the club's much-maligned American owners the Glazer brothers, to Manchester didn't go unnoticed, however (as you pointed out, season ticket holders were stumped with a 12% hike in prices and a compulsory retainer scheme charging them for cup games). Some disgruntled fans, having been tipped off about the brothers' flying visit, greeted them by discharging the contents of an industrial ketchup container onto their limo as they attempted to beat a hasty exit from a city centre restaurant.

Rebel club FC United's fans also underlined their anti-corporate



## Reject Respect

Dear *DA*,

Further to your article on the split in Respect. In February Councillor Ahmed Hussain (right) defected from Respect-SWP to the Conservatives, making them the official opposition on the council.

It came about after initial talks with the Lib-Dems broke down. Councillor Hussain had joined the SWP and initially they vehemently denied that anything was happening only for him to appear in a local paper shaking hands with the Tories!

The SWP then did their best to make light of Hussain's transfer of allegiance but the move just underlines the paucity of the SWP and other left parties forming front groups. It is also part of the farce and now collapse of the scheme that the SWP, supposedly the vanguard of Britain's working class theo-

rised as 'a united front of a special kind'.

As you said Respect was bound to come to grief as it was written into its political DNA from its inception. What the SWP has witnessed is the logical consequences of its decision to wind up the Socialist Alliance so that it could realign itself with George Galloway and sections of the Muslim community in an attempt to get their ideas and policies accepted by default. They thought they could manipulate the 'united front' to their own ends only to find themselves with egg on their faces.

In solidarity, Leon.



credentials by boycotting a game against promotion rivals Curzon Ashton, after the company televising the match forced a change in kick-off time.

And, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, 2 fans invaded the pitch at the Burnley v QPR game and unfurled a banner bearing the message "Campbell Causes Leukaemia". This made reference to Blair's former spin doctor Alastair Campbell and his previous justification of "smart" uranium-tipped bombs being dropped on Iraq by allied forces. There has since been an increase in leukaemia rates in affected regions, but by a further twist of

irony the King of Spin, a big Burnley fan, has since become Chairman of fundraising for Leukaemia Research.

With Liverpool fans mounting a vociferous campaign against the club's American owners, commercial forces certainly aren't getting things all their own way!

Dan, the Terraceman

(Disclaimer: *DA* in no way condones such naughty behaviour!)

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

# With Friends like

## why union bosses fail to protect our interests and what we

**T**he experience of sacked nurse Karen Reissmann, and the inability of industrial action to achieve her reinstatement, serves as a timely reminder of the shortcomings of today's unions in their ability, desire and commitment to effectively support workers in struggle. But all is not lost and for the anarcho-syndicalist solution to the tyranny of capitalism and yet more sell-outs, read on!

Despite the tenacity of Karen's local Unison branch, who remained on strike up until her appeal, the response of the union nationally in promoting solidarity for her cause was pitiful. In fact, the wholly inadequate response from the Unison leadership contributed to the defeat of the strike every bit much as the actions of the Primary Care

Trust bosses themselves.

During the strike, solidarity and support from other workers was largely gleaned through word of mouth and tireless campaigning by rank and file activists. But did we at any time hear the Unison big wigs calling for local or national industrial action in support of Karen? Did the Unison hierarchy at any time discourage other members from scabbing and thus undermining the brave strikers' resolve? And, for that matter, against a tide of creeping public service privatisation and cutbacks, do we see Unison campaigning for robust action to counter this? The answer to these questions is, predictably, 'NO'. When public sector workers were offered below inflation pay rises for the third year running, did we see Unison standing firm for a better settlement? Not on your Nelly!


That Unison still serves political funds to a New Labour regime at the forefront of attacks on workers' rights, pay and conditions is quite frankly, laughable. At least the cash-for-honours brigade get some payback for their investment. With Unison's full-timers sitting on committees with the very bosses responsible for destroying workers' livelihoods, any faint hope that our welfare is being protected looks, at best, fleeting. But if the unions (particularly those with the membership and resources that Unison commands) are so unwilling to resist attacks on our living standards, and are actively colluding with the forces behind these attacks, what hope is there? Very little, it appears. This indictment explains


in a snapshot why the workers' movement has been so demoralised and put firmly on the back foot. Bosses like those who sacked Karen Reissmann for daring to speak out must be rubbing their hands in glee. The politicians will no doubt also see this test case as further vindication of their NHS privatisation program and firm anti-union stance.

### the anarcho-syndicalist alternative

Karen Reissmann and her colleagues' experience shows exactly why we need syndicalist rank and file unions. So, *why would* syndicalist unions be so much more effective?

Well, in a nutshell, the power structure of most of today's unions mirrors that of capitalist organisations. This fact, in itself, is part of the problem. Rank and file unions, in contrast, retain direct workers' control through workplace based organisation and mass assemblies. Rather than operating a band of (corruptible) boardroom based careerists, a system of instantly revocable, mandated delegates is preferred. This ensures that delegates do not become divorced from the needs and aspirations of the rank and file, and accountability is maximised. Syndicalist organisations, unlike traditional unions, do not divide workers by trade. Instead they recognise that workers, both internationally and in any particular region, have similar interests and common adversaries. Eventually, therefore, syndicalism aims for the ultimate in workers' solidarity; one big union.

**Solidarity Federation** 

 **Industrial Strategy**

Solidarity Federation's ultimate aim is a self-managed, stateless society based on the principle of "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs". It is a society where we are no longer just used as a means to an end by bosses wanting to make money from our labour.

for free copies or bundles contact:  
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South West D.O., Manchester,  
M15 5HW;  
07 984 675 281;  
solfed@solfed.org.uk

# These... can do about it

Syndicalists hold no hope whatsoever that New Labour, Respect, the Socialist Workers Party or any other self-proclaimed vanguard can represent our interests in any way. History has continually borne this out. But unions must also actively involve communities and those who use the services and products of our labours to be truly inclusive. We also recognise that the interests of the worker and boss will always be at odds, so efforts to co-opt delegates on to management boards and seek compromises are fruitless. For these reasons, we see syndicalist unions as eventually giving workers the confidence to assume complete control of their workplaces through continued struggle. This will be achieved using proactive methods of industrial direct action. The ultimate tool in our armoury is the general strike, with popular workers' councils taking hold of the means of production as a prelude to operating these for the general good of society. Rank and file unions therefore also provide a means to build the new society within the shell of the old. This new society will be one based on libertarian communist principles, wherein we all enjoy the full fruits of our labours and have direct control over the day-to-day decisions affecting our lives, livelihoods and communities.

In a climate of rising fuel and food prices, cutbacks in jobs, wages, affordable housing and vital public services, as workers we are now bearing the brunt of a chaotic economy which threatens to spiral into freefall. Now, more than ever, we need powerful unions run for workers by workers, not career-minded fat cats who kow-tow to our sworn enemies.

The time for change is well overdue.

## South London SF Act against Underpaying Restaurant

**A** top London restaurant paid only £1.50 an hour to a kitchen porter.

Cesare Copeta, a member of the Solidarity Federation's South London local, was employed by The Food Room, owners of The French Table restaurant in Surrey and the Tom Ilic restaurant in Battersea, currently listed in Time Out's Top 50 London restaurants. He was employed as a kitchen porter at the Tom Ilic restaurant and had applied for the job through an advertisement in the Department of Work and Pension's Jobcentre Plus database.

He worked 50 hours over a 2 weeks shift, but was then paid only £75. Having been paid only £1.50 per hour, he walked out of the job in disgust.

The South London local of Mr Copeta's union, Solidarity Federation, wrote to the boss setting out our member's legal entitlement to the National Minimum Wage, payment for wrongful dismissal and accrued holiday pay. We organised a picket outside the restaurant at 6:30pm on Thursday 7th February. At the start of the picket, the employer agreed to pay the member his wages at a little over the rate set at the National Minimum Wage and has also paid the member's accrued holiday pay.

The South London local secretary, Mike Ward, said:

*The catering industry is riddled with long hours, low pay and shady practices. This is a far cry from the glamorous world of celebrity chefs. We are determined to help workers do something about the conditions they face.*



If you are facing a similar situation and want to organise against it, contact South London SolFed on 07956 446 162.

# London Coalition

One of the most exciting developments in London over the last year is the formation of the London Coalition Against Poverty. LCAP is inspired by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty in Canada, who have created a successful and empowering model of grassroots community organising over the last two decades. It brings together activists, advice workers and campaigning groups in order to tackle the causes and effects of poverty, merging advice work, direct action and libertarian organising.

LCAP's work has been based in Hackney and, to a lesser extent, Haringey in the north east of London. This is a pragmatic approach, reflecting where most current members live or work. The main focus over the year has been combating Hackney Council's Homeless Persons Unit's (HPU) use of 'gate-keeping'. This is the practice of misdirecting, lying and confusing people attempting to access housing. Officially 'gate-keeping' is illegal, but the practice is widespread amongst councils who attempt to manage demand for reduced housing stocks through making staff deny people a Homeless Person's Interview which is their statutory right.

LCAP started out leafleting outside the HPU (which they still do regularly) informing people of their rights and asking if they had experienced 'gate-keeping'. Once they have a case they work by placing pressure in the form of public collective action on the HPU office. A typical action involves a letter to the council explaining their obligations followed by a visit to the housing

offices with the person affected and between five and ten supporters who will refuse to leave until the person has been housed.

LCAP's approach is based on 'Direct Action Casework' (see below) which has been used successfully on several occasions, in each case challenging the unlawful refusal of accommodation to homeless people. For example, LCAP was approached by a man who had lived on the streets for some time. He had approached the Housing Office for help and had been turned away and prevented from making a Homeless Person's Application. LCAP brought five people to accompany him to the Housing Office and demanded that the application be accepted. The Housing Office responded by offering an appointment in several days time. This was not good enough and LCAP

immediately escalated their action by leafleting the people waiting with information about their legal rights. Although initially threatening to call the police the Housing Office backed down and took the application the same day, providing temporary housing in a hostel.



LCAP has also held consultations outside Hackney HPU to collect evidence about 'gate-keeping' and to get people's ideas about what they want to see changed at the HPU. There have been two successful demos against 'gate-keeping' outside Hackney town hall. One was a Halloween action called 'a Night Left

on Mare Street' where costumed revellers trick or treated councillors. The other was just before Christmas with a Dickens' 'Christmas Carol' theme with the ghosts of Christmas past, present and yet to come exposing

## Direct Action Casework

**is about knowing our rights and using direct action to enforce them in the same way that workers use disruptive action (go-slows, work to rule, sabotage and strikes) to gain their demands**

**applies this approach to life outside the workplace disrupting the smooth functioning of institutions which are failing to meet their legal requirements, forcing them to concede to our demands**

**is designed to cut through official processes to get people what they deserve and facilitates self-organising by the people directly affected**

**enables those people, whose immediate problem having been resolved, to become involved in helping others without feeling that they need specialist expertise**

**is effective but it isn't enough – campaign work is crucial to challenge the underlying problems and extend the experience of direct action to a broader context**



# Against Poverty

Hackney's 'gate-keeping' practices. A future tactic will be to try to get the council to support a motion against 'gate-keeping' to publicise the practice and use the motion to pressure the council in the future.

LCAP seeks to empower people through solidarity rather than to duplicate the work of existing advice agencies. They always make clear that they are working to change the unjust system of which these cases are particular examples. But once they take on a case the priority is to win.

