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Direct Action

Magazine of solidarity federation

WOOLWORTHS

CAPITALISM F**KS YOU UP

DREAMING IN THE DOWNTURN
ANARCHA-FEMINISM OR DEATH!
CUBA - 50 YEARS OF FIDELISMO
THE CURSE OF OIL

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Aims of the Solidarity Federation

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

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

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

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

Climate Change & Economic Crisis

THE CURRENT ECONOMIC crisis is entirely a product of capitalism itself, spawned by the inherent instability of “boom and bust”, the signature of an insane and immoral system of organising society. But even in the best of the boom times crisis has never been too far removed from the relentless exploitation of resources, both human and natural, in the mad pursuit of profit for the rich and powerful. That this system has brought us to the brink of disastrous climate change is now beyond doubt.

In the face of climate change, big business prefers to fiddle while the world threatens to burn. However, the economic climate is only exacerbating the situation. A prime example of this is the European Union pact on climate change concluded in December last year. Corporate predictions of job losses,

warnings of increased costs, and threats to move out of Europe have easily persuaded servile politicians to water down the original proposals.

The pact has three main aims, all to be met by the year 2020 – to cut Europe’s greenhouse gas emissions by 20% (compared to 1990 levels); to cut Europe’s energy consumption by 20%; to raise the share of renewable energy to 20% of Europe’s total energy production. Predictably, EU politicians have hailed this as an ambitious agreement which will lead the way forward to a new worldwide agreement to replace the Kyoto protocol at UN negotiations to be held in Copenhagen later this year. As usual, the politicians are pulling the wool over our eyes.

In the race to cut Europe’s greenhouse gas emissions the centrepiece is to be the expansion from 2013 of the existing European Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). Since its inception in 2005 this ETS has hardly set the world alight...! But now the December agreement

has laced it with various sweeteners in the face of pleas about hard times from the biggest polluters. These trading schemes like ETS have already come in for much criticism – see, for example, contributions at www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/subject/climate – for, among other things, reducing the buying and selling of permits to pollute to yet another means of making profit. What’s more, the expanded scheme widens the scope for profiteering. From 2013 companies in processing industries like steel, cement, and many others, will get their permits for free while many central European (coal based) energy producers will get theirs at a huge discount. While the nominal cost of permits is expected to be passed on the consumers, these companies will ludicrously be allowed to pocket a handsome windfall running to many billions of euros.

As an example of to the rest of the world the effect is predictable and Copenhagen is likely to be another round of political backsliding played to the tune of corporate greed.

The present economic crisis confirms there are no real capitalist solutions to capitalist problems, on temporary fixes – the scuppering of Brown’s fantasy to ending “boom and bust” is yet one more proof of that. Alarming, the capitalist response to climate change shows few real signs of being any different. Instead, in the tradition of crises, past and present, paying for the climate crisis will fall disproportionately on us, the international working class, rather than be allowed to threaten corporate profits.



Dreaming in will state intervention herald a

MY, MY...HOW TIMES HAVE CHANGED. FOR THIRTY years the free market could do no wrong, then suddenly all change and it's state intervention that's now the one true faith. Even our own steadfast leader, Mr Brown, has undergone a St Paul-like conversion. Now Mr Prudence is to be found strutting his Keynesian stuff all over the world stage, championing the idea of state intervention on a grand scale. How easy our politicians glide from one set of principles to another, hardly pausing to adjust their moral compasses.

As for the social democratic left, they truly feel their time has come. *The Guardian* is now stuffed with articles paying homage to the new god that is Keynesian economics. The new social democratic dawn is upon us and a land of egalitarian milk and honey beckons. The dark days of New Labour have now passed and the next election will see the state interventionist forces of good do battle against the dwindling power of the evil free market Tories.

not finished

But what are the rest of us, back here on planet Earth, to make of it all? Are the right wing free marketeers finished? Well, not so fast. Those of us not so carried away with the results of the US elections should pause for thought before proclaiming the New Jerusalem. We should not be fooled into thinking that Keynesian economics is somehow "left wing". The whole

Keynesian project was, after all, designed to save capitalism from its own destructive nature. Its aim never was, and never will be, to undermine the capitalist system. Quite the contrary.

The over excited liberal left would have it that the current state spend-

ing spree is aimed at eliminating poverty rather than saving capitalism. It's as if the very same Labour leadership, which was quite relaxed about the filthy rich and about growing inequality, has now suddenly found its social conscience. This is nonsense. Labour doesn't give a toss about the poor. Since 1997 they have allowed millions to languish in grinding poverty and did nothing. All we heard off them for a decade was the same old mantra that there is no alternative. It is only when capitalism is threatened that suddenly billions are conjured up from nowhere to save the whole system from going down the toilet.

So let's not be fooled by all the crap



the Downturn

new dawn for social democrats?

that we are somehow witnessing the end of the Thatcherite free market era. All that is going on is a change of tactics. The British state is not in the business of dismantling the free market at the expense of the rich and in favour of the poor. The state is not spending billions of our money to undermine the free market but rather to save it. Yes, this may involve channelling money to the less well off but this has little to do with concerns about poverty. It is part of a wider strategy aimed at boosting demand as quickly as possible during the current crisis.

saving the system

The role of the social democratic state is to support capitalism. The individual capitalist may look no further than how much profit there is to be made. The state, however, has to look at the system as a whole and how best to protect it. This may involve temporarily limiting profit in order to save the system from itself. That is the role played by Keynesian economics. When capitalism drops itself in the shit, the state intervenes by pouring in money and imposing greater regulation. Once the danger is past then market forces are let off the leash until the next crisis hits.

That is what Labour is up to now. It has nothing to do with creating a more egalitarian society. The very idea is laughable. Labour has already made it clear that once capitalism has been pulled out of the crap the current spending spree will come to an end and market forces will once again rule. State spending will be reined in and cuts to services imposed. It is then that the current spending will all have

to be paid for. And it will not be the rich that's doing the paying. Taxes will increase for the majority, while the rich get off scot free. That is why such eminent socialist bodies as the CBI and the Institute of Directors are backing the massive increase in public spending. They know full well that once the crisis has passed it will be back to the business of making vast profits as usual.


That is not to say that at the other side of the crisis things are going to look exactly the same. We may see far greater regulation of the financial sector. However, we should not be conned into thinking that this somehow represents the forces of progress limiting the power of capitalism to exploit. Far from it; it is the power of the state limiting one sector of capitalism to protect the system as a whole. This is in full keeping with the state's role under capitalism. The state is there to look beyond short term profit and individual capitalist interests, to intervene when necessary in order to support, shape and protect capitalism as a system.

What happens next is hard to determine. It all depends on whether the

measures currently being taken to bail out capitalism work or fail with the economy sinking into depression. What we can say with certainty is that the future well being of the working class does not lie in the state intervening on our behalf. The social democratic left dreams of a world in which the paternalistic state intervenes against capitalism in the interests of the working class...let them dream on. As workers we should ignore such fantasies and concentrate on organising and confronting both capitalism and its partner in crime, the capitalist state.

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Japanese Lesson

THE WORLD'S POLITICAL elites are looking just a little jaundiced now that the free market god is proving to be a touch fallible. The days of free market triumphalism are long gone as our shell shocked leaders try to prevent the world economy sliding into prolonged depression. With free market solutions now dead, the big question is whether or not massive government action will be enough to avoid an economic meltdown.

And there is more bad news for those who find it just a little worrying that, with the failure of the markets, we are now being asked to rely on politicians to pull us out of the economic shit. History tells us that when it comes to governments throwing ever larger amounts of money at capitalism to save it from collapse, the record is not great. During the depression of the 1930s the US government threw just about everything but the kitchen sink at the economy to little avail. Despite the massive amounts of money injected, the US economy remained stubbornly stuck in depression mode. It took the horror of the Second World War to get the world economy moving again.

There is a more recent example of government intervention aimed at economic stimulation, which again ended in failure. In the 1990s the Japanese economy went through its very own credit crunch which, like now, was caused by a build up of

bad debt in the country's banking system. In an attempt to prevent the economy slipping into a deflationary spiral the Japanese government blew unprecedented amounts of public money on public works. It also brought forward measures that boosted consumer spending by 10%. Neither measure worked and throughout the 1990s the Japanese economy could only average an annual growth rate of less than 1%, the so called lost decade.



Not surprisingly the trauma of the Japanese economy is being studied by the great and good in the hope that lessons learned will help get us out of the current crisis. The big hope is that by responding far more quickly to the crisis government intervention will be far more effective than it proved in Japan.

This may well be the case. The Japanese government at the time were firmly stuck in the free market "do nothing" approach and delayed intervening until the economy was well and truly stuck in the deflationary crap. On the other hand the Japanese economy faced the crisis with many advantages not enjoyed by other capitalist

economies today. For example, Japan had no government debt and a high level of private saving, which made it far easier to stave off deflation by boosting government and consumer spending. However, by far the biggest difference was that the Japanese crisis occurred at a time when the rest of capitalism was booming, which ensured that the economy was able to keep afloat through exports.

Given the differences, perhaps the only glimmer of light to be gained from poring over the runes of the Japanese experience is that the government was able to stave off a full blown depression by spending huge amounts of money. It may well be the case that the incomprehensible amounts of money being spent now will prevent a 1930s type depression and that we will only face a prolonged period of recession.

Whatever happens we can say two things with certainty. The arrogant stupidity of Gordon Brown in claiming that Labour had cured capitalist boom and bust now looks more than just a tad silly. Capitalism is inherently unstable and boom will always be followed by bust. The other certainty is that no matter what happens it will be the working class that will pay the price of capitalism's failings. Whether it be depression or recession it will be us who pay the cost through higher unemployment and falling living standards. And tragically it will be the low paid and casualised workers who will end up suffering the most.

