

SOLIDARITY!

Newsheet of the Aotearoa Workers Solidarity Movement

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The fight for anarchism is the fight for peace

ANZAC DAY ALWAYS seems an appropriate occasion to restate the anarchist opposition to war, and reiterate that it is never in the interests of the working class to support war.

The anarchist case against war arises from our analysis of, and opposition to, capitalism. Capitalism is the cause of modern war. The insatiable hunger for profit generates a relentless search by the various capitalist powers for markets and sources of raw materials. Modern war is in reality an extension of “business under capitalism” carried to an extreme of violence, where the economic rivalries between the various national sections of the capitalist class can no longer be peacefully resolved or controlled.

Despite the story that the First World War started because of the assassination of the Austrian emperor’s nephew Archduke Ferdinand by Serbian nationalists, the reality was that it was the outcome of years of conflicting capitalist interests. British and French capitalism was being challenged by the rising expansion of Germany, both in Europe and abroad. When Germany showed in 1911, by sending a gunboat to the city of Agadir, that they intended to get a foothold in Morocco, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer in the UK, Lloyd George, at once reacted with a speech threatening war.

In this tense international environment the crisis that would produce war on a Global scale was probably

inevitable. The “Austria-Serbia dispute” was merely the spark that ignited the conflagration.

Anyone who preaches peace and disarmament without calling for an overthrow of capitalism have yet to demonstrate how these objectives can be realised, or how trade and export of capital can expand without violence being the outcome.

The abolition of war, and the threat of war, will only be realised with the overthrow of capitalism and the restructuring of society on the basis of common ownership and production solely to meet human needs. Such a society would unite the human race without economic classes, or national barriers dividing us.

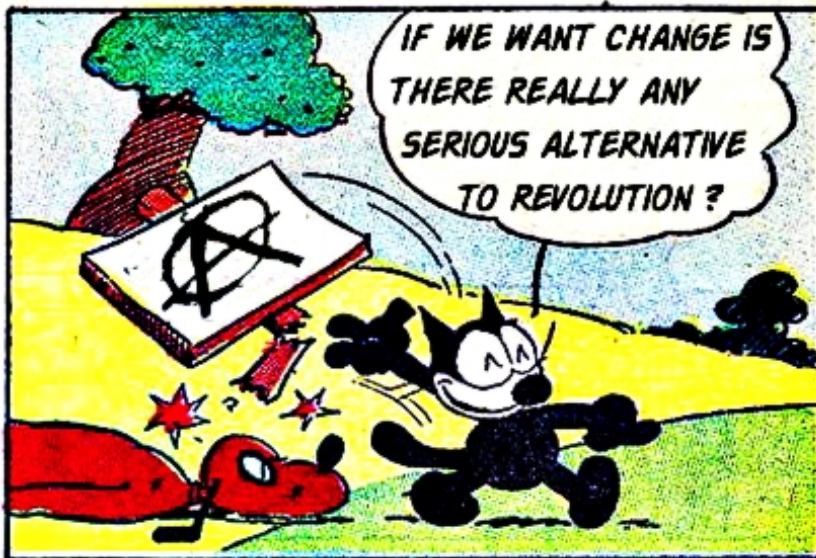
Whenever war is fought, for whatever false reasons that are presented to us, and whichever side is declared the victor, one side is always the loser, and that is us, the workers of the world.

As workers we need to realise that our enemy is not the worker in other lands; rather it is the capitalist class at home, and this is a far more important division than that separating nation from nation.

The fight for anarchism is inseparable from the fight against war. The only way to fight militarism is to fight capitalism and the state.

The fight for anarchism is the fight for peace.

A better paid wage slave is still a wage slave



THE GOVERNMENT RECENTLY announced a 50 cent increase in the minimum wage to be payable from 1 April, bringing it up to \$15.25 per hour. This new rate will see someone working a 40-hour week getting a pre-tax weekly wage of \$610, although it should be noted many thousands of minimum wage workers are part-time, and work fewer than 40 hours per week.

Often such an increase is met with the complaints of a loss of jobs, but before our bosses start pleading poverty even the Government seems unconcerned by this and confidently declared that the 3.4 % increase will not “hinder job growth.” Indeed, economists are increasingly of the opinion that gentle rises in minimum wages are at worst neutral and at best actually creates jobs. When low-income people got a pay increase they tend to spend it in their communities and help the local economy.