LCAP have started doing training days, helping people learn about doing Direct Action Casework and about the law around homelessness. The first one was attended by about 25 people who considered it a success. Whether this will translate into many people becoming involved is yet to be seen, although some were already members gaining greater confi-

dence, knowledge and skills.

Other campaigns have included the Haringey Anti-poverty Initiative, looking to tackle issues around debt, with the dual methods of offering support and advice and confronting the finance companies making money out of misery. Activities have centred mainly on Noel Park estate including advice surgeries with the emphasis on using collective action and picketing Brighthouse, a company that specialises in fleecing people with poor credit ratings through extortionate interest on goods brought. In the future they hope to map the main problems in the area, build a support network capable of mobilising when debt collectors or bailiffs are in the areas and to use Direct Action

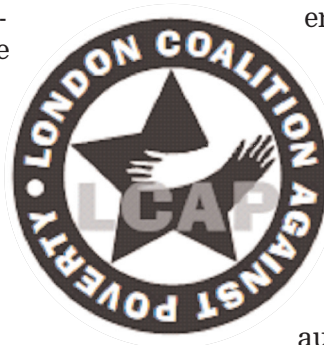
Casework in bailiff cases.

LCAP have also been working with North London Action for the Homeless with documenting the numbers of rough sleepers and the problems they face, to gather evidence to counter

Hackney Council's ridiculous claim that there are only six street sleepers in the borough. This is a good example of LCAP's attempts at alliance building, to enable groups to share resources whilst retaining autonomy. LCAP is also

facilitating a campaign of hostel residents who want to challenge the unsafe, overcrowded, unsanitary and poor conditions they are being forced to live in.

Although the successes LCAP have had have been small, they prove Direct Action Casework does work. The last year has seen LCAP consolidate and educate its membership base, build alliances, fund raise and build a solid foundation for future growth and action. In its second year it is looking to find a permanent office (it currently has a temporary one in the London Activist Resource Centre), expand its activities into other parts of London and apply Direct Action Casework to other relevant issues.



## How to Enforce your Rights at Work

Held recently by LCAP, this workshop consisted of three sessions:

1. 'Exploring Workers' Rights', looked at basic rights through exploring what rights apply in particular scenarios and where to find sources of further information. Participants received a booklet containing what was covered in this session.
2. 'The Whys and Hows of Organising', was divided into two sections
  - a. 'Why Organise at Work?', was presented by South London Solidarity Federation, and looked at the specific reasons why we need to organise to enforce our rights and the other benefits of organising in your workplace.
  - b. 'How we Organise' was led by the London Industrial Workers of the World and focused on the nuts and bolts of organising, looking at different ways and models of working collectively and at their strengths and weaknesses.

The feedback was pretty positive and LCAP intend to do more training in different parts of London, including more in-depth sessions focusing on particular issues.

Like what you've read?...then  
get in touch:

07 932 241 737

[londoncoalitionagainstpoverty@gmail.com](mailto:londoncoalitionagainstpoverty@gmail.com)

[lcap\\_news-subscribe@riseup.net](mailto:lcap_news-subscribe@riseup.net)

## Exposed: Social Landlord Breaches Tenant Privacy

**A** new housing association in Lambeth, Community Trust Housing, provided personal details of over a thousand tenants and leaseholders in a serious breach of the Data Protection Act.

Community Trust Housing (CTH) gave a 30 page spreadsheet containing over a thousand names, addresses, phone numbers, dates of birth, and dates of tenancies and leases to 'persons unknown' as part of a court action to gain possession of five houses. These documents were filed with the court and attached to the outside front door of each of the properties, where anyone walking past could have read them. Given recent incidents with organisations being casual with personal data, there was certainly enough there for identity theft.

CTH was set up in 2007 after a transfer of over 1000 homes on the Stockwell Park Estate from Lambeth Council. It is promoted as a tenant-led housing association whereby seven of the twelve member board are appointed by tenants, four are independently selected and one is a Lambeth councillor. At the time of the tenant ballot on the transfer, it briefly became headline news after New Labour acolyte Polly Toynbee used her

media power to back the transfer against opposition to it from the Defend Council Housing campaign group.

CTH took possession proceedings in the Lambeth County Court against the five properties that were occupied by unknown persons. On Friday 25th January 2008 they were awarded possession of the properties. It was in attempting to prove the legal determination of previous tenancies that the document was submitted to the court. However the document also contained the details of over a thousand other tenants and leaseholders. There was no attempt to erase or block out the details of the other properties not affected in the court proceedings.

These proceedings are public and the court documents form part of the public record. Any person can inspect the court record and access these private details. It is a serious breach of the Data Protection Act and shows that it is not just government that is cavalier with people's data.

SolFed fights for the rights of workers at work and where they live. We support community involvement in managing housing but will continue to keep watching the management.

## Education Workers Network

**S**olFed members in education recently held the 4th EWN national conference in Liverpool considering among other things:

new publicity material – stickers, intro leaflet and poster to advertise *Education Worker*

solidarity messages, including disputes at Keele University and Leicester Adult Education College

tips for workplace activists on working within and outside official union structures

the following statement on the current dispute over the pay bargaining in Higher Education

### EWN Statement on 'single table bargaining'

"EWN has a 2-pronged approach - on one hand we favour all Higher Education workers combining their industrial muscle; on the other hand we oppose national bargaining 'at any price', especially an employer-dictated time-table designed to avoid industrial action by lecturers interfering with student exams.

Given the state of the unions there's a danger of national pay bargaining ending up as a glorified works council (a bureaucratic body dominated by a management agenda, with employers consulting union leaders in a manner totally detached from the needs of ordinary members).

There's a crying need in Higher Education for more contact between activists in workplaces to promote greater militancy and greater solidarity between different groups of workers across union divisions. This is a key aim of EWN and ultimately we wish to see a single, militant, fighting union for all education workers."



# No such thing as class?



After winning the 1959 election, Harold Macmillan a Tory Prime Minister announced that "the class war is over" - and promptly formed a cabinet boasting four lords. Forty years later, Tony Blair, Labour Prime Minister declared that "We are all middle-class now" and politicians, academics and social commentators continue to tell us there is no longer such a thing as class in modern Britain. Notions of belonging to the working class are, we are told, outdated and belong to era of flat caps, factories, steel works and going down the pit. However no matter how many times we are told this we seem determined not to believe it. In a Guardian/ICM poll in October 2007 most British people still feel bound by class; with a massive majority - 89 per cent - of those surveyed feeling their social standing determines the way they are judged by the rest of society.

## Poverty in the UK: a denial of human rights

**A** report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has concluded that many people in the United Kingdom are being subjected to discrimination on the grounds of poverty. The refusal of successive governments to incorporate the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights into UK law has compounded common social attitudes that denigrate people who experience poverty and that undermine popular support for policies

to eradicate poverty.

Discrimination against people on the grounds of their poverty is a common but relatively unacknowledged feature of life in the UK. This discrimination can range from subtle differences in treatment by service providers and the general public to the failure to provide basic necessities, such as adequate incomes and shelter; things that are regarded as fundamental human rights by the world community.

### Judged

Those who are discriminated against can feel that they are being judged and found wanting as individuals, that their right to belong in society is under question and that they are destined to be excluded from the benefits of increasing prosperity experienced by the majority.

Such discrimination is sometimes based on views that people living in poverty are inferior or of lesser value. Such atti-

tudes can become embedded as 'povertyism' - a phenomenon akin to racism or sexism

There are deeply held views amongst the public about the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor. This is reflected in governments' resistance to highlighting wealth redistribution as a means of combating poverty.

### Equality and Human Rights

The new Equality and Human Rights

Commission is required to prioritise the rights protected by the UK's Human Rights Act, which generally excludes economic, social and cultural rights, in its human rights work. Moreover UK equality law does not specifically cover poverty, which means the Commission cannot take anti-discrimination cases on poverty, as it can where discrimination is based on sex, race, disability, religion or belief, age or sexual orientation.

Of course the Commission would have its work cut out if it included poverty and class within its remit. After all the economic system we live under, capitalism, is based on inequality, it could not function without it. To try and eradicate poverty would need a revolutionary overhaul of society, something the Equality and Human Rights Commission or indeed the Joseph Rowntree Foundation really don't want to see.

## Education inequality widening

It has been reported that 85% of white boys from poor backgrounds leave school without attaining five good GCSE's. It seems that white boys in disadvantaged areas are the lowest performing group of pupils in schools after the small population of Traveller children, unsurprisingly though nearly half of their wealthier classmates in England hit the government's target of five GCSE's at grades A\* to C, including English and Maths.

This follows some recent remarks made by Dr Anthony Seldon, master of Wellington College in Berkshire and a biographer of Tony Blair, that the private educa-

tion sector has "emerged pre-eminent in the British education system" and was "perpetuating the apartheid which has so dogged education and national life in Britain since the Second World War".

For Seldon, the independent education sector, which accounts for 7% of British children,

*"cream[s] off the best pupils, the best teachers, the best facilities, the best results and the best university places. If you throw in the 166 remaining grammar schools, which are predominantly middle class and private schools in all but name, the stranglehold is almost total."*

Britain's current education structure is increasingly coming to resemble that of the Victorian era. Then, the working class went to elementary schools, the middle class to grammar schools and the upper

class to public schools, with the Church and philanthropists wielding significant influence over the system. The same situation is re-asserting itself now: community schools for the working class, faith schools for the middle-class and private and public schools for the top echelons of British society.

### Advantages

Of course the middle classes start with a huge advantage. We have always had an educational system that is socially selective. The richer you are, the better the school to which you send your children, whether private or state, specialist or non-specialist. Even the government's own research, and ministers, acknowledge the use of 'covert selection' by the leading state schools to produce "socially segregated intakes".

The increase in educational inequality along class lines hasn't



happened in isolation: it is a reflection of how this country has changed over the last thirty years. Back in 2000 Ofsted, the Office for Standards in Education reported on educational inequality and noted the "strong direct association between social class background and success in education" to put it simply, the higher a child's social class, the greater are their attainments on average. It also saw evidence that "the inequality of attainment between social classes has grown since the late 1980s",

This a reversal of the first three-quarters of the 20th century with the levels of inequality back to where they were fifty years ago and, much more worryingly, there are no signs that this is going to be reversed in the near future.

# Health - better not be poor

It has always been the case that the rich live longer than the poor. Now the government's own figures have confirmed that health inequality as measured by life expectancy and infant mortality has got worse since Labour came to power.

Babies born to poor families now have a 17% higher than average chance of dying, compared to a 13% higher than average chance 10 years ago and the life expectancy of people living in poverty has fallen further behind the average, particularly for women, than it was around the time of Tony Blair's election.

David Sinclair, the head of policy at Help the



Aged, said that the figures represented a "staggering failure" on behalf of the government.

"The starkest demonstration of the gap between rich and poor can be seen in the gulf in life expectancy between different social groups. Despite the government's

commitment that no one should be disadvantaged by where they live, the reality is that people who are poor, or who live in poor communities, die earlier."

Poor communities are become poorly served communities and are disproportionately affected by gaps in NHS provision and cut-backs leading to a cycle of disadvantage and poor health.

Given that cutting health inequalities was supposedly one of the Labour Government's priorities the figures are a bit of an embarrassment for them but more importantly it shows that when it comes to the distribution of resources the working class is left at the end of the line picking up what's left.



MORE EVIDENCE OF A HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IN CRISIS

# War is Murder

## Iraq, Afghanistan and the

**A**s hard as the mass media and politicians try to convince us otherwise, the mounting death toll and carnage in Iraq serves as a daily reminder of the violent nature of both capitalism and the state forces which preserve it.