Shameful Scenes as BNP Gather in Liverpool

ON NOVEMBER 22ND, THIRTEEN BRITISH NATIONAL PARTY members were arrested in Liverpool city centre for distributing racist material. The pamphlet in question was a BNP "report", purporting to be about "hate crimes against white people". It begins with a nauseating denunciation of racism by BNP chair and Holocaust denier, Nick Griffin, which is followed by a welter of lies and scare stories about foreign workers, asylum seekers and Black and Asian communities in this country. It is designed to produce fear and hatred amongst white voters, and to drive them into the arms of the BNP.

In the week following the arrests, the BNP condemned the incident as an attack on "civil liberties". They called on supporters to gather in Liverpool the following Saturday to condemn this outrageous assault on their right to peddle racist filth. The choice of Liverpool for this upsurge in BNP activity is linked less to the defence of free speech (threatened by what the BNP curiously calls the "fascist" Labour government), and is more to do with Griffin's challenge for the North West seat in the next European elections. Meantime, Merseyside Police "consulted" the Crown Prosecution Service and was told that the thirteen should be released without charge, which they duly were. The BNP also got permission to hold their leafleting in Liverpool.

counterdemo

Anti-racists used the intervening week to mobilise a counter-demonstration. On the day, around 200 turned out for a rally against the BNP at the top of Church Street in the city centre. The BNP's event was at the other end of the same street. More police were deployed to corral the anti-fascists than to observe the BNP, who were distrib-

uting the same material which had triggered the arrests the previous week. The anti-fascist protest had been called by Unite Against Fascism and by the Merseyside Coalition Against Racism and Fascism, two alliances of moderate anti-BNP campaigners. After an hour or so of standing around and chanting, the rally was addressed by the local MCARF spokesperson and TUC bureaucrat, Alec McFadden. He thanked everyone

for being present, told us that the demonstration had been a magnificent victory and that, as the BNP were not going to turn up, the event was now over. Then he left, and many demonstrators drifted away.

How odd, then, that that was the very moment at which the police escorted around 100 BNP scum into position at the other end of Church St. The sequence of events could not have favoured the BNP more if McFadden had been liaising with the police about the scope and timing of the protest and when to disperse the anti-fascists.

Well...the fact that he **had** actually been liaising with the police about the scope and timing of the protest and when to disperse the anti-fascists tells us that what we are dealing with in McFadden is a reformist trade union bureau- >>>



crat who, despite attacks on his home and his person by the BNP, cannot be trusted, is scared to death of independent working class action and is more concerned with his career and his respectability than with organising effective opposition to racism and fascism. It shows us the danger of leaving anti-fascism in the hands of those who will connive with the police to allow the BNP to go about its business without fear.

polluting the city

Thankfully, some anti-fascists had been unwilling to go home at McFadden's bidding, and had lingered, suspecting that they had not witnessed a magnificent vic-



BNP scum gather in Liverpool

with the rest of the inadequates who were trying to poison the minds of the people of Liverpool. Police were seen directing black people away from the leafletters. "Freedom of speech" for the BNP apparently means that black Scousers can't walk the streets of their own city on a Saturday afternoon because permission has been given for an event at which their passing by might constitute a "threat to public order".

herded by police

News of the BNP being escorted to Lime St. Station was followed by anti-fascists again being blocked in by police, this time back at the top end of Church St. Two Labour city councillors were spotted in the vicinity and were accosted by anti-fascists, asking how the BNP had been allowed to occupy the main shopping thoroughfare while those opposed to racism and fascism were

being herded around by police. Neither, unsurprisingly, could give a coherent answer. The BNP held a rally on St. George's Hall steps *en route* to the station while anti-fascists were still penned in by police. The rank and file did not know it was taking place. Had Mr. McFadden and Mr. Bennett been told of this event, which the law demands should be pre-arranged, by their partners in negotiation, Merseyside Police?



tory at all, but rather sensing that the BNP were still polluting their city. Scouts quickly ascertained that Nazi scum were encamped at the very centre of Liverpool's shopping area, not half a mile away, this time protected by the police. Frantic phone calls brought anti-fascist numbers up as protests began at the police cordon around the BNP contingent. Shameful scenes then followed. Police prevented anti-fascists from moving around the streets while BNP luminaries like Griffin and Richard Barnbrook, the party's London Assembly member, freely mingled

At this point, another self-selected "leader" of the official anti-fascist movement, Weyman Bennett, UAF spokesperson and SWP central committee apparatchik, announced to the crowd that we should march back up Church St, thereby leaving the BNP unhindered. After being shouted down by the anti-fascists, he reappeared briefly to tell us that he had negotiated "five more minutes" with the police on our behalf. More abuse flew. The police seemed to tire of the whole business of negotiation at that point, and lines of cops pushed us all back up the road anyway, taking the opportunity to detach and surround the more vociferous section of the anti-fascists and to box them into shop doorways.

While it was desperately sad to see a large BNP presence in our city, there were some positives. There was pretty general condemnation of McFadden, Bennett and the handling of the protest amongst the crowd. People will in future be much less inclined to take at face value what they are told by these two, or to accept their leadership of the anti-fascist struggle. In addition, the day's events did bring out many old faces – some were veterans of Anti-Fascist Action in the 1980s and '90s who had in the past

prevented BNP and NF scum from operating here and who are clearly still keen. There were also many new faces there – younger people obviously willing to stand up to fascism. Another thing – the BNP turnout was small, considering the publicity generated by the week's events. Those who wandered through their ranks noted that there were few Scouse accents to be heard, and that some there had come from as far away as Tyneside. A northern mobilisation of the BNP had only unearthed 100 bigots willing to show their faces. We still outnumber them without really trying, so there is potential there. The other good thing was the response of the public. The BNP contingent remained static in size throughout. People did not join them and many made their opposition clear. Young Asians spontaneously joined the anti-fascist protest. The street was strewn with discarded BNP leaflets. Several passers by, young and old, independently mentioned Hitler's bombing of Liverpool during the war, and cited this as a reason not to support the BNP. A group of lads asked what was going on at the cordon. When told that the BNP were in town, one said scornfully "BNP – British Nazi Party".

hitler worshippers

There is a school of thought that believes it is inaccurate and simplistic to equate the BNP with the Nazis, that not everyone in the party is a raving anti-Semite or a closet Hitler-worshipper, and that these facts will damage the anti-fascist argument. It is certainly true that history never repeats itself and that the next far right demagogue will not have a toothbrush moustache and a lank fringe. Yet the evocation of the Nazis is a potent weapon. Some people clearly

make the links already, implicitly understanding where racism can lead. If the term became firmly linked in the public mind with the BNP, it would prove fatal to a party trying to market itself as a respectable organisation that shares the concerns of many white voters. At the moment, the leadership is keen to marginalise the bonehead foot soldiers who sustained the party in the past, but they are still present and active. Whatever the case, we have to make sure that our charges against the BNP stick.

Another thing became apparent on November 29th. This is going to be a long struggle. The BNP is already more successful in electoral terms than either



police protect the nazis



defeat fascism, politically, organisationally and physically in Liverpool and elsewhere must intensify now.

anti-fascism

Let us re-learn an old lesson from the events of November 29th in Liverpool. The leadership of moderate anti-racist groups and the labour movement are not going to challenge or stop the BNP. We need a more militant organisation to do that. In the 1980s and '90s, Anti-Fascist Action served this role, allowing anarchists and serious

anti-fascists from the left to co-operate in a shared policy of giving "no platform" to fascism. Direct action was used most effectively to prevent the BNP gaining a toehold in our communities then. Alas, AFA is no more and BNP support has risen to alarming levels. There is a direct action oriented anti-fascist movement in Britain, in the form of *Antifa*, which shares the "no platform" ethos (antifa.org.uk). This is a young organisation that is still to achieve a national presence and has not yet mobilised numbers on the scale that AFA did. This state of affairs has meant that the field is still clear for reformists and compromisers of McFadden's ilk to keep anti-fascism "safe" and at the margins, while the BNP make the running.

Direct Action would welcome a debate on the way forward for militant anti-fascism in this country.

Thanks to Liverpool Indymedia for images used with this article.

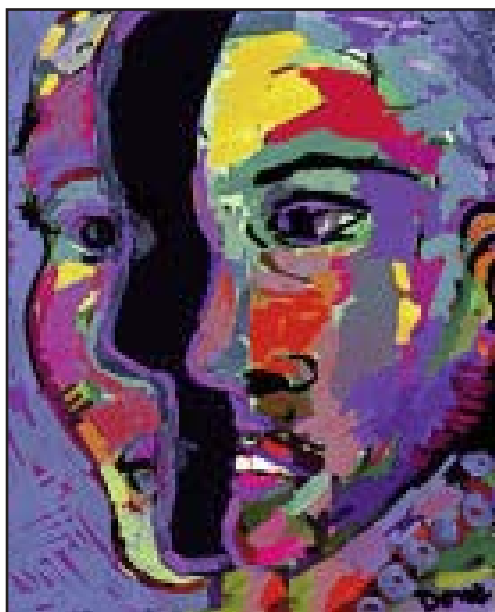
Self-Organising

SEPTEMBER SAW THE FIRST BRISTOL Anarchist Bookfair for many years. Stalls, activities and workshops were organised and hosted by a variety of groups. South West SF, organised a workshop to discuss the still relatively taboo subject of mental health. Specifically, it was concerned with examples and methods of mental health users and workers organising themselves to resist and/or compensate for a system that treats and contains mental ill health in a fashion that is often distressing and damaging for those concerned. South West SF argued that, although many user-worker relationships are restricted and damaged by the oppressive system in which interactions

take place, mental health workers and service users have as much, if not more, that unites them as separates them. There is a need for service users and workers to collaborate to address not only individual care needs but also collective issues.