While any increase in the wages of workers is always to be welcomed a minimum wage is not the same as a living wage, and those behind the Living Wage Movement maintain that even this rise still sees the minimum wage well below what people actually need to live a full life.

The living wage is seen as not just meeting subsistence needs, or a basic cost of living, but also takes into account larger social and cultural needs, such as having money to spend time with family, time for enjoyment, time for education and self-improvement, and enabling a more dignified existence. The Living Wage Movement calculates that the rate for a worker to be able to participate as an active citizen in the community, and not just survive, should be a minimum of \$19.80 per hour. This movement has had some success at getting its voice heard and, there are now nearly 50 fully-accredited living wage employers in New Zealand, up from 27 last year.

Tales of workers struggling for, and getting, higher wages if they can, is always a good thing, but is it enough? The Living Wage Movement will improve the living conditions of some workers; and any struggle is good for developing confidence in the workers' own sense of ability to change the world in which they live.

Real and achievable struggles like this are more valuable than abstract plans and theorizing, even defeats can be used to teach valuable lessons, such as the importance of solidarity and unity, and demonstrating the common interests of the working class against the exploiting class.

Admittedly wage battles, like all immediate struggles, are limited, but, at the end of the day, a working class that is not able to take the basic step of fighting for an increased wage will be unlikely to manage to organise and fight to completely change society, which has to be our ultimate aim, as all victories under the existing capitalist system are partial. Rising prices, cyclical periods of rising unemployment, and attacks on working hours and conditions will continually erode better wages that have been won through struggle.

A fight for a living wage may be a step in the right direction, but has to be linked with the knowledge that better wages are not enough since wages are always less than the value of what the worker produces, with the surplus value being claimed by the employers. A better-paid wage slave is still a wage slave; and higher wages do not remove this exploitation and the resulting inequalities. If we want to end the permanent fight for better wages we need more than redistributing income from the employer to the worker, we need to see the establishment of a society that would not be divided into employer and worker.

No amount of reform will eliminate the irreconcilable clash of interest between the capitalist and the working class. The wages system cannot be made fairer. So while supporting workers' struggles for better pay, we also say that instead of just asking for a fair day's wage we need to demand the abolition of the wages system, and ultimately widen the struggle to take the means of production into common ownership and under the democratic control of the whole people.

Plastic Free or Capitalism Free

AS PART OF THE Plastic Free July promotion a group in Gisborne have launched a make Gisborne plastic-bag free campaign, and have got the backing of a few retailers in the city. While this is highly laudable, I would suggest that it should be taken a step further and we should be concerning ourselves not just with what we carry our shopping home in, but also with what we are putting in our re-usable, biodegradable bags.

Firstly I must stress that I fully recognise that using sustainable materials, reducing consumption and buying “ecologically friendly” products is very important, and I would never denounce such a thing. But, I would add that such measures are of a limited use as solutions to the pollution of our world, and the catastrophe that most of the world’s climate scientists suggest we are facing. At best, such tactics can only delay, not prevent, capitalism’s devastation of the planet.

The fundamental issue is, can making ethical choices in our consumer habits actually influence how capitalism works?

The first problem faced is the issue of how much information about products for sale is hidden. Without diligent research, or information provided by pressure groups, customers have no way of knowing the environmental impact of the products they buy (for example, who knows the environmental cost of a supermarket’s recyclable bags?)

Then there is the misinformation provided by the companies themselves in their adverts and PR campaigns that can easily swamp our own best intentions, and the efforts of groups attempting to inform the public of the facts of the environmental costs of certain products.

All products have an environmental impact, no matter how green they are labelled, and corporations see ethical consumerism as a way of increasing consumption, not reducing it. It is a chance to redirect an interest in consuming less into a willingness to buy green products, meanwhile expanding their market share to include consumers that want green products. Of course they still produce and sell the more environmentally-damaging alternatives if there is money still to be made from them.

We are told that we can use the market to express our desire for greener goods, but the most obvious problem here is that some people have louder voices than others. Those with the loudest voice (i.e. the most money) will hardly be interested in radically changing an economic system that placed them in that position.