A world economy underpinned by the unending pursuit of profits, new markets and control of scarce resources like oil, inevitably creates nations constantly at odds with each other. This in turn generates militarism, conflict and war as rival elites seek to preserve and expand their empires at our

expense. It is no coincidence that the richest state in the world, the US, is endowed with sufficient weaponry to enable it to intimidate and outgun weaker ones, furthering its global eco-

A few months after the invasion of Iraq the US corporation, Halliburton, secured \$7 billion dollars worth of business to 'rebuild' the country with contracts in its oil and gas infra-

Council. Meanwhile, as figures for conflict-related deaths peak at over a million (and growing daily), many Iraqis are still without clean water, electricity and sanitation.



Far from being anarchy, the chaos which reigns today is the direct result of imperialist and insurgent factions' bloody battle to assume control of Iraq's resources and people for their own selfish ends. The ordinary Iraqi has become justifiable 'collateral damage' in their power-crazed megalomania.

conomic interests in the process. Economic and military power go hand in hand.

structure. Other corporations such as Bechtel benefited similarly with contracts worth \$34 million. Both organisations maintain close links with the US Senate. Vice President Dick Cheney was a former CEO of Halliburton, and Bechtel's Chief Executive, Riley P. Bechtel, was appointed to the Bush administration's Export

The fabled 'war on terror' was merely a convenient smokescreen used by Bush and Blair to justify the pre-emptive invasions of both Iraq and Afghanistan. Far from making the world a safer, more secure place, the gruesome exploits of the allied military forces has functioned only to

***As much as oil is the lifeblood for the entire world economy, control over oil serves the profit and power interests of small elites among governments and corporations.***

(Michael Renner in *Fuelling Conflict*)

# for Profit

## War on Terror



stimulate an upsurge in reactionary Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. It is also of sickly irony that the 'war on terror' has generated a climate of fear which those in power have used to strengthen their position by systematically eroding our basic liberties.

### the profits of doom

The profit motive acts without conscience or regard

to human cost. War and the insidious trade in arms represent capitalism at its most abhorrent and

destructive. Money spent on weapons and war is money not spent on meeting basic needs. There are 24,000 people starving to death in the world every day, yet the UN has calculated that half of the \$87 billion

plus the US has spent waging the war in Iraq could provide clean water, food, sanitation and education for everyone on the planet. The arms trade helps to keep rich countries rich and poor countries poor. In 2004 wealthy nations sold \$22 billion worth of weapons to less developed countries and US sales alone accounted for \$18.6 million worth of exports.

Arms are sold without



regard to consequence. For instance, between the 1970s and their eventual withdrawal, the Indonesian state's brutal imperialist genocide in East Timor was waged using weapons such as Hawk jets and Scorpion

tanks bought from the UK government.

### the health of the state

Wars will always be fought as long as we allow a tiny minority to manipulate us, dictate to us and rule over us. The politicians, corporations and their puppet media are all in cahoots. Like monarchs of old, they initiate wars under false pretenses, but rarely die in them. The use of the

poor as cannon fodder and the promotion of national, religious and racial divisions to further the greed of the minority is the perennial

legacy of governments throughout history. The squaddies and civilians sacrificed in Afghanistan and Iraq represent only the tip of the iceberg in a campaign without, it seems, any end in sight.

With the 'war on terror' (or more accurately 'war for oil') having further destabilised an already conflict-ridden world, the potential for a grave military catastrophe is exaggerated in a post-cold war era which has seen the modernisation and proliferation of nuclear and biological weaponry.

Nevertheless, the corporate media machine still peddles the eternal myth that thousands of years of human evolution has finally perfected an economic system to benefit mankind as a whole. Likewise, the authorities project a perpetual aura of legitimacy, responsibility and control. The reality behind these lies is a brutal, chaotic system which impoverishes millions and executes a highly self-destructive battle for resources that threatens us all with eventual annihilation. Only with the complete and total superceding of these systems and structures, along with the ideological apparatus which supports them, will the war machine become a distant memory.

# The First Casualty of War

## Harry, the Media and Afghanistan

Against the backdrop of a resurgent Taliban, mounting casualties and a consummate failure to win the hearts and minds of the population, the powers that be needed something pretty radical to bolster support for their flagging military occupation of Afghanistan. Enter stage left, Prince Harry!

In a tour which publicist Max Clifford described as “a very calculated public relations exercise”, the Prince, much maligned by the tabloids in his hard partying and Nazi uniform wearing days, was spectacularly catapulted to hero status. The stirring coverage of the third in line to the throne’s Afghan posting commanded 11 pages each in the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*, and 6 of the *Daily Telegraph*’s precious broadsheets. *The Sun*, notorious for its warmongering “Gotcha!” headlines during the Falklands conflict, demonstrated uncharacteristic restraint, dedicating a mere 6 pages to the story.

Of course, this overblown coverage amounted to nothing more than cheap propaganda. Royals

ly grasped and manipulated in much the same way as the swish army recruitment ads which con-



Harry’s ‘action’ involved calling in air strikes on Taliban positions using ‘Kill TV’

apparently willing to risk one of their own, allowing Harry to be cast as one of ‘our boys’, and the accompanying jingoism all evoked a tired old nationalist fantasy of the mythical good old days of Empire when Britannia ruled the waves – when Britannia raped, plundered and enslaved huge portions of the globe.

veniently sidestep the gory truth of war. They lie, we die.

The servicemen and women killed and maimed on active service at the time the Harry story broke, warranted barely a mention. On his return to Brize Norton air base, the plane transporting Harry also carried two injured squaddies, one of whom had lost two limbs. Neither was there any mention that many members of the armed forces will be faced with scrabbling for proper care, support, employment or benefits on their return home from duty.

We will not be fooled. Without the wholesale backing of the propaganda machine of the mass media, nationalism and the greed of the ruling class, along with the wars they cause, would be seen for the obscenities they really are.

### they lie, we die

The phrase “truth is the first casualty of war” has never been more apt. Tony Blair, when challenged on the unlikely prospect of sending his own offspring to war, once baulked “I would *love* to send my children to Iraq”. This was as patently ridiculous as the idea of Harry being exposed to any real danger. But as a propaganda coup, Harry’s exploits were opportunistical-



The Sun’s take on the uniform



## Colombia

# In the Face of Violent Threats

In March a number of organisations in Leeds presented a day event on human rights in Colombia. Amnesty International and the Yorkshire and Humberside TUC provided speakers and there was a large delegation of Colombian trade unionists from the CUT union. Why Colombia and why the emphasis on trade unions and human rights? Colombia is suffering a low level civil war on several fronts – between the state, paramilitary groups (many of them sponsored by the army), the army itself, drug barons and the ‘leftist’ guerrillas of the FARC and ELN. Some 4,000 trade unionists have been murdered, often by paramilitaries, who are opposed to any workers’ organisations that act against their interests.

The conference highlighted the situation of trade unionists, women, lesbians and gays and others who do not fit the state’s or the ‘armed actors’ view of society. The IWA has been prominent in campaigning on Colombia

in conjunction with the Friends of the IWA in Colombia and in attempting to launch anarcho-syndicalist unions there and in other Latin American states. To this end, West Yorkshire SF distributed its own interpretation of the conflict and some routes towards solutions (contact W Yorks SF for a copy). We feel the solution, which in the case of Colombia will be not fast in coming, does not rely on petitioning ministers and the like (the Foreign Office Minister, Kim Howells, was pictured recently smiling in a photograph with Colombian army battalions responsible for murdering trade unionists) but in fomenting grass roots organisation of women, trade unionists and others.

One heartening story told at the conference was that of some fifty women in a small town who, in the face of violent threats made from various sides, marched against violence against women. Such acts are truly heroic and deserve our support.



Howells posing with the High Mountain Battalion of the Colombian Army, which is accused of killing trade unionists; also pictured is General Mario Montoya (behind and left of Howells) who is linked to right wing death squads

## Poland

# Solidarity Appeal

The following information comes via our comrades in the ZSP (Union of Syndicalists Poland).

In February Lionbridge Poland sacked Jakub G., an elected representative of the Krakow Workers Federation (KFP), a new union founded last December based on direct democratic principles. Lionbridge, a U.S. multinational, offering translation and ‘localisation’ services, was far from happy at this development.

Before Jakub’s dismissal another rep was approached by management seeking union approval to sack Jakub for supposedly leaking ‘company secrets’, transferring confidential data and damaging the company’s image in an internet article. KFP, of course, reminded bosses of Jakub’s status as a protected union rep but they responded only by going ahead with the sacking, based on no evidence whatsoever, and despite someone else admitting to writing the article.

Jakub is seeking reinstatement in the Polish labour court. Sackings like this are fairly common in Poland, especially when a new union is set up. ‘Leaking confidential information’ or ‘acting to the detriment of the company’ is the usual story, while workers are usually reinstated by the courts. However, it means that these people’s workplace organising skills, especially crucial for new unions, are absent for months on end.

The court case against Lionbridge will cost about US\$3,000 and will almost certainly be won, but it might take more than a year. All donations are very welcome and can be returned upon winning the case. Please contact [info@zsp.net.pl](mailto:info@zsp.net.pl) for details about how to send bank transfers and for more information about KFP. A full list of Lionbridge offices around the world with their addresses can be found on [www.lionbridge.com](http://www.lionbridge.com).

**for more international articles  
see pages 22-25**

# The 'May Days' in

May marks the anniversary of one of the most infamous events in the h

**T**he 'May Days' in Barcelona 1937 was the turning point of the Spanish Civil War and Spanish Revolution, when counter-revolutionary forces moved against the anarchists, imposing greater control over the Spanish working class and reintroducing capitalist modes of production.

Mainstream historians often remember the Spanish Civil War as a fight between a democratically elected government of Socialists and Liberals and the combined forces of fascist army generals and Catholic clergy. What is often forgotten, however, is the social revolution that shook capitalism and the Spanish state to its very foundation. The Spanish Revolution marked a high point, not only in the workers' movement with the anarcho-syndicalist CNT (Confederación Nacional

del Trabajo – National Confederation of Labour) playing a major role in organising workers and leading armed opposition to the fascist military uprising.

Spain had been in a state of social and political flux for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, laying the basis for civil war. Being neutral during World War 1 Spain traded with both sides leading to the industrialisation of some regions like Catalonia. This economic boom saw the growth of the two main labour organisations, the UGT (historically linked with the Spanish Socialist Party) and the CNT.

## general strikes

From 1917 there was a wave of revolutionary unrest, with a nationwide general strike in 1917 seeing unified action between the two big labour unions, with the UGT much more willing to deal with the government and to return to work. A CNT-led general strike also broke out in 1919 in Barcelona, with 100,000 workers walking off the job forcing the Spanish government to pass the world's first eight hour day law. By 1919 CNT membership had swelled to about 755,000, roughly 10% of the active adult population, putting it far ahead of its Socialist rival.

This revolutionary activity gave way in 1923 to the military dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera. 'Free Unions', originally set up by right-wing Catholics, were introduced and the UGT and CNT were suppressed. The UGT came to terms with the dictatorship and continued to operate, being promoted as a 'responsible' alternative to the CNT which refused to capitulate and

thus faced repression from death squads recruited by the authorities and funded by the Church.