The presumed starting point for the talk and discussion was that the present economic system can and does have a significant detrimental effect on the mental health of individuals, families (or other networks) and communities. The topic was introduced firstly by a service user and secondly by a mental health worker. Outlines of these introductions are provided below.

Service Users' Self-Organisation



One of the most important changes in the mental health field in the last 25 years has been the emergence of the service users' / survivors' movement. The movement is diverse and has many dimensions including self help and mutual support, advocacy, training and political campaigning. The movement campaigns around issues such as: compulsory treatment; the Mental Health Act 1983; anti-stigma issues; prejudice and discrimination; and the medical model in psychiatry, including drug treatments and electro-convulsive therapy (ECT).

history

The development of the large mental hospital system is now seen to have failed users, largely as a result of institutionalisation, lack of funding and the dominance of the medical model combined with repressive regimes.

Major changes in the 1980s have seen the development of care in the community and the care programme approach which was meant to give users the opportunity to influence the care they

received. Empowerment was meant to form the basis of good mental health practice by professionals but many have remained ignorant of the existence and demands of the user movement.

The loss of hospital beds has removed the opportunity of a safe refuge and community care has increased public concern about danger and risk. This has resulted in the extension of compulsory treatment in the community. The stigma of institutionalisation has been replaced by the stigma of danger resulting in fear, discrimination, isolation and marginalisation. Statistics show that you stand twice the chance of being killed by the police (100 per year) than you do by someone with mental health problems (50 per year). However there are about 4,500 suicides a year and this is the biggest cause of death among 10-24 year olds.

the movement

In 1974 a group of users formed the first mental patients union which developed a class focused opposition to the psychiatric system and formed an alliance with women's groups, black groups, prisoners

in Mental Health

rights groups, etc. This was followed by the formation of PROMPT (Promotion of Rights of Mental Patients) and CAPO (Campaign Against Psychiatric Abuse) in the early 1980s.

In 1986 the Survivors Speak Out Conference formed the first national network for individuals and groups involved in action.

In 1987 a Charter of Needs and Demands was drawn up, while Mind Link was set up as a network of survivors working within MIND.

In 1990 Hearing Voices began to hold meetings with the aim of setting up self help groups.

quilliser addiction, self harm, eating disorders, manic depression, hearing voices, etc. SURG (Service User Reference Group) is made up of reps from service user groups from this region.

Other parts of the country have seen the development of survivor led crisis projects, safe houses and therapeutic communities. Many of these groups started to develop advocacy projects and have been involved in policy making decisions within mental health trusts and the training of workers. Some are involved in user-led research.

However, a long campaign for a safe house in Bristol has failed to be taken seriously.

A lot of work has gone into challenging stereotyping in the media and the development of literature, film and art from a user perspective. For instance, reading a personal account by someone who also has suffered a crisis can be far more therapeutic than being given a diagnosis by a psychiatrist. Examples include work by William Styron, Andrew Solomon, and Elizabeth Wurtzel which deal with their experiences of depression. Mad Pride organises a celebration each year.

Recently over 200 people attended a conference for survivors as professionals working in mental health services. Perhaps the most important part of the movement is self help and mutual support provided by the groups. At present there are about 300 groups nationally.

Demands on Society: These include equality and an end to dis



crimination in employment, housing, etc; in particular an end to negative stereotyping and for inclusion and acceptance.

Demands on Services: These include respect and dignity, information, choice of treatment options including alternatives to drug therapy, non-judgemental listening, advocacy, the honouring of advance directives.

debates in the movement

The rights of users to be involved in the development of services is enshrined in law. However, since the movement is very diverse this has led to debates around issues such as tokenism, payment, full time survivor consultants and representation. Activists are sometimes accused of not representing users and are often patronised. However, most are aware of the diversity of users' experiences and try to represent them fully. This may mean attempting to represent people in secure units as well as people with mild depression and anxiety who may have only limited contact with a GP.

Black people are over represented in the mental health service and the service is institutionally racist. In response, black people have sometimes found it necessary to



From 1990 onwards many groups across the country began to seriously challenge practices in the mental health services. In Bristol these organisations now include Bristol Survivors Network; Patients Council, Southmead and North Bristol User Network (SUN), Depression Alliance, Sensation (working with Black users). Other groups are associated with tran-

develop their own organisations. Women are sometimes the victim of sexism and abuse by users and staff and have concerns that sometimes are not recognised by the user movement. Until recently, sexuality itself was subject to psychiatric diagnosis and treatment. Working class people, women and minority groups are more likely to enter the mental health system as are gay people, migrants, ethnic minorities and people with learning difficulties.

achievements and challenges

In a society, which sees people with mental health problems as a burden, the continuing growth of the user's movement is an achievement in itself providing evidence of the skills, creativity and persistence of a devalued group. Pioneering approaches have emerged for the treatment of psychosis and self harm as a result of pressure from user-led networks. Traditional psychiatric practices are being challenged with a large body of written work available to professionals. Advocacy services are being developed in some areas, but funding is a major problem

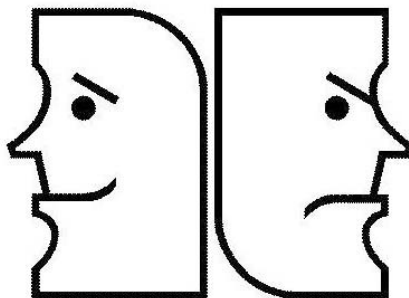
Wide scale prejudice still exists within society in general. The challenge is to widen the focus of the movement to tackle society's negative attitudes while still trying to change the mental health services.

Although users are involved in the development of their own care plans, mental health professionals still have a huge amount of power over any individual entering the service. Managers may consult with users and invite them on to their committees, but they will set the agenda and retain the power. Developing links between users and sympathetic mental health workers may be one way to challenge this power.

Mental Health Workers' Self-Organisation



Critical Psychiatry Network



Information relating to mental health workers organising themselves to address political concerns is hard to come by and examples appear rare. However, the following sketches out some such attempts over the past 25 years.

1986 – Launch of Asylum magazine: This followed a visit to the UK by mental health workers from Trieste, Italy. At that time the ASYLUM San Giovanni in Trieste comprised of “apartments for clients, art studios, space for film and theatre and perpetual discussion of what more could be done to humanise mental health services. There were co-operatives and a restaurant in town as well as small friendly units with a few beds for short stay during crises as well as facilities to sit together, to eat and to chat and to see the mental health workers. Mental health workers in the UK were attracted by the argument that the total ambience of everyone's life is of central importance to their mentality. The Italian workers in Trieste had realised that much that is therapeutic comes from the arts, from sharing good things, from eating, drinking and laughing together”. The aim of the Asylum magazine was, and continues to be, to argue and struggle for a system based on the best examples of mental health care.

1994 – Founding of the Psychology, Politics, Resistance (PPR) Group: PPR describes itself as a “network of people – both psychologists & non-psychologists – who are prepared to oppose the abusive acts of psychology. This means challenging the ideas within psychology that lead to oppressive practices, supporting those at the receiving end and using psychological knowledge positively to help those engaged in struggles for social justice”.

PPR held “network festivals” bringing together groups and individuals already campaigning.

1999 – First meeting of the Critical Psychiatry Network

(CPN), aka “the Bradford Group”: CPN provided “a network to develop a critique of the contemporary psychiatric system”.

The network “is influenced by critical philosophical and political theories, and it has three elements. It challenges the dominance of clinical neuroscience in psychiatry (but does not exclude it); it introduces a strong ethical perspective on psychiatric knowledge and practice; it politicises mental health issues. Critical psychiatry is deeply sceptical about the reductionist claims of neuroscience to explain psychosis and other forms of emotional distress. [CPN is]...sceptical about the claims of the pharmaceutical industry for the role psychotropic drugs in the ‘treatment’ of psychiatric conditions.”

The CPN describes their beliefs as follows:

Like other psychiatrists we use drugs, but we see them as having a minor role in the resolution of psychosis or depression. We attach greater importance to dealing with social factors, such as unemployment, bad housing, poverty, stigma and social isolation. Most people who use psychiatric services regard these factors as more important than drugs. We reject the medical model in psychiatry and prefer a social model, which we find more appropriate in a multi-cultural society characterised by deep inequalities.

In particular the group has been concerned with proposals for compulsory treatment in the community.

2003 – Launch of Paranoia Network: The network brought together “ideas from users and survivors of services as well as from

clinicians and academics”. In 2004 it held an international conference in association with the **Asylum** Group and Manchester University in order to create “a space to speak and produce new knowledge rather than simply listen and be subjected to the psy-complex.”

reformist trade unions

Most unionised mental health workers are organised within reformist unions such as UNISON and Unite. They concern themselves mainly with issues relating to pay and conditions and the amount of political discussion at



Manchester mental health workers during the Karen Reissmann dispute

branch level is minimal. There have been some disputes and campaigns around NHS privatisation (e.g. the recent Karen Reissmann dispute – see **DA41**) but little if any discernible discussion or joint action with service users.

anarcho-syndicalist networks

Anarcho-syndicalism in Britain is relatively small yet those involved argue for workers and service users to organise amongst and across themselves. Politics and economics are not seen as mutually exclusive and are considered the concern of those affected, not of elected representatives. Health and social care workers in the anarcho-syndicalist Solidarity Federation are in the process of setting up a network

with the view to eventually establishing a healthcare union.

something to think about...

We would like to look at practical ways in which users and mental health workers can develop links and work together. We recognise the importance of both sides continuing to work within their own organisations and maintaining their autonomy. Some users may be wary of working with mental health workers because of the dangers of reproducing the power relationships which exist inside the service. On the other hand, some workers may be wary of meeting up with users outside of their working hours for reasons to do with risk and confidentiality. However, we would like to propose the development of forums where interested individuals and groups can meet to discuss working together to challenge the power relations which are integral to the existing mental health system.