The reverse of this is that those with the least money will often be buying more ecologically destructive products simply to make ends meet rather than through any real desire to do so.

Ultimately, green consumerism has the effect of reducing our power to influence society solely down to our purchasing power. It does not deal with issues such as unlimited economic growth on a finite planet, or the power of the transnational corporations who manufacture and sell us our goods. Instead it sees the blame being placed on the individual, and presents the solution as “shopping better”.

Meanwhile the corporations, which will pollute if they see a profit in it, continue to take our money off us and cause the degradation of our environment.

Again, it must be stressed that we as individuals should change our lifestyles as much as possible if we are to limit our impact on the environment, and the campaign for a plastic-bag free Gisborne is welcomed in that it is a collective action, and a step away from the individualist approach of green consumerism — and it is a move in the right direction. However, the challenge is not to stop at that. In the face of the problems we are facing it will require an even more conscious, wide-ranging and radical movement to meet the challenges being posed by a system that puts its own interests before all else.

Only by organising to achieve a society where all of us as consumers and producers have full control over what is produced, and how it is produced and distributed, will we be able to address the issues facing us all.

The Aotearoa Workers Solidarity Movement wants to build a classless, stateless, ecological sustainable society free from all forms oppression: anarchist communism. That society would be run by a federation of workplace and community councils, with everyone having a say in decisions that affect them. Resources and property would be communally owned and controlled by everyone.

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www.awsm.nz**

You can also email us on awsm@riseup.net

Zero hours = Zero dollars = Pissed off



:: How does it make you feel? You went to an interview, got selected, signed a contract and didn't get a single dollar out of this!

Pretty pissed off. You know I'm trying to arrange to pay my bills and feed my son etc and you budget ahead thinking you'll have money coming in and you don't apply for other jobs because you think you already have one. It also makes you feel really used and unappreciated, wasting your time on pointless correspondence and CV preparation.

THERE HAS BEEN a lot of discussion and organising on zero hour contracts recently. Unite Union successfully negotiated for all workers at McDonalds, Burger King, KFC, Pizza Hutt and Starbucks to have guaranteed hours. We interviewed two people on zero hour contracts to illustrate that the problem of casualised labour is much wider than just the fast-food industry.

:: Kia ora, a couple of years ago, you were 'employed' by a NZ university. Can you tell us about that?

Ae kia ora. Yes just over a year ago I received a pānui about this university looking for research assistants so I applied. About two months later it was arranged for me to attend an interview. I went to that city and attended a hui at a fancy kind of pub where the proposed research project was discussed with the relevant project organisers and some new PhD students. I realised after some time that this wasn't really an interview so asked what this process was. I was informed that I could have the job if I wanted it and they would send me the relevant paperwork for the contract. After quite a few emails the university finally sent through the contract and I signed it. After a few months I asked what was going on and was informed that someone would contact me. I had already contacted her several times and got no replies. I've now waited over a year for any actual work.

:: Why do you think universities have these zero hour contracts in place?

I presume now that they use contracts like this to secure funding and bump up their so-called EFTS [Equivalent Full Time Students] that make them look as if they are employing more people than they actually are. From what I've seen of other projects and contracts with this university they receive very large 'administration' fees from funding arrangements.

:: Hey, you have just signed a zero hour contract. Do you work in the fast-food industry?

No, I don't. I have just started to work for a labour hiring company. The contracts there are totally casual. Basically, by signing the contract, the boss doesn't agree to offer you any work, and you don't agree to take any assignments offered.

:: How does that work in practice?

Well, if you want work, you have to let them know what days you want to work and then just ring up first thing in the morning and hopefully they have got something for you. But there are no guarantees at all that you will get any work. Some people work full-time on assignments lasting months and months. Other jobs are just for half a day and that's it. Basically, the middle-man, the labour hiring company, just takes another cut out of your wages. You are being exploited three times: by the boss, the other boss and the government.

:: Have you followed the organising efforts against zero hour contract in the fast-food industry?

Yes, a little bit. It's good to see workers organising against these vicious attacks from above. I suppose their situation though is quite different to ours. At least they are working for the same company shift after shift. For us, while we work for the same labour hiring company, we may have a different assignment every day working for another company. Those companies have no obligations to you, and nor does the labour hiring company. It's pretty messed up.

Check out www.awsm.nz for more information!