The dictatorship fell in 1931 and Spain returned to a republican system with the election of a Socialist/Liberal alliance. The alliance didn't last long, however, with attacks coming from insurrectionists on the left and military unrest on the right. Right wing parties won the 1933 elections and Spain entered another period of repression. At this time the Socialist Party began to move to the left with talk of the need for 'proletarian revolution' and 'a workers' government'. Meanwhile, at their Zaragoza congress, the CNT also looked ahead to the kind of world they wanted to create, a system they called 'libertarian communism'.

## the looming conflict

In February 1936 the Socialists were once again in power with the election of a Popular Front government of Socialists, Liberals and other left wing and regional nationalist parties. The Communist Party at this time was a small fringe group with little significance either in state politics or among the working class. The CNT, who had previously discouraged members from voting in elections, took only a nominal position on abstaining in return for the release of political prisoners and to prepare for the looming conflict.

On July 17<sup>th</sup> 1936 fascist military generals launched their coup. While a swift takeover was intended the nationalist forces met much resistance. The workers in Barcelona were well prepared and well armed after raids on army barracks, forc-



# Barcelona 1937

## History of anarcho-syndicalism and the wider working class movement



barricade in Barcelona, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1936

*The essential point of the system was social equality between officers and men. Everyone from general to private drew the same pay, ate the same food, wore the same clothes, and mingled on terms of complete equality...In theory at any rate each militia was a democracy and not a hierarchy...They had attempted to produce within the militias a sort of temporary working model of the classless society.*

Away from the front classless models of society were also constructed. The CNT, as the largest union, now held *de facto*

power in Catalonia and other areas. The hated Civil Guard was replaced by Workers' Patrols; industries came under workers control; hotels like the Ritz, once playgrounds of the rich and famous, were now open to all with affordable meals (free for families of militia fighters); big estates were collectivised by rural workers; churches were gutted and their contents burnt in the streets as a show of defiance against the powerful clergy.

Whilst the working class were tak-

ing over the means of production and the militias were marching to Aragon to liberate it from the fascists, the apparatus of the state, however, was not challenged. There was set up instead a Central Anti-Fascist Militias Committee (CAMC), which had representatives not only from the CNT but also from the POUM and bourgeois Catalan political parties. Within a few months the CAMC was dissolved, the 'Generalitat' (the Catalan government) was reconstituted and the CNT entered the Generalitat on September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1936, taking over the Department of Food Supplies. Thus concessions by the CNT leadership towards the state had started already. Whilst workers were instituting libertarian communism the CNT's leading lights were rubbing shoulders with Catalan nationalists and the Communist Party.

### communist influence

Political manoeuvrings within the government also became apparent and the dictatorial aims of the Communists soon manifested themselves in the new order. The Communists had always been an unimportant minority in Catalonia and the rest of Spain but, by a series of clever manoeuvres, including uniting with the Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC), their influence increased. To the Communists the POUM, due to its Trotskyite tendency, signified a rival party that had to be eliminated. The Soviet Union strongly supported these manoeuvres. Arms and shipments of food arrived from the USSR and the Communist propaganda machine started using this support for their political purposes.

ing the fascists to surrender after two days of fighting. Popular resistance spread quickly to Spain's other major cities and anti-fascist militias were organised by each major political party and union. CNT militias fought alongside ones formed by the likes of the POUM (a small Marxist party to the left of the Socialist Party), the Communists and the UGT. The CNT militias were organised on a non-hierarchical basis. In *Homage to Catalonia*, George Orwell, who fought in a POUM militia, described the set up:

Conflicts between the CNT and UGT arose. The Workers' Patrols who had smashed the fascists in July acted were dominated by anarchists and syndicalists. The Communists of the UGT now demanded equal representation, something they were in no way entitled to due to their insignificant number. The UGT members left the patrols and devoted their attention to winning over the police to their side. Friction arose between the police and the Workers' Patrols which, in some places resulted in fighting with a number of dead and wounded.

The following is an example of preparations being made for a conflict against the anarchists:

*On Friday March 5<sup>th</sup> 1937, a few individuals presented an order, signed by Vallejo, director of the arms factories, to the arsenal in Barcelona, to hand over to them ten armoured cars. The director of the arsenal found the document in order and delivered the cars. At the last moment doubts arose as to the authenticity of the order, and the director telephoned to Vallejo for verification. The document proved to be forged, but in the meantime the armoured cars had been driven away. They were followed and observed to go into the Voroshilov Barracks, belonging to the PSUC, that is, the communists.*

The purpose of stealing these armoured cars would become tragically clear in May.

### the may days begin

May Day 1937, the traditional day of the workers' movement, was not celebrated in the most revolutionary city in the world. The Generalitat announced that May 1<sup>st</sup> was to be a day of work for the sake of war production. However, it was the ongoing conflicts between labour organisations that lay behind their decision. On

Monday May 3<sup>rd</sup> the Communists made their decisive move. Truckloads of assault guards drew up to the telephone exchange which, since July 19<sup>th</sup> the exchange had been controlled by the CNT, causing clashes with the Generalitat since the CNT controlled telephone links, border controls and the control patrols. The assault guards stormed the exchange taking the CNT militants on the lower floors by surprise and disarming them. On the upper floors, however, they met dogged resistance thanks to a strategically placed machine gun.

News of the attack spread like wildfire, workers threw up barricades all over the city and angry



militants demanding weapons besieged union offices. The defence committees of the CNT, which had existed since the dark days of dictatorship, mobilised themselves. The POUM, also under fire from Communist attacks, took up arms at their own barricades. Orwell wrote that 'the POUM leaders were furious at being dragged into this affair, but felt that they had got to stand by the CNT'. In other areas of Catalonia civil Guards were disarmed and PSUC offices were seized as a 'preventive measure'. There was no firing on the first night and by the second day the

**for more on the Spanish Revolution see units 15 to 18 of *A History of Anarcho-Syndicalism*, downloadable from [www.selfed.org.uk](http://www.selfed.org.uk)**

workers were spreading the barricades further into the suburbs.

### increasing tension

In the face of increasing tension the CNT Regional Committee sent representatives to the government to negotiate an end to the conflict. Premier, Tarradellas, and Minister of the Interior, Aiguade, were asked to remove the police in order to pacify the population. Tarradellas and Aiguade assured denied knowledge of the incident at the telephone exchange. But it was proved later that Aiguade had himself ordered the occupation. The Regional Committee asked workers to remain calm and everything would be done to compel the police to leave. But workers remained on guard, mistrustful of the apparent peace. In the solidly anarchist working class suburbs of Barcelona the police were disarmed by workers without resistance.

In the early hours of May 4<sup>th</sup> the shooting started. The police occupied the Palace of Justice and seized a number of CNT headquarters. In the face of such provocation the CNT officially called for calm in an address to the people of Barcelona:

*Workers of the CNT! Workers of the UGT! Don't be deceived by these manoeuvres. Above all else, Unity! Put down your arms. Only one slogan: We must work to beat fascism! Down with fascism!*

Despite the CNT's 'responsibility', PSUC agents provocateurs didn't stop their attacks. Late in the afternoon, an exceptionally cruel and bloody incident occurred, not

far from *Casa CNT*, headquarters of the Regional Committee. Two cars were approaching the *Casa* but were ordered to stop and surrender weapons at a barricade of Catalan city guards and PSUC members. As the occupants were getting out of the car they were shot down in the street.

### provocation continues

As the days wore on provocation by the counter-revolutionary PSUC continued despite calls for calm from the anarchist leaders. Juan García Oliver and Federica Montseny, both well-known anarchists, and controversially ministers in the national government, called for the workers to leave the barricades and lay down their arms to preserve anti-fascist unity. A member of the POUM described what happened at a barricade in reaction to Montseny's radio speech:

*The CNT militants were so furious they pulled out their pistols and shot the radio. It sounds incredible but it happened in front of my eyes. They were absolutely furious, and yet they obeyed. They might be anarchists, but when it came to their own organisation they had tremendous discipline.*



barricade in Barcelona, May 1937

On May 6<sup>th</sup> workers began to dismantle the barricades. The PSUC immediately took advantage and seized the telephone exchange. The government, now in Valencia after fleeing fascist bombardment in Madrid, sent assault guards to maintain order in Barcelona. The revolution was now well and truly lost.

Political killings continued after the May events. For instance, on May 5<sup>th</sup>, Communists murdered the Italian anarchist Camillo Berneri, a philosophy professor and exile from Italian fascism. On May 11<sup>th</sup>, the mutilated bodies of twelve young anarchists were dumped at a cemetery. Andreu Nin, the POUM leader, was arrested, tortured and finally assassinated by Communist agents and his party was outlawed.

Political manoeuvrings also continued. Caballero, the Socialist leader, was ousted and replaced with Juan Negrín who was more sympathetic to the Communists. The CNT were also banished from both the national and Catalan governments. The Communists were victorious and the counter-revolution had set in. Spain was soon riddled with Soviet secret agents. Appeals were made to

Stalin for weapons that often never came. The war was now to be presented as merely a conflict between democracy and fascism in a vain hope for international support. The revolutionary militias were absorbed into a regular army and their democratic, non-hierarchical practices lost. Land was returned to the landlords and factories handed back to the bourgeoisie. The CNT were now officially enemies of the state. Even at the Battle of the Ebro, the last

major Republican offensive, Communist death squads wandered over the battlefields executing wounded anarcho-syndicalists.

No appeal was made on a class basis to workers in other countries because the Popular Front strategy did not portray the fight as essentially a struggle for working class power. As Orwell wrote:

*Once the war had been narrowed down to a 'war for democracy' it became impossible to make any large-scale appeal for working class aid abroad...The way in which the working class in the democratic countries could really have helped Spanish comrades was by industrial action - strikes and boycotts. No such thing ever began to happen.*

Whilst victory for the revolution was never a certainty, its doom was made certain in May 1937. The inability of the workers to take the offensive against counter-revolutionary forces damned their efforts entirely. They were not helped by their so-called leaders, anarcho-politicians like Montseny and García Oliver, who made concession after concession and continually called for calm whilst revolutionary workers were butchered in the street.

### provocation continues

However, May 1937 offers important lessons to anarcho-syndicalists and all revolutionaries. The actions of the Communists show them for what they truly are, another ruling class in waiting. The actions of the anarchist ministers also serve as proof that the politics of the state are a dead end for the working class. The state is corrupt in itself and cannot be used to bring revolution just as a thorn bush cannot produce figs. Only the actions of the workers themselves can bring about revolution and a truly libertarian communist society.

## Mexico **Sexual and Reproductive Health**

Since their 1994 uprising, the Zapatistas in the Chiapas region of Mexico have shown that their revolution hasn't just satisfied itself with liberation from bullying landowners. They have also made considerable gains in transforming a previously macho indigenous culture with high rates of maternal mortality into one where women and their sexual and reproductive rights are now actively promoted.

They operate a health system autonomous from the Mexican government which includes community educators, trained midwives, community clinics and a hospital. In short, a social transformation that, although starved of resources, is actively promoting women's health and reproductive rights. Sexual and

reproductive health is prioritised by ongoing community based education on sexually transmitted diseases, cervical cancer, family planning and preventive health care before, during and after birth.

Adriana, an unmarried Zapatista woman, states 'In the past we were only good to look after the family and the house and they sold us like animals'. She continues 'our parents have now started to learn that we have the same rights as men'. Mirella, another Zapatista woman, comments 'we also give freedom to our children because children, like adults, also have rights'.

The Zapatistas' revolution shows how the fight for personal and economic freedom goes hand in hand. Ya basta!!!



## Iran **Bad Hijab Day for Modesty Coppers**

Everyday in Tehran the 'modesty police' grab young women for 'immodest' dress, issue warnings or whisk them off for detention and interrogation.