Websites / further info

Asylum Magazine – Psychology, Politics, Resistance – Paranoia Network – www.asylumonline.net

Critical Psychiatry Network – www.critpsynet.freeuk.com

Solidarity Federation – Health & Care Workers Initiative – www.solfed.org.uk – c/o The Blackcurrent Centre, 24 St Michael's Avenue, Northampton, NN1 4JQ – northamp-tons@solfed.org.uk



Anti-Capitalist Feminist Conference

Dear Comrades,

We are feminists who have come together from a number of groups to organise an event on Saturday 14 February 2009. We are excited and energised by the current resurgence in feminist activism in the UK, but we think that the kind of feminist movement we build and the kind of politics it has, matter.

We are committed to an anti-capitalist feminism which sees the interconnections between all struggles against oppressions and against capitalism, and we want to build an event that creates an open space to discuss this and develop our ideas. But we don't want to just talk about our politics – we want to fight to actually change the material conditions of women's lives, to fight misogyny and our own exploitation, and to involve as many women and men as possible in the campaigns that will be at the centre of this event.

We want the joint event to provide us with a forum to come together, participate in open debate, develop strategies to work towards our



common aims, network, make alliances and inspire each other to build a strong and active feminist movement. We need to unite

to challenge women's oppression and exploitation. We want to fight for the rights of all women - and that includes the rights of sex workers and 'illegal' migrants.

We organise using non-hierarchical, consensus-based decision making. We recognise the power structures that exist among us, based on the inequalities of our society, which amplify some voices and marginalise others, and we will actively work to confront them. Decisions are taken at monthly meetings, which are open to feminists of all genders. There's also the option to work autonomously in self-defined groups (e.g. women-only). We respect the fact that women have a diversity of experience and we see this as positive in that it enables us to learn from each other.

Key issues on which we want to organise include...

Defending and extending reproductive freedom.

Opposing rape and sexual abuse.

Fighting racism and immigration controls.

Building solidarity between women workers.

Challenging all forms of heterosexism and increasing our freedom of sexual expression.

Struggles against capitalist exploitation.

In Sisterhood and Solidarity,

anticapitalistfeminists@
lists.riseup.net

Reforming Parliament?

Dear DA,

Surely in the 21st century Parliament needs to be reformed. After all how many of our MPs went to private school and university? It doesn't sound like our Parliament is full of commoners. A Parliament full of commoners will mean more varied debate and not for self-interest.

Yours faithfully, SH.

REPLY: *As far as the kind of social change that we envisage is concerned, whether or not parliament is reformable is a side issue. Parliaments, the parties and politicians that infest them, along with other hierarchical bodies like the reformist unions, have the power to make decisions over our heads without having to account for their actions. Against this, we see direct action as the way forward for our class – that is, in the words of our Aims (on p.2), "action by workers ourselves, not through intermediaries like politicians and union officials".*

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Address Unknown

Dear DA,

I have just read "Address Unknown" and can endorse the reviewer's comments [see DA44]. This is indeed a little gem of a book, a telling indictment of the creeping pervasiveness of prejudice and oppression.

In solidarity, RE



We aim to keep DA at £1.50, to keep the basic sub rate at £5 and wish to thank donors and supporters for helping to make the magazine good value for money

DIY Politics:

THERE IS A COMMON MISCONCEPTION that anarcho-syndicalists aren't remotely interested in anything unconnected with workplace struggle. This is, to put it very mildly, rubbish! Without practicing solidarity, mutual aid and organisation outside, as well as inside, our workplaces, we could never change society for the better.

One of the enduring plus points of mutual aid and voluntary cooperation is that people practice them daily in every act of kindness, unselfishness and community spirit. Looking out for one another or sharing our skills, time and resources go a long way in reversing the selfish dog-eat-dog individualism that our rulers love. This spirit is also reflected in the growing popularity of DIY politics.

The squatting movement offers but one example of people facing similar problems joining together to help each other out. When many are now finding their homes repossessed by the forces of darkness, squatting, a (legal) form of direct action and a practical solution to homelessness, will again rise in popularity. After all, there are many perfectly good properties standing empty while the government allows people to be turfed out on the street.

Many other social movements are on the rise – from those fighting climate change and globalisation to those opposing NHS privatisation, state surveillance, gender inequalities, deportations and the far right. Disability rights groups demand respect as equals, not charity. Social centres in many towns and cities, offer space to meet and socialise away from the centres of rabid commercialisation. Groups like the London and Edinburgh Coalitions Against Poverty organise against attacks on our living standards.

All these movements need to snowball and forge greater links, not least with workers

The Advisory Service for Squatters, set up in 1975, produces a Squatters' Handbook (13th edition forthcoming) detailing the practicalities of squatting: ASS, Angel Alley, 84b Whitechapel High Street, London, E1 7QX
tel: 0845 644 5814
www.squatter.org.uk

solidarity between community, workplace & social movements

in struggle. During the epic Liverpool Dockers dispute in the 1990s, the environmental group Reclaim the Streets showed the way by proactively building support and solidarity for the strikers.

The process of struggle, in our communities and workplaces, is vital in sharing ideas, raising awareness and building confidence. Winning reforms today is only a part of the longer term trajectory towards a better society. We should never underestimate the strength of solidarity, but also heed lessons of the past. Not so long ago a popular campaign of mass resistance defeated Thatcher's hated poll tax. Since then, the state has hit us with more taxes, from congestion charges to VAT on virtually everything. Although we won the poll tax battle we haven't won the war...yet.

In this war, we anarcho-syndicalists work towards organising mass assemblies in the workplace and community. Electoral politics, vanguard parties and corporate trade unions have failed us. Our class needs its own organisations built on direct democratic principles; organisations that offer maximum control and accountability; organisations that do not diffuse our demands or divert us up fruitless blind alleys like supporting the Labour party.

We may be on the cusp of an important time in history as governments stand impotent in the face of recession and corporations continue devouring the planet in the name of profit. The ever present spectre of global capital that hangs like a dark cloud over us all is not infallible. Sure, revolutionary change will not happen overnight, but by organising together, in our workplaces and outside, a better world can, and will, be ours.

Anarcho-syndicalists do not just focus on those in paid employment. Anarcho-syndicalists fully support and participate in many forms of community organising, arguing for the building of residents' associations and radical community groups to build working class power in the community, using tactics such as rent strikes to gain improvement in conditions. Anarcho-syndicalists also believe in the organisation of the unemployed, domestic carers, students and other unwaged groups...

from *Anarcho-Syndicalism – An Introduction*, libcom.org.uk

Anarcha-Feminism

the relevance of anarchism and feminism

FOR all intents and purposes, feminism and the whole issue of women's liberation appear to have quietly but conspicuously slipped off the political agenda in these difficult times. Even within "radical" left circles, opposition to women's subjugation now amounts to little more than a few tokenistic murmurings about the need for abortion rights and equal pay. Years of supposed progress and struggle for equality, it seems, have actually done precious little to improve women's lot. To quote one well worn statistic, women put in two-thirds of the world's working hours; receive 10% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the world's property.

So what is to be done?

A socialist awareness of the primacy of capitalism as the source of

economic oppression, combined with an anarchist focus on transforming all power-based relationships, still holds our best and only hope for liberation. Simply, anything less than a direct attack upon all the conditions of our lives is not enough.

Across the world, in developing and advanced industrialised nations alike, women continue to be oppressed, exploited and abused *en masse*. In every case, the common denominator at play is an abuse of power – whether that be social, economic or interpersonal. We could quote horrifying statistics galore about

honour killings, genital mutilation, rape, domestic violence, low pay, sexual trafficking and so on. But perhaps it would be more helpful to look at the roots of our oppression – roots which are so often overlooked by the party hacks and liberal apologists who, for all their fanciful rhetoric, have achieved precious little in real terms of advancing our cause.

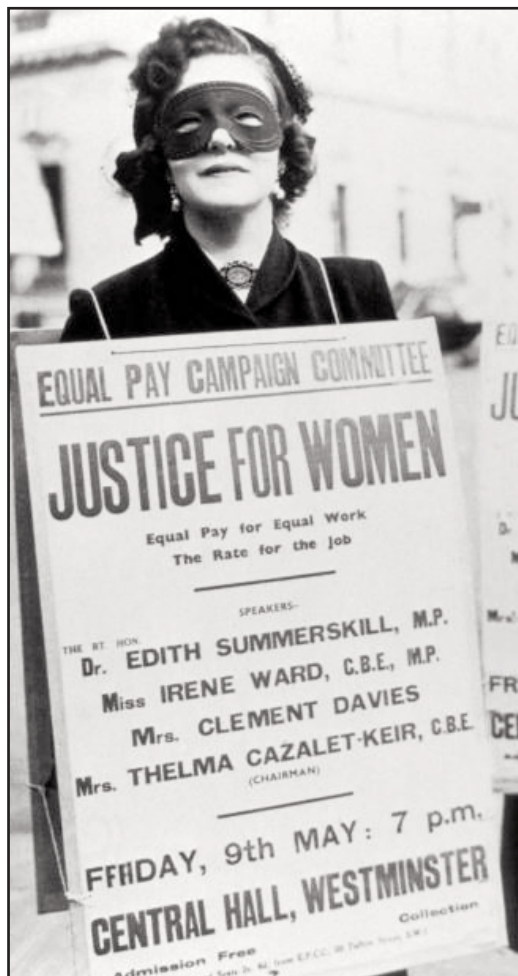
the gruesome twosome

Patriarchy – the domination of women by men – as any revolutionary worth their salt will tell you, predates capitalism. Closely tied to patriarchy is the stifling ignorance and unquestioning bigotry of established religion. For aeons this gruesome twosome has denied women's basic right to sexual freedom and reduced them to possessions of their (dominant) menfolk. The emergence of industrial capitalism only saw women's domestic oppression continue, shackled by economic dependence to the male breadwinner.

Throughout their lives, the sociali-

"Women are consumed by men who treat them as sex objects; they are consumed by their children (whom they have produced!) when they buy the role of super mother; they are consumed by authoritarian husbands who expect them to be willing servants; and they are consumed by bosses who bring them in and out of the labour force and who extract a maximum of labour for a minimum of pay.... They are consumed by men who buy their bodies on the street. They are consumed by church and state, who expect them to produce the next generation for the glory of god and country."

Carol Ehrlich: *Socialism, Anarchism and Feminism*



1952: women are still struggling in 2009 for equality in spite of the Equal Pay Act of 1970

or Death!

today

sation process imbues women with behavioural attributes befitting the roles they are required to undertake in class society. The feminist Ann Oakley made the useful distinction between sex and gender roles. The sex role is a biological one – only women can give birth, for example. The gender role, however, is socially ascribed and parallels closely with the respective tasks that women and men fulfil to keep the economy ticking over. Oakley noted how cross-cultural studies revealed wide variations between both male and female behavioural patterns, but observed how these were commonly presented as being caused by biological rather than social factors. Notably, authoritarian societies place vastly greater value on masculine traits like aggressiveness, competitiveness and domination.

working for free

One obvious role that women's socialisation prepares them for is that of housewife. The duties that women undertake as housewives in the daily grind of the modern nuclear family is not only central to the reproduction of the human race, but also the capitalist economy. By giving birth and nurturing present and future workers, women directly contribute to the profits of capital. But while the worker receives a fraction of the wealth they create, the housewife gets nothing. She works for free.

At times when capitalism requires them to do so, women are needed not only to carry out their traditional domestic roles, but also to bolster the workforce. Typically women's socialisation sees them "succeed" in caring, casual and unskilled professions. The Equal

Pay Unit found that even in 2007, women are paid 17% less than men. But this figure does not factor in part time and casual jobs – the ones which are usually first to go in a recession – meaning that the actual disparity is far higher. When women do succeed in the macho world of business, they do so only by being as cutthroat, aggressive and competitive as their male counterparts – thus making a mockery of the genetic determinists' argument.

But women are not just manipulated to enable their exploitation as workers and housewives. They are actively targeted by capitalist advertising as consumers of fashion, beauty and vanity products. As women, we are assiduously subjected to impossible images: images of artificially airbrushed "perfection" that consumer capitalism wants us to aspire to at all costs. Under capitalism women have also become objects and commodities for men's consumption – as sex workers, soft-porn models or scantily clad appendages to sell male orientated products from lads mags to motor-bikes. Is it any wonder that so many of us suffer from low self-esteem?

For all the talk of "liberation", decades of struggle and universal suffrage have done little for most working class women, save a few minor concessions in employment and reproductive rights. As women, our disempowerment is lasting testament to our continued oppression by capitalism, patriarchy, church and state. The media savvy feminists of the 1960s and 70s who

claimed to advocate on our behalf, became nothing more than mouth-pieces for the establishment.

Likewise, those women who have climbed the ladders of power have proved invaluable to the ruling class in perpetuating our subjugation.

anarcha-feminist revolution

The need for us to challenge domination and power in all its manifestations, remains as pressing now as it has ever been. We ignore the lessons of the past at our peril. Our emancipation will not be achieved by us submitting to the compromises of hierarchies, parties or bureaucracies. We must regroup and refocus. We must fight alongside, not against, men to smash capitalism. We must do so as equals and if that means organising independently as well, then so be it. Our time has come. This time we must make our own anarcha-feminist revolution.



Recessive Tendencies

a tale of boom, bust and that old devil called capitalism

As the global economy plunges deeper into crisis, people everywhere are facing home repossessions, unemployment, pay cuts and rising prices. The very same governments that for decades extolled the virtues of unfettered market forces, have committed the ultimate U-turn by promising billions of taxpayers' money for bailing out ailing financial institutions. This, they argued, was necessary to avert a complete economic meltdown on the scale of the 1930s. But before the full horror of crisis unfolded, some speculators and hedge fund managers, who gambled on the chaos big style, have pocketed the cash and disappeared merrily off into the sunset.

We are told that this latest financial crisis was caused by a combination of mounting unserviceable debt, greedy bankers and the collapse of the American sub-prime mortgage market. But this is only half the story. As many are coming to realise, cycles of boom and bust are part and parcel of capitalism itself.

marx was (partly) right

Fundamentally, as Marx pointed out, capitalism is awash with contradictions. In *Das Kapital* (1867) he noted how a small minority (the bourgeoisie) own and control the means of production – the factories, fields and workshops. The vast majority of the population (the proletariat), on the other hand, have to sell their labour in order to survive. As capitalism has evolved, these basic class distinctions have become more complex, but have not disappeared.

Now, as in the 19th century, wealth in society is created *not* by speculators, financiers or bankers, but by the

sheer labour of the workforce. Profits arise from capitalists stealing a proportion of that wealth. The difference between the value of the products or services provided by the workers, and the amount they are actually paid, stacks up as “surplus value” profit for the capitalist. The owners of industry are only able to maintain this exploitative relationship, argued Marx and his anarchist contemporaries, because government protects their interests. This is achieved by a combination of what the 1960s



Xinhua/Photoshott

American “democrat”, Walter Lippman, referred to as “manufactured consent” and, failing this, the threat of or actual use of force.

Marx examined the tendency of capitalism to move through cycles of boom and slump. He noted that capitalism is based around the production of commodities for the market. Production is not linked to peoples' needs, but with the sole expectation of making profit. Profit levels are dependent on the ruling class holding down wages, eroding working conditions and investing in technologies to increase productivity.

Nevertheless, competition between rival capitalists to produce more goods to realise ever greater profits, eventually results in a “crisis of over-

production”. More goods are produced than can be sold, leading to firms going bust and workers being laid off. In the ensuing uncertainty, the economy retracts as consumers have less to spend, banks refuse to lend and investment is cut. Inflation and prices both go up. Smaller firms (or banks) go bust, or are absorbed by bigger ones who then monopolise the market. The banking and airline industries provide us with recent examples of this.



David Wimsett/UppA/Photoshott

In order to get out of the resulting slump, unnecessary productive capacity has to be wiped out. Unsold goods are either bought up cheaply or completely written off, as investment will not start if overproduction still exists. Profit rates have to be increased by cutting wages and interest rates. Each slump thereby provides the conditions for future economic boom, followed inevitably by yet another slump. This permanent state of insecurity is the natural cycle of capitalism and also a trigger for war between competing states.

Although workers have the produc-

tive potential to enable everyone on the planet to have a decent standard of living, this is not in the interests of the ruling class. Only a very different system – socialism – could make this an actuality. Marx recognised that the ruling class would not give up their positions willingly – a popular revolution followed by a period of “dictatorship of the proletariat” was therefore necessary to implement socialism and prevent the capitalist ruling class from regaining power. According to Marx, socialism and workers' self-management would eventually prevail, and the state would become obsolete and “wither away”. These latter points are highly contentious, and underline a clear distinction which emerged between two traditions within socialist thought – the authoritarian tradition and the anarchist or libertarian tradition.

a bad case of the trots

The failure of subsequent revolutions to implement socialism resulted because the authoritarian/centralist tendencies – advocated by the likes of Stalin, Lenin, Trotsky and Mao – achieved ascendancy. But in practice these only resulted in dictatorship of the party, state run capitalism and another form of class rule – as libertarians such as Bakunin and Malatesta correctly predicted they would. Countless (thriving) movements based on libertarian principles were brutally crushed by alleged workers' states for being “counter revolutionary”. Of these, Kronstadt (1921), Hungary (1956) and Spain (1936-7) are perhaps the most widely documented while Castro's Cuba (see page 25) is another case in point.

Marx's lack of insight into power as a self-perpetuating end in itself remains a disastrous oversight. The actions of various self-proclaimed leftist vanguards in power has wrought immeasurable damage to the credibility of socialist ideas. This fact in itself does not negate the need for sweeping social change, but only underlines why libertarian approaches and organisational forms are so critical.

First and foremost, libertarians do not eschew organisation – only authoritarian organisation. In contrast to authoritarians, they aim for real (direct) democracy, self-activity and solidarity. Libertarian organisation is based on free federations built from the bottom up rather than from the top down. Further, libertarians oppose **all** relationships based on power – not just class ones – and seek to establish the building blocks of the new society within the here and now. Crucially, as the IWA put it, the emancipation of the workers is the task of the workers themselves – not of self-appointed leaders, parties or intermediaries. Socialism, as experience bears out, cannot be built using capitalist or authoritarian methods and organisational structures.

Nevertheless, despite these objections, Marx's writings continue to offer a germane explanation for the relentless cycle of boom and bust which afflicts capitalism. The misery wreaked by economic competition and the greed of a few can be seen all around us today. And the many contradictions capitalism presents – from poverty to global warming – may yet provide the mechanisms for its downfall.