But on one occasion in February matters took a different turn. This time one young woman fought back, and a crowd gathered to defend her. Video footage from a mobile phone is on YouTube at: <http://de.youtube.com:80/watch?v=ByUqnnx1Wfs>.

Facing a full-blown riot, the police fled leaving one of their number to be beaten up. Later, riot cop reinforcements moved in to gain control, firing warning shots, threatening to fire on the crowd and arresting 15 people.

For the last year modesty police have been increasingly strict in enforcing 'Islamic dress code'. An opinion poll by the Fars News Agency last year said most Iranians supported the police's treatment of women wearing 'bad hijab'. Not much sign of approval on this occasion though! At



present defiance is highest among younger middle class women. Although some flouting of the code does go on in working class suburbs and rural areas, it is unclear if this reflects differences in attitude, or a tougher police crackdown among the poorer sections of Iranian society.

Recent months have also seen riots and demonstrations against the Ahmadinejad/Khameini leadership, especially by students. In many cases accusations have been levelled that these are orchestrated by reformist elements within the regime aligned with former presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani. Whether or not the growing resistance among Iranian women to the Islamic dress code is open to such manipulation, it is nevertheless a welcome development.



# Interview with Italian anarcho-syndicalist

**F**or part of the last year, South London Local of SolFed has had Cesare, from Unione Sindacale Italiana (USI), the Italian section of our International, as our comrade and guest. As he is returning to Italy, we took the opportunity to interview him about USI, and the situation for workers organising in Italy.

**SLSF:** *What is the size of USI and how is it broken down by region and industry?*

**Cesare:** We have about 1000 dues paying members and about 500 more who are in arrears. We are concentrated in the north of Italy, particularly Lombardy and Emilia. At our last Congress we had new sections join from Genoa, Fiat workers from Portense and health workers in Tuscany.

We have a problem in the south, only having sections in Portense and Naples and scattered individual members. The north is where most of the work is, while the south is very poor with high unemployment.

The attraction of USI is that we are federalist - this is what attracts new sections. Sometimes they have split from Cobas (Confedera-



**General Strike in Milan November 2007**

zione dei Comitati di Base - Confederation of Rank and File Committees) because we offer autonomy for every section and are not a centralised organisation.

Our biggest national union is in health; we also have national unions in the post office, local councils, education and engineering. In addition, there is a small national union which groups together workers on the land with retail workers, such as some in an organic food shop in Milan.

Most of our membership is in the public sector as it is very difficult

to organise in the private sector. There is a strong co-operative sector and we also organise there. The co-ops often employ workers who are not co-op members so they are like a normal employer.

**SLSF:** *How has the USI grown over the last 20 years?*

**Cesare:** In 1991, USI called a strike against the first Gulf War with two of the Cobas. This was the first time there had been a strike that wasn't called by one of the big reformist unions. It proved that we were a union and not just a propaganda group. It was from

this strike that the Milan Healthworkers union joined. My section joined in 1994, because USI was the only union that was federalist. The difference between USI and the other unions is the internal organisation - we stress federalism and autonomy.

Since the split in 1994, we have grown because people see us as the real USI. We were left with only one national union, in the Post Office, after the split. We have had to rebuild credibility by our activities in the workplace. For example, the section in San Raffaele hospital in Milan has a majority of workers, but was only set up 2-3 years ago.

The anarchist movement has decided in the last two or three years that we are the real USI, for example in Genoa and Parma, FAI (Federazione Anarchica Italiana) members have joined.

At our next congress we will discuss pushing the union in places where we don't already have a presence, learning from the experiences of the Spanish CNT.

**SLSF:** *How do you relate to the other unions?*

**Cesare:** There are four big reformist unions who decide everything. The bosses prefer to deal with them. For example in

Milan airport, where Alitalia is about to be sold, the bosses talk to the big unions but the majority of workers are in the alternative unions.

There are seven or eight Cobas; each has a different political position, usually related to which left group set it up. The biggest alternative union is the CUB (Confederazione Unitaria di Base - Unitary Rank and File Confederation), but it is close to Rifondazione Comunista, the reformed Communist Party. There is not much difference between the various Cobas, but the political differences make it difficult for them to take action together.

USI is in a similar position to the Cobas, but is the only union that stresses its federalism, and its sections' autonomy and has a very distinct internal organisation. It can be very difficult to change the National Secretary of the Cobas - one of them has had the same guy for 20 years - even though they are libertarian. USI has difficulty in rotating tasks at times, but at least we try to change mandates regularly.

Workers, not bureaucrats, should run the union.

**SLSF:** *Can you tell us about the split with the USI-Roma? What caused it?*



Genoa November 2007

**Cesare:** When the split happened in 1994, Rome had many national mandates in the unions for schools engineering, and councils. They decided to make an agreement with another union to get union rights. This other union was in a different international. Their approach to this alliance was authoritarian. They claimed thousands of members but it was all just a fake. The same few people held lots of positions. For example the person who was national secretary of the education union was also deputy national secretary of the engineering union. This goes against all of our practice. The Rome people also had a strong relationship with Rifondazione. They have a big office in Rome, but it was not clear who had paid for it. Now, they only have 2 sections, in Rome and a very small one in Milan. The statistics branch they had, which was quite strong, has joined CUB for the negotiating rights

**SLSF:** *How do they operate and how is it different to USI?*

**Cesare:** The Rome people are better at press releases, the internet and so on. They use the name USI-AIT to confuse foreign readers that they are part of the International Workers' Association, even though its initials in Italian are AIL. There have been times when we have called a strike and they have written to the government saying that the USI is not striking. This happened in education where the headmaster





came and talked to our members and tried to undermine their action with it. Sometimes Cobas use the USI-Roma to undermine us as well. We have a proposal at our congress to change our name in the light of these activities, but our history is important to us and I don't think it will pass. We have also considered taking this to court, but it would have to be in Rome, where we don't have a section. USI-Roma want the name for the historical credibility, but their actions undermine this claim. For example they claim to be anarchists but recommend a vote for Rifondazione.

**SLSF:** *What is USI's attitude to the Italian state's industrial relations machinery?*

**Cesare:** The RSUs (Rappresentanze Sindacali Unitarie - unitary trade union representation bodies) are against the interests of workers. They are about mediation. The RSU gives union rights, which include facility time for reps, meetings in work time and the ability to call meetings with the boss. We don't have this, so have to strike to get it. In the private sector, the reformist unions are guaranteed one third of all seats on the RSUs, regardless of whether they have any members in that industry.

Our approach was to leave the attitude to the RSUs up to our sections, because of our federalism. Most of our sections have now left the RSU and I think those few still using it will leave in the next cycle. It is only a bureaucracy - in the Post Office in my town there has been one meeting of the RSU in three years. The benefit of this approach is that the workers decide for themselves, rather than a national congress.

The Healthworkers union were in the RSU before they affiliated. The alternative unions measure their size by the number of votes they

get in the RSU elections. We are the only union that has any critique of them.

**SLSF:** *Has the USI done propaganda against the RSUs?*

**Cesare:** Not that I know of. The smaller sections who are only propaganda groups may do so, but generally we find it difficult to do propaganda.

**SLSF:** *What are your relations with anarchist organisations?*

**Cesare:** Most Italian anarchists take Malatesta's view that all unions are reformist, so are spread across all unions. For example the Federazione di Comunisti Anarchici (FdCA) have members in CGIL (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro - Italian General Confederation of Labour, one of the big four) and Cobas. The National Secretary of Education in CUB is in the FAI; the National Secretary of Unicobas is an anarchist. Unicobas has a magazine called *Socialismo Libertario* but its

structure doesn't reflect this. There is not much reflection on the unions in the anarchist movement and no differentiation between unions. This has recently begun to change, as USI shows the difference with federalism and autonomy. As well, younger workers are becoming interested. There is a group of young workers in my town who may affiliate at some point, because we have approached them on practical issues and shown principles. I am the only anarchist in my section where I work.

**SLSF:** *What issues are coming up for you?*

**Cesare:** Our next congress will debate the law on strikes, which is becoming more difficult, especially in the public sector. For example, bus drivers in Milan recently went on strike, but their alternative union stitched them up by denying they had called it and the drivers were fined. We are also discussing our identity as a union, rather than being a propaganda group.



Founding Congress of the USI 1912

# Beyond Bullets:

## the suppression of dissent in the United States

### by Jules Boycoff

AK Press 2007 – 460 pages – £16.00 – ISBN: 978-1904859593

The saying: 'Tyranny is always better organised than freedom' is a lesson some anarchists and libertarians have yet to learn, but for most of us government repression and suppression is an obvious corollary of revolutionary activism. This book by American academic, Jules Boycoff, underlines that precept in its study of the government suppression of dissident groups and individuals in the US from the early twentieth century to the present.

'Suppression', Boycoff argues, is a more accurate term for the way liberal democratic regimes like the US tackle their political opponents, whereas 'repression' or open coercion is more readily the form taken in non-democratic regimes. The line, however, is thinly drawn here and as Boycoff takes us on a historical and contemporary survey of government 'suppression', they certainly appear to converge in places.

The shooting dead of Kent State University students by National Guardsmen in May 1970 and the murders of Black Panther militants, Fred Hampton (right) and Mark Clark by Chicago policemen in December 1969 all fit more clearly into a repressive model.



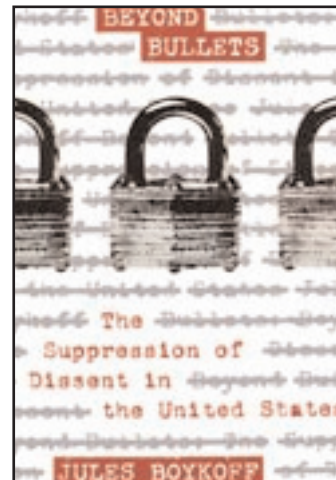
They were an overt assault by the state on particularly dynamic movements and individuals at the height of the civil rights and anti-war campaigns, though other state killings such as on the Pine

Ridge reservation in early 1976 of American Indian Movement activist, Anna May Aquash, occurred in less critical times.

There is some very useful information on the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) from its inception in 1938 and the targeting of socialists, communists, and trade unionists as well as other 'dissident citizens', as Boycoff calls them, which complement his discussion on the censorious PATRIOT Act of 2001. In addition, the central role of the FBI and, between 1956 and 1971, its Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), are given good coverage. COINTELPRO mounted covert operations utilising an array of techniques 'to disrupt

and neutralize individuals deemed to be threats to domestic security'. Despite its limited existence, this program laid the groundwork for future state strategy towards

its internal critics. This is a point not fully developed by Boycoff, nor does he incorporate the writings of state strategists themselves, such as David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare:*



*Theory and Practice* (1964) or Frank Kitson's influential 1971 manual *Low Intensity Operations*. Admittedly, these works are taken to focus mainly on external armed threats, and Galula's work in particular has influenced the US approach in Iraq, but they have also had a bearing on internal activities

and circumstances.

Despite these quibbles, Boycoff's book is an excellent one-stop guide to the state suppression of a wide variety of 'dissenters' and revolutionaries. That he discusses the more recent and ongoing post-9/11 attacks on oppositional groups sets state action in its proper context. Moreover, his analysis in the second half of the book of the mass media's complicity with state suppression of dissent, its manipulation of information and techniques of demonisation, deprecation, under-estimation, false balance and disregard makes this book thoroughly unique and a useful tool for understanding the nature of state-media relations.