Capitalist Contradictions: the Evidence

- At the start of this recession, energy bosses announce multi-million pound profits, while consumers are hit with huge price rises and fuel poverty.
- Northern Rock, bailed out by taxpayers' money, rewards the public by repossessing homes on a grand scale; meanwhile, homelessness rises as the government allows thousands of properties to stand empty.
- As banks are effectively nationalised, elsewhere publicly owned assets are incrementally privatised.
- Corporate executives are awarded inflation busting rises as workers are told to accept what amount to pay cuts.
- The use of low paid casual labour is widespread, and both unemployment and work related deaths continue to rise.
- Across the world, rising food prices have resulted in riots and thousands going hungry even though there is more than enough food produced globally to go round.
- Wars are being fought over declining oil supplies, when global warming indicators tell us to invest in renewables or face climate chaos.
- Greenhouse gas production, the primary cause of global warming, continues to rise despite Kyoto and Bali.
- The US furthers its imperialist ambitions not just by occupying Iraq and Afghanistan, but also with sorties into Pakistan and Syria; in response, increasingly marginalised groups turn to religious fanaticism and acts of terror.
- As NATO expands into Eastern Europe, we are again reminded that a mere fraction of global military spending could easily eradicate world poverty.
- There's a shift towards centralisation of political and economic power within a small number of largely unaccountable transnational corporations and financial institutions (like the IMF).
- As world financial markets have become deregulated, growing capital speculation and increasing destabilisation has resulted.
- The deployment of state surveillance under the guise of “the war against terror” is broadening all the time; attacks on unions and the right to assemble and protest continue.
- Social inequality is growing both between and within nations; even within relatively wealthy economies such as Britain, massive disparities in life expectancy and health exist that are closely linked to social class.
- The production and sale of commodities upon which consumer capitalism's economic growth is based, is decimating the earth's natural resources at a horrific rate, even taking recession into account.
- Capitalism homogenises and commodifies our leisure; it rests on power, competition and alienation, it spawns crime, violence and repression, and it supports racism, sexism, nationalism and tribalism.
- In short, capitalism is rotten to the core, as are all governments, ideologies and social relationships founded upon prejudice, exploitation and power.

Workers Control, not the case for libertarian

Much work carried out in today's society is boring, useless and stressful, affording workers little in the way of genuine autonomy or self-determination. Further, the forces of capitalist industry are profligate in the use of our time, talents and natural creativity, making us mere minions to the machinery of profit. This wastefulness is compounded during times of recession when unemployment levels soar. Under capitalism, workers are typically paid far less than the true value of their labours, while the owners of capital grow ever richer by creaming off the surplus value in the form of profit. Mass poverty and social inequality are other by-products of the profit economy, sanctioned in the final analysis by the institutions of government. Moreover, capitalist production as a whole is damaging to the environment and leads to wars between nation states over resources, territory and markets. As the economy spirals ever deeper into crisis, increasing numbers are questioning the very legitimacy of the current global economic order. Here we outline the case for replacing capitalist wage labour with libertarian communism (or anarchism) and direct workers control.

The term "workers control" refers to the collective worker ownership, control and management of all aspects of production and distribution in both industry and agriculture. Under libertarian socialism, free democratic workers assemblies, councils and federations would perform all the functions previously reserved for the owners, managers and financiers. However, in stark contrast to under capital

ism, these activities would be organised and discharged for the general well being of society, rather than to maximise the power and profits of the controlling minority. In

this way, production is directly harmonised and attuned to the needs of consumers, taking full account of the wider social and environmental costs of any such undertakings.

Workers' self-management means the end of hierarchical and authoritarian modes of production to be replaced by free agreement, collective decision making, direct democracy and social equality. Syndicates – that is, voluntary associations responsible for managing and organising work – would form the bedrock of the new co-operative order. But although libertarian socialism abolishes the dichotomy between order givers and order takers, self-management does not mean that all decisions are made by everyone. As GDH Cole explains:

A mass vote on a matter only understood by a few experts would be a manifest absurdity, and, even if the element of technique is left out of

"You are what you do. If you do boring, stupid, monotonous work, chances are you'll end up being boring and monotonous. Work is a much better explanation for the creeping cretinisation all around us than even such significant moronising mechanisms as television and education. People who are regimented all their lives, handed to work from school and bracketed by the family in the beginning and the nursing home in the end, are habituated to hierarchy and psychologically enslaved. Their aptitude for autonomy is so atrophied that their fear of freedom is among their few rationally grounded phobias. Their obedience training at work carries over into the families they start, thus reproducing the system in more ways than one, and into politics, culture and everything else. Once you drain the vitality from people at work, they'll submit to hierarchy and expertise in everything. They're used to it."

Bob Black



Controlled Workers socialism & workers control

account, a factory administered by constant mass votes would be neither efficient nor at all a pleasant place to work in.

This is not to say, however, that the institutionalised division of labour under capitalism will remain intact – far from it.



Many observers have noted how capitalism has given rise to an insidious culture of professional elitism, conferring undue status upon academic rather than practical skills. Those at the lower end of the pyramid of production are condemned to carry out rote, mundane tasks for much of their working lives, with little or no scope for intellectual or profes-

intelligentsia to justify their superior status and earnings. Capitalism also bestows unduly large rewards on its unproductive money makers, bureaucrats and administrators, while domestic workers, carers and community minded volunteers enjoy little or no recognition or financial return for their efforts. For these reasons, while we embrace the division of work to maximise productive efficiency, we bitterly oppose the division of labour. It would be impossible to completely eradicate the division of labour overnight, but with equal pay and coordinated work rotation, knowledge can be shared and skills developed. This promotes a proprietary interest for workers in their sphere of work and, with greater autonomy and control, puts an end to the arduous, meaningless, and alienated labour so prevalent under the current system. The responsible deployment of technology will also render many mundane tasks a thing of the past.

The distinction is often made by libertarians between a person who is **an** authority (because of their specialist skills and knowledge) and a person who is **in** authority. While we reject the latter we respect the former. That some decision making has to be delegated need not lead to hierarchy, because ultimate control rests with the worker/community councils as a whole, who would have the final say in determining what types of decisions could be safely delegated. To put this in more practical terms, the decision to commission, let's say, a civil engineering project, would lie with a federal assembly, but the logistics of carrying the project through would remain with the responsible syndicates. These syndicates would remain fully accountable to the federation by periodically reporting back on the progress of the project.

sional advancement. "Brain work" on the other hand, tends to be the preserve of a small band of highly-qualified professionals, with the remainder of other jobs filling the void somewhere in between. Over time, this hierarchy has naturally reproduced itself and is used by the

Economic cooperation and the common ownership of social capital would eliminate competition for survival, resource wars and the "expand or die" dynamic of the capitalist market. Production "from each according to ability to each according to need" ensures equity of access to

"If workers' management of production does not transform work into a joyful activity, free time into a marvellous experience, and the workplace into a community, then they remain merely formal structures, in fact class structures. They perpetuate the limitations of the proletariat as the product of bourgeois social conditions. Indeed, no movement that raises the demand for workers councils can be regarded as revolutionary unless it tries to promote sweeping transformations in the environment of the workplace."

Murray Bookchin

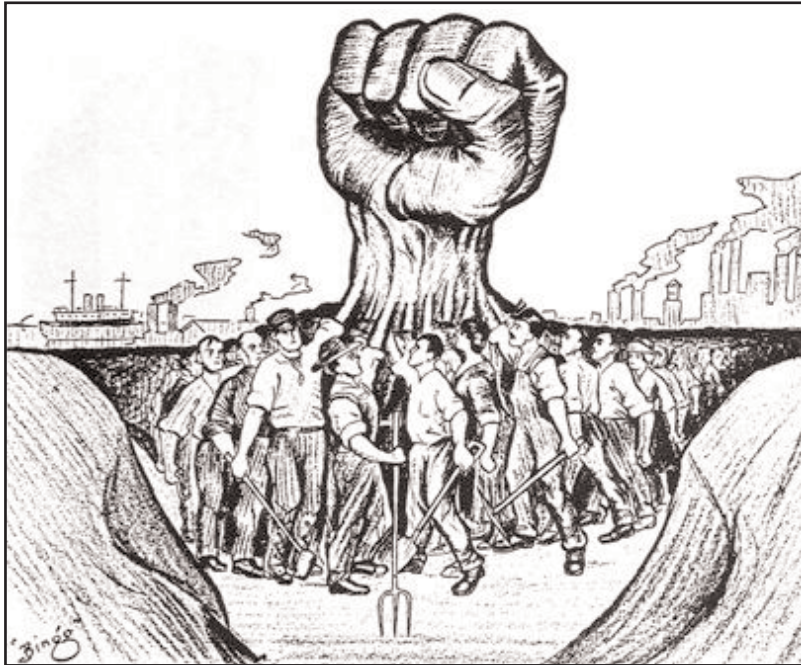
resources, unlike at present where the ability to pay can literally determine if you live or die. Our organic need to live, eat, belong, contribute and create will ensure that the wheels of production will keep on turning. But work activities that are socially damaging or have little or no real value, of which capitalism has many, would be phased out. It can be concluded that this would result in less waste, less bureaucracy and shorter working hours all round. Once our basic needs have been met (ie. food, warmth, shelter, transport, communication, healthcare etc.), the decision to produce luxury items would have to be made collectively and prioritised accordingly. Our tendency to succumb to alienated forms of pleasure such as mass consumerism, designed to keep the capitalist economy afloat at cost to both ourselves and the environment, will vastly diminish. In their place, we will enjoy the contentment associated with genuinely creative, fulfilling self-managed activity.

Direct workers control also makes for ongoing social transformation and enables productive forces to constantly readapt to the changing aspirations and needs of society at large. As Tom Brown argued:

the syndicalist mode of organisation is extremely elastic, therein lies its chief strength, and the regional confederations can be formed, modified, added to or reformed according to local conditions or circumstances.

Workers' control entails decentralisation and rejects the Leninist centrally planned economy with its inbuilt tendency to degenerate into authoritarian state capitalism, which has absolutely nothing to do with socialism. However, this does not mean that larger scale produc-

tive/distributive tasks cannot be carried out or administered efficiently. The worldwide postal and telecommunications systems of the present operate largely without central control. In future, the activities



contributing to such large scale undertakings would be overseen and organised directly by the workers' syndicates delegated by the regional federations to ensuring their smooth running.

So how do we get from A to B? The involvement of workers in revolutionary syndicates within capitalism is intended to accustom them to making decisions (something which hierarchical society robs them of) and also to build confidence, through class struggle, to finally transcend wage labour and assume control of the means of life themselves. By deploying instantly recallable, mandated delegates derived directly from the "shop floor", the horizontal structure of the new social order can be implemented in the present. Moreover, the principle of "building the new society in the shell of the old" must also be applied outside the workplace, for production must not be an

end in itself, but the means to satisfy our wider human needs, wants and desires.