All in all, Boycoff has written a powerful and penetrating study of the US government and media's combined onslaught on dissent, which through past and present analogy demonstrates a continuum of suppression as enlightening as it is unsurprising.

# Making a Killing: the political economy of animal rights by Bob Torres

AK Press 2007 – 171 pages – £11.00 – ISBN: 978-1904859673

Does animal rights have a place within anarchism or indeed within the liberation of the working class? Bob Torres' *Making a Killing...* is not the first to take up the tenuous issue of animal rights philosophy and anarchism but he certainly tries to cover a lot of ground. By primarily drawing upon a critique model of capitalist economy through Marx and drawing upon issues of social ecology via Bookchin he weaves together a sound argument that is an impassioned plea for the left and libertarians to consider the plight of animals.

The hallmarks of this tradition can in large part be traced back to developments within anarcho-punk during the eighties. While a number of appeals about the mistreatment of animals raised important questions and kick-started a number of campaigns, the issue of class and a philosophy based around a lifestyle eschewing animal abuse was never fully resolved.

Readers might be familiar with the contemporary beginnings of this debate with the likes of *Beast of Burden* and *Animal Liberation: Devastate to Liberate? Or Devastatingly Liberal*. As the animal rights movement progressed from its infancy and hit a zenith in the mass appeal of vegetarianism, it saw the beginnings of numerous campaigns against the fur trade, blood sports, battery and intensive farming, testing on animals and vivisection and so on. It was

also drawn into criticisms of misanthropy, fanatical single issue campaigning, violence and professional politicking – or what Torres refers to as the 'Animal Rights Industry'.

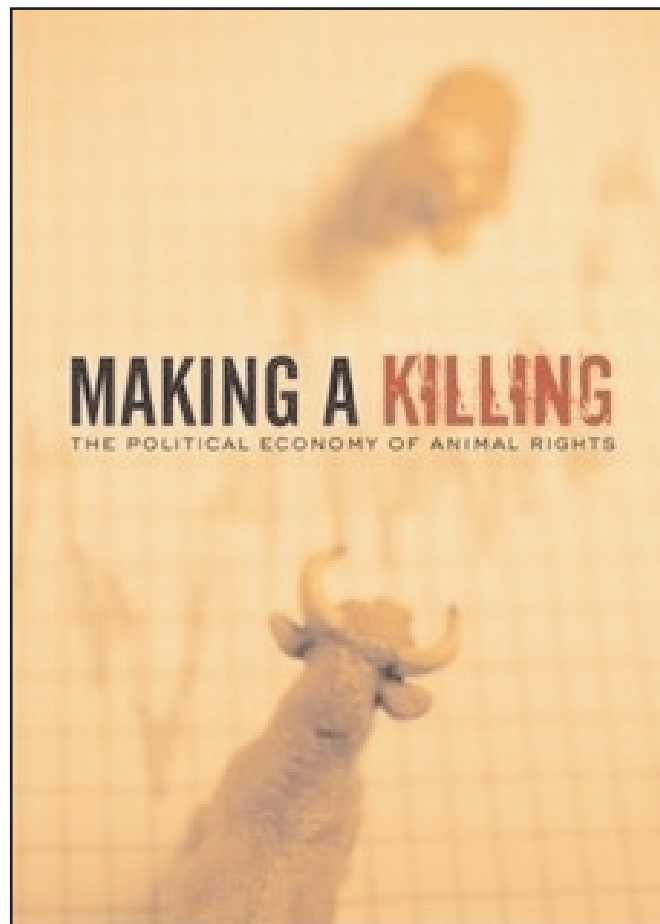
Where the book picks up is by fleshing out an understanding of

standing of nature and ecology entirely on a capitalist and therefore an irrational level. For example racism, sexism and even class have a pre-capitalist basis, but find their oppressive height within capitalism's existence. These factors can make oppressive forms appear 'natural' but, on the

contrary, they are mere perversions of nature. The accumulation of wealth at the expense of the few, regardless of its origins, is in fact a distortion of our 'organic nature'. This is entirely where Bookchin is tied in – by exploring how the exploitation of classes results in various constituted hierarchies of the sexes, races and even of animals.

What's interesting is that it isn't left there. The ALF and mainstream animal rights groups are rounded on and deconstructed with a class and anarchist analy-

sis and Torres argues for the possibilities of a new form of activism that challenges the status of animals. The question is: will the people who would benefit from reading this book read it?



the status of animals. By taking issue with moralisers like Peter Singer, it argues that animals are reduced to the effective position of commodities and our maintaining of this keeps our under-

# The Anarchist Past and Other Essays

by Nicholas Walter (edited by David Goodway)

Five Leaves Publications 2007 – 254 pages – £9.99 – ISBN: 978-1905512163

Nicholas Walter, who died in 1999, was a long-time contributor to the anarchist movement in Britain. He had been a member of the Labour Party as an Oxford student, but the Suez crisis and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 pushed him leftwards and thence to anarchism. He was active in CND, the Committee of 100 and the 'Spies for Peace' group which in 1963 exposed government plans for the aftermath of a nuclear war. He first contributed to *Freedom* in 1959, and was a mainstay of the paper for the rest of his life. He also wrote for the influential *Anarchy* magazine. A working journalist, Walter combined a stream of anarchist propaganda with writing for a variety of publications, including the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Good Food Guide*.

Walter never called himself an anarcho-syndicalist and had a wide perspective on what constituted anarchism. He wrote for *Freedom* in the years that it was accused by class struggle anarchists of being 'quietist', 'philosophical', 'pacifist' and 'evolutionary'. He often argued against those who took a more class-based view of

anarchism, not least the late Albert Meltzer, an anarcho-syndicalist stalwart, with whom Walter held lengthy polemics over many issues and several decades. Meltzer said of Walter that

*He seemed to have the idea that he was the official spokesperson of the anarchist movement...he had carried on a seemingly endless feud with me...I suppose it was because I refuted his revisions of our history and distortions of our ideas.*

After Meltzer's death in 1996, Walter recalled that "He subjected me to a stream of abuse for over thirty years. But it takes all sorts to make a revolution."

Indeed, that sentiment sums up Walter's approach to anarchism. His view of the movement as a broad church is reflected in this collection. Besides discussing recognisably anarchist figures like Michael Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin, it includes observations on libertarian elements in the thought of Gerrard Winstanley, William

Godwin, Tom Paine and even the Marquis de Sade.

Nicholas Walter was not dismissive of class struggle or the idea of revolutionary unions, but saw them as just one tactic open to the anarchist movement, calling it "an anarchism for the most class-conscious elements in a strong labour movement". This leaves some of his writing on organisation, revolution and creating a new economy open to charges of vagueness.

Yet this collection is still worth reading, not least for his knowledge of the early history of British anarchism. Amongst the



reviews, essays and even obituaries included are priceless details on activists like Charlotte Wilson, Joseph Lane, Edward Carpenter

and Dan Chatterton.

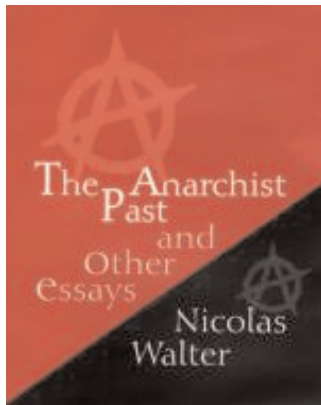
His 1978 review of John Quail's *The Slow Burning Fuse* was another opportunity to hold forth on this subject. His association with Freedom Press certainly gave him an ency-

clopaedic knowledge of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century British anarchist publications. The review is peppered with little gems, like identifying the long-forgotten British anarchist, Leonard Motler as being among the first to condemn the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia. In December 1917 Motler had written in his own paper, *Satire*, that

*The Russian Revolution is running a-gley. These little things happen when the people permit new rulers to pose as their saviours, instead of saving themselves by running the country on their own.*

Motler's paper was shut down by the government a few months afterwards for its persistent opposition to the war.

Indeed, the book reviews in the collection are among its best features, whether you've read the books or not. While disagreeing with some of his conclusions, it is still interesting to read Walter's interpretations of such anarchist standards as Woodcock's *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, Ward's treatise on anarchism and education, *Talking Schools*, Bookchin's seminal *Post-Scarcity*



**Anarchism and  
Avrich's *The Russian  
Anarchists*.**

In fact, the role of anarchists in the Russian Revolution and its aftermath is particularly well covered. Walter was a fluent Russian speaker and his pieces on Peter Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist movement, the events of 1905 and 1917, the Kronstadt revolt and Emma Goldman's disenchantment with the course of the revolution are all detailed and informative. His observations on the role of Russian anarcho-syndicalists show the increasing influence they were having in the Russian labour movement before they, and all non-Bolshevik currents, were drowned in blood by Lenin and Trotsky.

Nicolas Walter may not have been on the same wavelength as ourselves, but *The Anarchist Past* is still a valuable read, bearing in mind Albert Meltzer's barbed warning that what we are dealing with here is a liberal and an academic, albeit one who wrote about anarchism.

# My Revolutionary Life

## Juan García Oliver interviewed by Freddy Gomez

Kate Sharpley Library 2008 - 37 pages - £3.00

ISBN: 978-1873605721

**H**ere you'll find a pamphlet to the usual high standard of KSL. Although I found the cover a bit lacking compared to the recent re-issue of *The Assassination Attempt on Franco from the Air* the actual content more than makes up. It's a series of investigative and probing questions. With a lack of publications by or about Juan García Oliver in English, I was more than happy to pick this up.

The interview takes up from JGO's early militant days just after the strike at *La Canadiense* in 1919 just prior to him joining the CNT (Confederación Nacional de Trabajo) at 17 years of age. It continues with his membership of *Los Solidarios* (an anarchist action group formed of/by CNT members) during the brutal age of *pistolero*, as working class militants (primarily CNT members) and the bosses' stooges fought gun battles and committed assassinations on the streets of Spain.

The pamphlet brings us through the melding of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism into, as he saw it, a more recognisable form known as anarcho-syndicalism that we would also recognise today, up to his membership of the *Nosotros* anarchist group, maybe one of the most infamous groups of the 1930s period including Francisco Ascaso and Buenaventura Durruti.

There is a quick reference to his time in

prison and his being asked by the FAI (Federación Anarquista Ibérica) to set up a group with others (including Durruti). None of them were actually FAI members (there never was official membership) but this isn't fleshed out enough for me.

A brief mention is made of the actual uprising on the 19th July 1936 and the infamous 23rd July CNT Plenum where he and a member/delegate of one of the Barcelona locals stood against the vote for putting the brakes on implementing Libertarian Communism. Finally there is discussion of JGO joining the Government as Minister for Justice, and his role in helping to broker the ceasefire during the 'May Days' of 1937.

There's a lot I've missed out and what I have mentioned has at best just been touched upon. However there's a lot more there and a lot of different answers to previously posed questions about the CNT and that period of Spanish history. It's led me to different conclusions and, all in all, I found it extremely interesting. I recently got round to reading the KSL pamphlet *The Wrong Steps* which is a piece/chapter translated to English and taken from JGO's book *El Eco de Los Pasos* almost entirely dedicated to the 23rd July plenum. I would recommend reading *My Revolutionary Life* prior to reading *The Wrong Steps*, as this fleshes out the working class militant and the route that led him to joining the government.