To those who remain unconvinced that such a programme is nothing but utopian wishful thinking, the experience of the Spanish Civil War (1936-9) shows otherwise. In the words of Sam Dolgoff:

...millions of people took large segments of the economy into their own hands, collectivised them, administered them, even abolished money and lived by communistic principles of work and distribution – all of this in the midst of a terrible civil war, yet without producing the chaos or even serious dislocations that were and still are predicted by authoritarian 'radicals'. Indeed in many collectivised areas the efficiency with which enterprise worked by far exceeded that of a comparable one in nationalised or private sectors.

Against a backdrop of military assaults by the fascists and sabotage by Stalinists, against all odds, some 8 million people participated in this revolutionary social project – a project which shows that ideas of workers control and libertarian socialism retain enduring and practical relevance in an age where disillusion with chaotic capitalism and state "socialist" repression reigns supreme.

"Anarchism aims to strip labour of its deadening, dulling aspect, of its gloom and compulsion. It aims to make work an instrument of joy, of strength, of colour of real harmony, so that the poorest sort of man should find in work both recreation and hope."

Emma Goldman

Italy

Fighting Neoliberal Reforms in Education

Since October last year, students from all over Italy have been involved in a wide number of protests against new laws which are aiming to introduce neoliberal reforms in both schools and universities. These new laws, law 133 and law 169, have been put forward by minister of education Mariastella Gelmini who is aiming to balance the government's books through cutting public expenditure in education. The main thrust of the new laws are:

cuts to the public expenditure reserved for universities totalling 1,500,000,000 Euros in five years;

reduction in the number of university teachers (50% in the medium-to-long term) which will also lead to the impossibility of research activities;

the nature of the university will be transformed – universities will lose their public nature which will lead to a situation where they will be divided into first or second class institutions depending on the expenditure power of the respective region; therefore, the opportunity of studying in university will not be ensured any more for low income students;

closure of the SSSIS (School for the Specialization of Teachers) justified only on the basis of saving on public expenditure; along the same lines, primary schools will have just one all-purpose teacher per class with unions expecting this to

cause the loss of 83,000 jobs

There is also a racial element to the new reforms with “bridge classes” being established for the children of immigrants, separate from Italian students. These had previ-

ously been put forward by the Lega Nord, a right wing nationalist party which has also supported the Berlusconi government's recent attacks on the Roma people in Italy. “cuts”; students disrupted events at the Rome Film Festival and banners have displayed with slogans such as: “No more deaths because of public expenditure cuts: shame on you!” which refers to an incident in a high school near Turin when a roof collapsed and killed a 17 year old student.

In light of the economic crisis the movement has now taken up the slogan “We will not pay for this crisis” and have dubbed themselves “the wave”. This is intended to draw comparisons between the government's apparent lack of funds for education and, on the other hand, their willingness to bail out the irresponsible bankers and bureaucrats who are behind the current recession. Along the same lines, December 12th saw a general strike called by the General Confederation of Italian workers (CGIL) in response to

the state of the economy. This saw the closing of postal services nationwide, transport services, airports in several cities and many automobile manufacturers, in some of which strikers were joined by members of other unions. Tens of thousands marched in Rome while 200,000 workers rallied in Bologna, 30,000 in Turin, 50,000 in Milan, 40,000 in Naples, 10,000 in Genoa and many more gathered elsewhere to demand higher wages, better pensions, more labour rights and lower unemployment.



ously been put forward by the Lega Nord, a right wing nationalist party which has also supported the Berlusconi government's recent attacks on the Roma people in Italy.

In response to these attacks, parents, teachers, staff and students from primary school to university level have staged a number of imaginative protests. High schools and universities have been occupied and lessons have been taking place outdoors; the wearing of plasters has become a symbolic sign of the

Greece

After the Tear Gas

The cowardly police murder of 15 year old Alexandros Grigoropoulos in Athens on December 6th was the catalyst for days of rioting, protests and occupations. Although these have now largely died down, the country remains on a knife edge.

Greece has a turbulent history, being ruled between 1967 and 1974 by a US-backed military dictatorship – a regime brought down by a mass rebellion inspired by students at Athens Polytechnic in 1973.

In the run up to the recent shooting, the country was rocked by a series of high-profile scandals implicating the government, church and judiciary. Wanton police brutality and racism are rife;

unemployment levels have soared to 70% among the 18-25s; 1 in 5 Greeks live in poverty, and low pay and high prices run in parallel. To top it all, neo-liberal reforms and austerity measures have compounded a biting recession.

After the rioting subsided, schools, universities and council buildings remained occupied. A general strike took place during the revolt.



Days later, in a move to counteract union bureaucrats distancing their members from the revolt, a group called the General Assembly of Insurgent Workers occupied the offices of the General Confederation of Greek Workers in Athens. There have been moves

to form autonomous assemblies and bridge the gap between disaffected youth and workers. Despite the predictable statist lies about a small band of “anarchist agitators” behind the unrest, even sections of the disillusioned middle class warmed to the cause. TV and radio stations across the country have been occupied in response to media distortions.

With the tear gas having dispersed, it remains to be seen if the simmering discontent can morph into something more productive and tangible, or if the moribund forces of the old left will again recuperate the struggle for their own ends.

Excerpt from General Assembly of Insurgent Workers banner:

From labour “accidents” to murders in cold blood, state and capital kill. No persecution, immediate release of the arrested! GENERAL STRIKE, workers self-organisation will become the bosses’ grave.

Colombia

Repression Continues



The Colombian state’s policy of murdering trade unionists, indigenous people and social movement activists continues unabated in 2009. In London, the Colombian embassy sees frequent pickets protesting against these abuses. The photograph here shows a picket on October 23rd last year, which was specifically in solidarity with sugar cane cutters, striking public sector unions and the indigenous Minga people. The organisers,

Polo Democrático UK and Colombia Solidarity Campaign, were joined by the Solidarity Federation / IWA, the Latin American Workers Association and Hands Off Venezuela. The sugar cane cutters have since won a major victory in December bringing pay increases and improvements in terms and conditions – further info:

<http://upsidedownworld.org/main/content/view/1625/>

Cuba: 50 Years of *Fidelismo*

JANUARY 1ST MARKED THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FLIGHT *of dictator Fulgencio Batista from the Caribbean island of Cuba and the initiation of what is now commonly referred to as a communist regime under the direction of Fidel Castro. Nowadays, of course, the reins have been passed to Raúl, Fidel's younger brother, but the socialist rhetoric has not weakened in the intervening 50 years. Much has been made of the Castro dynasty's persecution of political dissidents, homosexuals and other non-conformists and many readers will find themselves irritated by the inaccuracy of the oft quoted Fidelist "socialist paradise" in press coverage of the regime's jubilee celebrations.*

Of course, that the Castro bothers identify themselves as socialist is sufficient for them to be considered thus – equally by the US State Department (who have enforced a trade embargo against the island almost since Fidel's accession to power) and the international left, for whom Fidel was (and continues to be) a kind of folk hero, a two finger salute to those arrogant *gringos* who sit only 90 miles to the north. Both sides of the divide claim that to support Fidel (whatever *that* means in real terms) is to support socialism and oppose US-led capitalism and, for this reason, the logic follows, it is the duty of every revolutionary to "support" an "anti-imperialist" Cuba despite its obvious shortcomings. However, even a cursory glance at Cuban history demonstrates how Fidel was distant from the social upheaval of 1950s Cuba and was massaged and moulded into the post-revolutionary leader by various American lobbies, mostly due to his avowed allegiance to their interests, an alle-

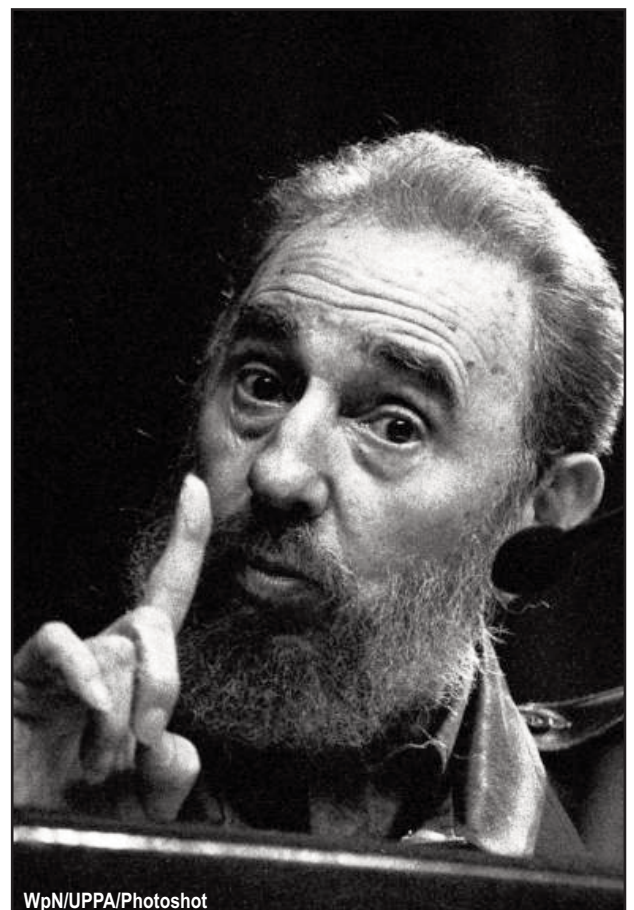
giance that he maintained long enough to eradicate authentic class struggle in Cuba.

spanish-american war

From Columbus' maiden voyage to the Americas until the momentous events of January 1959, Cuba was an occupied territory, subservient to the economic and political dictums of first Spain and then the USA. In 1898, the two imperial powers actually contrived to fight a war on Cuban soil over possession of the territory, resulting in an American victory and the island's integration as an American satellite for the ensuing 60 years and creat-

ing the context for the Castroist anti-imperialist struggle.