# Red Mutiny:

## mutiny, revolution and revenge on the battleship Potemkin by Neal Bascombe

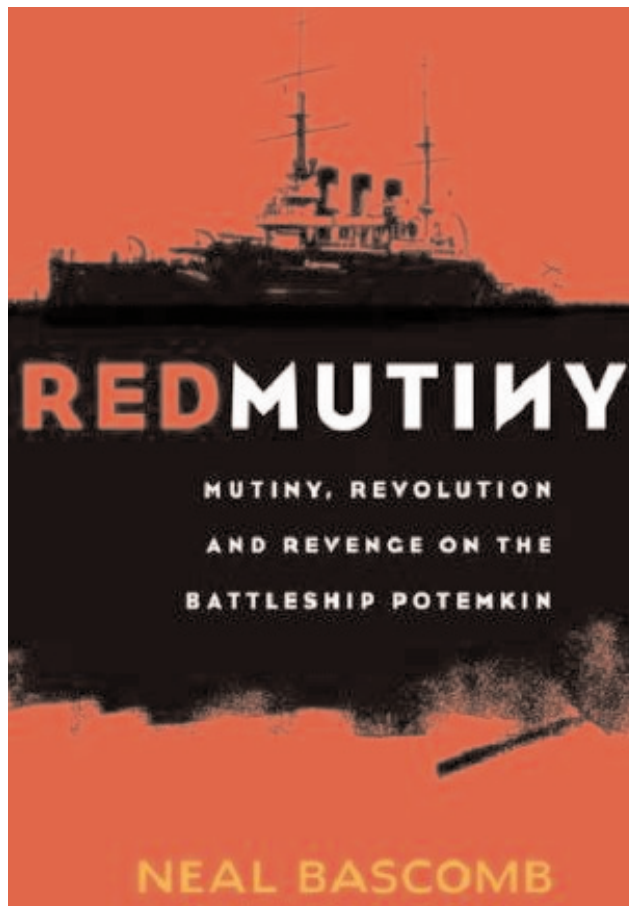
Phoenix 2008 – 392 pages – £8.99 – ISBN: 978-0753823713

Neal Bascomb has written an engaging history of the *Potemkin* revolt, an event that has become iconic in annals of the revolutionary struggle as one of the harbingers of the 1917 revolution. The Eisenstein film did much to spread its fame. Who can forget the massacre on the steps at Odessa, the rolling pram and the cracked spectacles?

The Russian Navy of the time was a bastion of reaction, aping the autocratic antics of the ineffectual Tsar, who liked nothing more than parading about in uniform, the military being his pride and joy.

For eleven days in June 1905 the warship defied attempts by the hierarchy to remove this “embarrassment”, the underlying incompetence of the authorities adding to the confusion. The revolt was not entirely spontaneous, the activists Yakhnovsy, Vakulenchuk and Matyushenko had worked secretly to bring it about in the hope that the rest of the fleet would rise against the military tyranny and this would ignite the flames of revolution across the Empire, which seethed with discontent.

The stupidly racist and adventurous war with Japan, in which the Russian Navy and military failed ignominiously, cost tens of thou-



sands of lives. The rotting meat that acted as the catalyst for the revolt was bought by supplies officer Makarov from Odessa rather than Tender Island where the boat was moored. It is not clear why, maybe a private deal.

The sailors seized the armoury and Vakulenchuk was mortally wounded by the loathsome First Officer, Gilyarovskiy, who was then shot by Matyushenko and

others as was the captain, the arrogant Golikov, who had threatened the crew with the yardarm. At times it seemed that the revolt would spread through the Black Sea Fleet but even on the *Potemkin* there were just some fifty dedicated to the struggle with two hundred other ‘fellow travellers’ out of a complement of 763. After steaming around the Black Sea for some time and confronting the rest of the fleet (which did not attack as many of the sailors regarded the *Potemkin* crew as heroes and were therefore ‘unreliable’) the ship made its way to Romania where the crew were free to go where they chose and the *Potemkin* was partly scuttled before being handed over to the Russian authorities.

Matyushenko continued the struggle, never joining any of the ‘revolutionary’ parties, being temperamentally closer to anarchism than authoritarianism. He later went back to Russia to work as an agitator but was captured, tried and hanged. Defiant to the end and bringing to mind the words of the Haymarket martyrs he said, “Hang me, you cowards! But know, the time will come when it’ll be you hanging from the lampposts!”

There are errors in the work according to the historian Simon Sebag Montefiore (his *Stalin* is a good read) in a review in the *Telegraph* but these are to do with career positions and minor events. Overall this is a timely and useful addition to the literature.

# Anarchism, sex and freedom

## The fight against capitalism, patriarchy and repressive religious morality

If there is one subject that radicals and revolutionaries alike evade, mouth platitudes over, or casually brush aside, it is that of sexual politics. Issues like strikes, global warming and poverty are far less intimate, personal and controversial. Yet in spite of our continued economic and political disempowerment, our sexuality remains the one area of our lives over which we still exercise a high degree of personal expression and control. It is also one of the few subjects of universal interest, affecting literally all of us.

Part of the reason that sex and sexuality are so rarely discussed, even in political forums, is because we have been socially conditioned by those in power to suppress this most basic, but often complex facet of our identities. Over the course of history, the state as guardian of our morality has consistently dictated where, when

and how we express our sexuality. The established religions still propagate the idea of sex other than for procreation and outside of marriage as sinful. Little surprise then, that for many the idea of sex has become synonymous with repression and guilt. But the religious establishment isn't the only culprit. Political

regimes (of both left and right), the nuclear family, education, media, psychiatry and various other institutions have all distinguished themselves in reinforcing authoritarian morality where personal relationships are concerned. In so doing they have collectively exercised a profound form of social control.

### Constructing and enforcing 'normality'

The choice of friend or partner(s) is a fundamental right which many of us take for granted. Relationships open the door to intimacy, companionship, love, affection, self-esteem, emotional fulfilment and belonging. Having a wide range of relationships provides opportunities for personal and social enrichment. Nevertheless, the society we live in judges some types of consensual relationship as preferable to others.

Under capitalism, relationships are founded upon inequalities of social, economic and political power; maintained and enforced by the institutions of the state. These inequalities and the values which underpin them infest all areas of social life, from the bedroom to the workplace. We are systematically conditioned, (often





Wilhelm Reich

unconsciously) from an early age to conform to an artificially constructed reality designed to serve the interests of the ruling classes, rather than our own.

Constructing and upholding a particular view of 'normality' has always been a primary control tactic of ruling elites. This contrived 'normality' exists to encourage both social conformity and to sell products on the premise of aesthetic perfection: a perverse form of body fascism is reflected throughout the modern mass media because of the latter. 'Normality' is further represented and reproduced in the nuclear family: husband, wife and 2.4 kids, the perfect social unit of production and consumption.

The ideal of the nuclear family operates as a powerful curtailer of sexual expression according to radical psychoanalysts. As an institution, it supports capitalist society by reproducing power relationships following the perceived norm. Wilhelm Reich articulated how the internalised repression of our childhood and adolescent sexuality by our parents generates a kind of mass intellectual prison. In the 1930s Reich used this analogy to explain how workers became receptive to ideologies such as fascism, even though rationality would suggest strongly that this acted contrary to their economic

interests. The authoritarian family, Reich concluded, in repressing our natural sexual development, creates a subconscious dependency on powerful figures within the adult psyche.

The family's rigidly defined gender roles, which are further reinforced by the education system and other mediums, serve the economy by providing a clear cut division of labour between the sexes. From an early age we are conditioned to adopt distinct behavioural attributes according to our gender. But cross-cultural studies show that far from being genetically determined, these roles are socially ascribed. Although we culturally bear witness to an increasing blurring of the traditional stereotypes, they are still very much with us. Single-parent families, same sex relationships, and other departures from the perceived norm are all subject to social stigmatisation to a greater or lesser degree.

Homosexuality, despite being prevalent throughout the animal kingdom, is portrayed by political and religious control freaks as being contrary to the 'laws of nature'. Being gay is also still routinely punished by death in some parts of the world. It was not so long ago that the Tory government passed Clause 28, prohibiting the 'promotion' of homosexuality

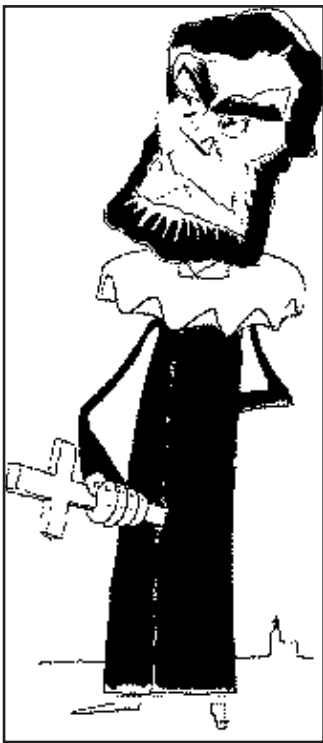
within the education system. The fact that gay villages exist in some UK cities reflects that gays have felt it necessary to create safety in numbers in an often hostile society: a society in which only recently same-sex partnerships have been legally recognised and sanctified.

Conventional psychiatry, which traditionally has served as a powerful agent of social control, up until quite recently employed aggressive and unpleasant aversion techniques to 'treat' homosexuality and other 'deviations' in the UK. Further, there are still women in health and social care services today who were admitted to psychiatric facilities years ago for such heinous acts as sexual promiscuity and having a child outside of marriage.

The bizarre ambivalence of capitalist morality is epitomised by







the corporate gutter press which on the one hand delights in exposing the infidelity and aberrations of its subjects: On the other, its pages abound with adverts and imagery designed to titillate and sell sex.

### Sexism, sexual abuse and class

The atrocious repression and exploitation of female sexuality still reigns supreme across the world. A recent case was highlighted in Islamic Saudi Arabia where a woman was sentenced to 200 lashes after being gang-raped by seven men. In some African and Asian countries, women are still subject to routine genital mutilation. Amnesty International estimate that some 2 million girls and women a year suffer this vile and barbaric act. Honour killings also

continue to this day, wherein females are murdered by their own families for supposedly bringing shame by the perceived misuse of their sexuality. Even in more 'liberated' western cultures, women fare little better. The sex industry is characterised by the trafficking of women and girl children into lives of virtual sex slavery. (The figure for girls and women trafficked into Western Europe alone is estimated at 120,000 a year). Most pornography in western society reduces sex to a mechanical act devoid of feeling, rendering women's role to that of subservient sex objects: commodities to be bought and sold for men's pleasure. The feminist argument that porn = theory and rape = practice has some conviction. But this viewpoint must also be interpreted within the context of a society where institutional sexism and exploitive relationships are ingrained. Women are more likely than their male counterparts to be victims of rape and domestic abuse. They are harangued outside abortion clinics by religious zealots for having the temerity to exercise control over their own bodies. They are statistically paid less than men, less likely to be promoted and tend to work in industries which are traditionally devalued financially and socially.

In looking at oppressive (economic and sexual) relationships, we need to

***The bizarre ambivalence of capitalist morality is epitomised by the corporate gutter press which on the one hand delights in exposing the infidelity and aberrations of its subjects: On the other, its pages abound with adverts and imagery designed to titillate and sell sex.***

consider the sexual abuse of children by adults. Paedophilia, the sexualised exercise of adult power over children is understandably a highly charged and emotive subject. Abuse is usually committed by an adult that the victim knows, and often trusts, rather than a total stranger. Although recognition and action

on abuse is increasing, it is not routinely taught as part of the school curriculum. To make matters worse, systematic child abuse has been covered up by institutions such as the Catholic church in Ireland, exposed for operating an unwritten policy of relocating rather than reporting paedophile priests. Money also plays



a big part in abuse. According to the United Nations, there are estimated to be 100 million children worldwide living or working on the streets, with 1.2 million girls under 18 trafficked into prostitution each year. Sex tourism has become big business, with rich western males travelling to countries such as Thailand, Sri Lanka and the Philippines to systematically abuse children.

### Freeing ourselves and our sexuality

Although our sexual tastes may be distorted by the dominant power relationships we are all exposed to, they still reflect our uniqueness and individuality. Some choose monogamy, others polygamy, some bisexuality, some S&M and so on. Our tastes, identity and orientation can change over time, and most of us will choose to experiment at some point in our lives. Some will have many partners, others only one. For some experimentation is a lifelong experience. It would be wrong to suggest that we should advocate mass orgiastic indulgences any more than we should advocate the monogamy of heterosexual married life. Even some of the most fervent champions of free love (such as the anarcha-feminist Emma Goldman) have confessed to pangs of jealousy and possessiveness on occasions. What suits one person does not suit another, and we must for-

***Whilst pushing to rid the world of the ruling elites, we must never neglect to challenge the policemen, patriarchs and priests inside our own heads.***

ever guard against the tyranny of imposed 'norms'.

A mature, informed, approach combined with improved access to clinics, contraception and healthcare resources, will lead to more healthy and rounded adults, better able to exercise real choice and control. One of the reasons that the UK has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe is because it fails so miserably on this score. And rather than pontificating about some far-off revolution, we can all recognise, act and respond to the ways in which we have been manipulated, conditioned and controlled in the here and now. Whilst pushing to rid the world of the ruling elites, we must never neglect to challenge the policemen, patriarchs and priests inside our own heads.

### The economic, social and sexual revolution

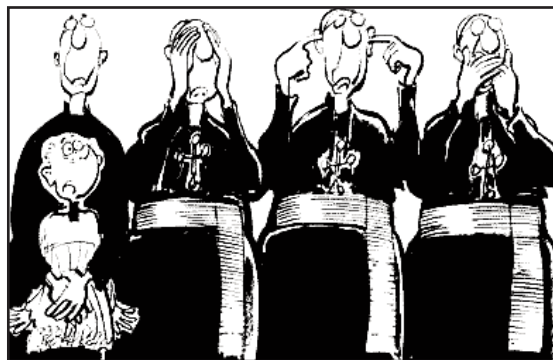
As we have seen, a hierarchical society maintains itself by manipulating and controlling our morals and sexuality. Economically capitalism exploits men, women and children on the basis of social class. Although

legislation now prohibits discrimination on the grounds of age, gender and sexual orientation, no such legal frameworks exist to deter maltreatment on the basis of social class. The reason for this is obvious. Class provides the overriding abusive power relationship in capitalist society; though it is over simplistic to argue that all power relationships are subsumed by economic ones (patriarchy and religion predated capitalism, after all), economic and political hierarchies sustain all others. The whole sex industry is underpinned by market forces. Sex workers, whether child or adult, rarely choose their profession: many work the streets, bars, brothels and massage parlours to escape poverty, or simply just to get by. For some, there is simply no other option. Businesses which sell sex, and the trafficking rackets which supply them, are motivated in t h e final analysis by profit. Sex is b i g business. In exploiting our insecur-

ities and selling sex, capitalism distorts and alienates our desires beyond all recognition.

But capitalism has not been seriously threatened by allowing gays and women to populate its positions of power; liberalised capitalism cares little if the boss is male, female, gay or straight as long as they keep the rich, rich and the poor subservient.

Che Guevara's adage that the revolutionary is motivated by great feelings of love may sound sentimental, but is essentially correct. Whilst humankind continues to be enslaved by capitalism, patriarchy, authoritarian morality and other forms of oppression, we can never be truly free. Recognition of our common humanity, suffering, and the forces which inflict this, provides the seed of lasting revolutionary change. Meaningful and fulfilling relationships are founded upon us realising our common needs, wants and desires voluntarily as equals, without interference. We must assume control not only of our workplaces and communities but our hearts, bodies and minds too.



## SolFed-IWA contacts

### SF National contact point:

PO Box 29, South West D.O., Manchester, M15 5HW;  
07 984 675 281; solfed@solfed.org.uk;  
www.solfed.org.uk.

### International Workers' Association:

IWA-AIT Secretariat, Poštanski Pretinac 6, 11077  
Beograd, Serbia; +38 (0)1 63 26 37 75; secretaria-  
do@iwa-ait.org; www.iwa-ait.org.

**South London SolFed:** PO Box 17773, London, SE8 4WX;  
07 956 446 162; southlondonsf@solfed.org.uk;  
southlondonsf.org.uk.

**South West SolFed:** c/o SF National contact point;  
sww@solfed.org.uk.

**West Yorkshire SolFed:** PO Box 75, Hebden Bridge, HX7  
8WB; wysf07@gmail.com.

## | locals

**Bolton:** c/o Manchester SolFed.

**Brighton SolFed:** c/o SF National contact point.

**Coventry & West Midlands:** c/o Northampton SolFed.

**Edinburgh SolFed:** c/o 17 West Montgomery Place,  
Edinburgh, EH7 5HA; 07 896 621 313; edin-  
burghsf@solfed.org.uk.

**Ipswich:** c/o N&E London SolFed.

**Manchester SolFed:** PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester,  
M15 5HW; 07 984 675 281; manchestersf@solfed.org.uk;  
mail list: manchestersf@lists.riseup.net.

**Merseyside SolFed:** c/o News From Nowhere, 96 Bold  
Street, Liverpool, L1 4HY.

**Northampton SolFed:** c/o The Blackcurrent Centre, 24  
St Michael Avenue, Northampton, NN1 4JQ;  
northamptonf@solfed.org.uk.

**N & E London SolFed:** PO Box 1681, London, N8 7LE;  
nelsf@solfed.org.uk.

**Preston SolFed:** PO Box 469, Preston, PR1 8XF;  
07 707 256 682; prestonsf@solfed.org.uk;  
prestonsf.mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk.

**Scarborough:** c/o West Yorkshire SolFed.

**Sheffield:** c/o West Yorkshire SolFed.

**South Herts SolFed:** PO Box 493, St Albans, AL1 5TW.

## | other

**Catalyst (freesheet):** c/o Preston SolFed, cata-  
lyst@solfed.org.uk.

**Education Workers Network:** c/o News From Nowhere,  
96 Bold St, Liverpool, L1 4HY; ewn@ewn.org.uk;  
www.ewn.org.uk; email list: ewn@lists.riseup.net.

**Health & Care Workers Initiative:** c/o Northampton  
SolFed.

**Kowtowtonone:** local freesheet from W Yorks SF.

**SelfEd Collective:** c/o Preston; selfed@selfed.org.uk;  
www.selfed.org.uk.

**'A History of Anarcho-syndicalism'** - 24 pamphlets,  
downloadable FREE from www.selfed.org.uk.

**SolFed Industrial Strategy - Leaflet:** c/o SF National  
contact point

**The Stuff Your Boss does not want you to know -  
Leaflet:** know your rights at work; available online at  
www.solfed.org.uk - bundles from the SF contact point  
(see above) for free/donation.

**Manchester SF public meetings:**

7.30pm, Town Hall Tavern, Tib Lane, off Cross Street,  
Manchester - May 13<sup>th</sup>, The Housing Crisis in Britain;  
June 10<sup>th</sup>, Against Racism and Fascism; July 8<sup>th</sup>,  
Anarchy, Sex and Freedom.

## Friends & neighbours

### 56a Infoshop

Bookshop, records, library, archive, social/meeting  
space; 56a Crampton St, London, SE17 3AE; open Thur  
2-8, Fri 3-7, Sat 2-6.

### AK Press

Anarchist publisher/distributor; PO Box 12766,  
Edinburgh, EH8 9YE; 0131 555 265;  
ak@akedin.demon.co.uk; www.akuk.com.

### Freedom

Anarchist fortnightly; 84b Whitechapel High St, London,  
E1 7QX; www.freedompress.org.uk.

### Hobnail Review

Guide to small press/alternative publishing from anti-  
authoritarian/libertarian left perspectives; regular  
reviews and listings; send 2 1st class stamps - Hobnail  
Press, Box 208, 235 Earls Court Rd, London, SW5 9FE.

### Kate Sharpley Library

full catalogue: BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX;  
www.katesharpleylibrary.net.

www.libcom.org.

### London Coalition Against Poverty

07 932 241 737; londoncoalitionagainstopoverty  
@gmail.com; lcap\_news-subscribe@riseup.net.

### National Shop Stewards Network

http://www.shopstewards.net/.

### Organise!

Working Class Resistance freesheet/info; PO Box 505,  
Belfast, BT12 6BQ.

### Radical Healthcare Workers

http://radicalhealthcareworkers.wordpress.com/.

### Resistance

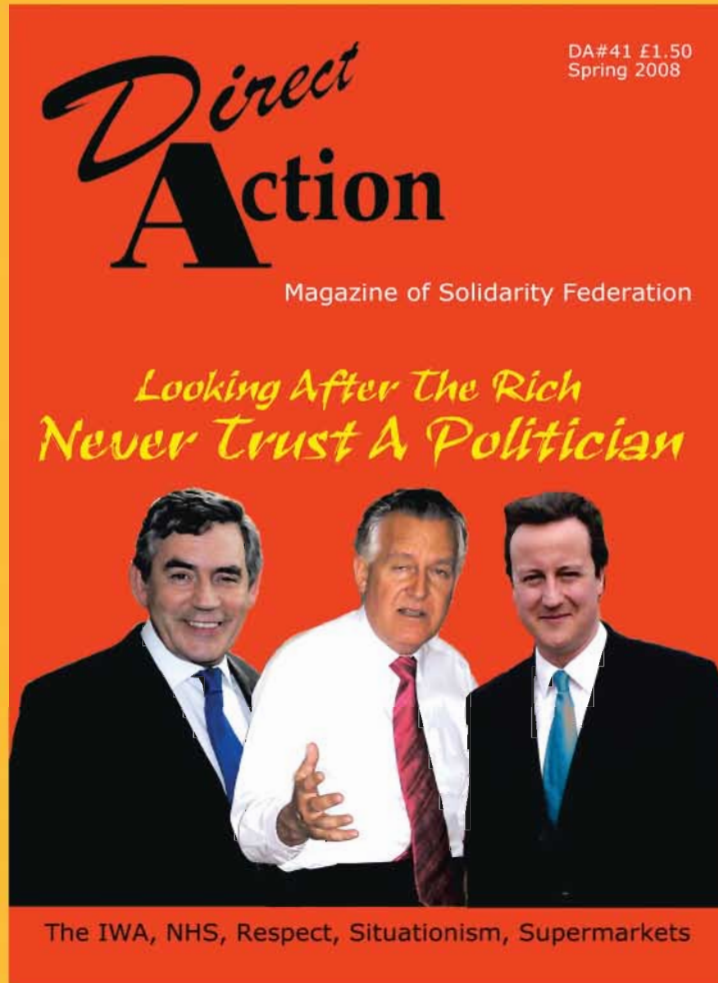
Anarchist Federation freesheet; c/o 84b Whitechapel  
High Street, London, E1 7QX; www.afed.org.uk.

### ToxCat

Exposing polluters, pollution and cover-ups; £2 from PO  
Box 29, Ellesmere Port, CH66 3TX.

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