This only tells one part of the story though, since Spanish colonial authority on the island had been steadily undermined by civil unrest, originally instigated by black slaves in revolt and then continued by a labour movement initiated by Spanish anarchist exiles. Indeed, such was the influence of anarchist labour organisers in



WpN/UppA/Photoshot

1890s Cuba that José Martí, a journalist and writer turned pro-independence leader, focused many of his efforts in building links with the Cuban anarchist movement in an attempt to convince them that the removal of the Spanish was integral to social revolution.

In the end, Martí's overtures were sufficiently flattering that a large majority of the Cuban anarchist movement abandoned labour struggles in order to join Martí in his uprising of 1895, and militated for workers and peasants to do the same. As the uprising floundered, Martí promptly launched an apparently suicidal battle charge in order to ensure his legacy as Cuba's biggest national hero – even more popular than Fidel. The many ordinary Cubans who died alongside him in his quest for power were not afforded such reverie.

Eventually, the Cuban insurgency garnered US support, leading to the subsequent Spanish-American War of 1898 as previously mentioned, but Cubans were soon to unmask the superficial nature of Martí's promises of post-colonial freedom as victorious American troops occupied the island until 1902 in order to guarantee the smooth transition of Cuban sugar and cigar factories from Spanish to American hands. Cuban workers found themselves with new masters rather than no masters.

class struggle

Meanwhile, also in 1902, anarchist organisers returned to the more fruitful task of class struggle, initiating Cuba's first ever general strike amongst Havana tobacco workers. The strike was crushed by

the incipient Cuban government but only served to inspire 20 years of avid organising and striking, especially amongst workers in the tobacco factories, railways and sugar mills. Central to workers' struggles in this period were the concepts of direct democracy and a



monument to Jose Martí

rejection of electoralism, while anarchist ideas also permeated the creation of the first Cuban union federation, the CNOC, in 1924.

The election of General Gerardo Machado in 1925 coincided with a period of repression against anarchist groupings in the assertive labour movement and also the creation of the Moscow directed Cuban Communist Party. A purge followed, with the General Secretary of the CNOC being thrown into the sea by persons unknown to be eaten by sharks, and by 1931, the growing Communist Party had managed to seize control of the federation and they proceed-

ed to gradually dismantle its anarchist methods. This marked an era of CNOC negotiation with the Machado government while Machado's goons attacked and assassinated striking workers. However, workers' struggles continued and when a series of strikes in 1933 were united by an anarchist led strike committee, it mushroomed out of CNOC control into a national insurrection which eventually toppled the tyrannical Machado.

strike breaking

It is in 1933 that Fulgencio Batista emerges from a military coup as Cuban leader. Batista managed to maintain his hold on power in Cuba right up until 1959, partially via a succession of lackeys he appointed as President who reported to him, and partially via a sort of reformism which relied on mediation between the various factions within Cuban politics. Batista was especially reliant on the support of the Communist Party, granting them control over the new Cuban labour federation, the CTC, and positions within the government in exchange for the Communists' aid in breaking strikes such as the general strike of 1935.

Meanwhile, the reforms of the Cuban Constitution of 1940 encouraged a variety of political parties to oppose Batista and his cronies with more vigour, and in this decade, a young Fidel Castro graduated from the politically volatile Havana University with a law degree. Fidel soon started to climb through the ranks of the main opposition party, the reformist Orthodox Party, which was gaining popularity through the *exposés* of governmental corruption by its leader, Eduardo Chibás, on his weekly radio show. By 1951, it was being tipped to win the next election, but Chibás bizarrely shot and killed himself live on air, leaving the party moribund. Fidel, a *protégé* of Chibás, was present in the studio at

the moment of the shooting and accompanied him to hospital.

Nevertheless, Fidel had earned a reputation for himself as an eloquent nationalist and critic of US intervention in Cuban affairs and planned to stand for parliament in the 1952 elections, only for Batista to stage another coup against the independent minded President Prío Socarras and cancel them immediately beforehand. Fidel deplored his disrespect for parliamentary democracy and led a small band on an adventurist attack on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago, eastern Cuba. The attack was a massive failure and led to 60 insurgent deaths, yet with international fingers being wagged at Batista, he spared both Castro brothers long imprisonment. Once liberated, the putschists fled to Mexico where, influenced by both his brother Raúl and his new acquaintance, Che Guevara, Fidel formed the 26th of July Movement (M26J) with the intention of returning to Cuba and fighting a guerrilla war against Batista.

huge losses

In 1956, the 82 men of various nationalities in the M26J landed on a deserted beach in the east of the island on the now legendary *Granma* boat. Almost immediately, the poorly equipped rebels suffered huge losses following a skirmish with the Cuban military. Batista subsequently declared that Fidel had been killed, yet Fidel, Raúl and Che were amongst the 20 odd survivors who managed to regroup and retreat deep into the thick forests of the Sierra Maestra.

Meanwhile, the last 10 years had seen a succession of attacks on labour organising. The new anarchist labour federation had been crippled by governmental manipulation, and the anti-Bolshevik sentiments of Prío had led to him banning the new incarnation of the Communist Party, the PSP. This

resulted in Communist support for Batista's 1952 coup, although the Party was not rewarded, as Batista sought to appease Washington instead.

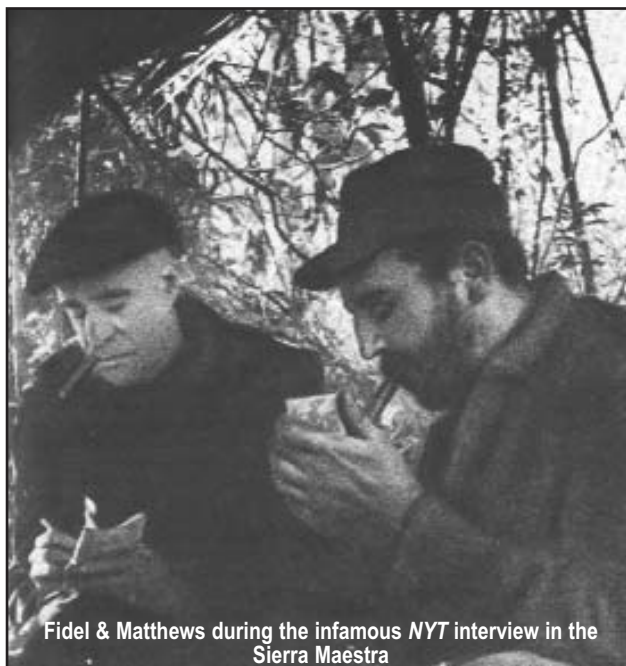
In the aftermath of Fidel's reported death in 1956, an awkward power struggle ensued between the discredited Batista and his various Havana based opponents, including an increasingly assertive movement based out of Havana University. However, in January 1957, through his contacts and supporters from his days as a Havana politician – people such as the President of Bacardí Rum, the former head of the Cuban national bank and a smattering of Catholic leaders – Fidel was able to organise the visit of *New York Times* journalist Herbert Matthews to the Sierra Maestra. Matthews was a famous and trusted liberal media personality in the US, and the scoop of reporting Fidel's continued existence, as well as Matthews' breathless account of illegally evading Batista's security forces *en route*, made front page news three

communist. He told Matthews that he was fighting for "an end to the dictatorship" and a return to the 1940 Constitution, and Matthews surmised that he was "democratic and therefore anti-communist". His obvious charisma was also emphasised in photographs of him in military fatigues, with cigar and beard, an image that has come to represent the uniform of the left wing revolutionary.

fidel's anti-communism

The interview was a huge PR success for both parties. Matthews, now convinced of Fidel's cause, became an unofficial advisor to the US State Department on Cuban issues. Moreover, the interview placed Fidel as the leading figure in the Cuban opposition in American eyes, despite his relative irrelevance as the leader of a band of 30 men in the sierra, lacking equipment, training and support. The influence of American media over Cuba was starkly demonstrated when smuggled copies of the *New York Times* arrived in Havana's

cafés, causing the meteoric rise of Fidel's public profile, and positing him as a viable and safe alternative to Batista that the fractured oppositional forces in Cuba's ruling class could unite behind. For the many malcontents with Batista's corruption and recklessness, Fidel's anti-communist pronouncements amounted to a guarantee of private property and a promise to curb class struggle.



Fidel & Matthews during the infamous *NYT* interview in the Sierra Maestra

days in a row. Fidel used the opportunity to depict himself as a romantic idealist in the vein of Robin Hood, as well as dispelling Batista's slurs against him as a

However, while many figures in the urban bourgeoisie started to cosy up to the M26J, Cuba as a whole started to experience an escalation

in working class resistance to Batista. In 1957 university students launched an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate the President in his offices, resulting in their leader, José Antonio Echeverría, being shot dead by palace guards. Echeverría had been sitting on top of a militant student body but his ill-conceived methods killed 35 students and effectively culled any moves towards organising the students against Batista. From thence onwards, students resorted to isolated bombings and other such terroristic acts intended to catalyse a more general anti-Batista struggle. Indeed, the entire country found itself subject to a succession of bomb attacks which were later accredited to anti-Batista sentiment, most of which had little connection to Fidel and his resurgent guerrilla movement.

sceptical

Fidel, spurred on by his popularity in the US and, by proxy, in Cuba, had seized a section of the Sierra Maestra as his own “autonomous zone” and was rumoured to be planning to seize Santiago, the nearest major city in the Oriente province. Outside of Oriente, however, Cubans were largely sceptical about his intentions. In Escambray province, a separate rebel militia seized control of the key city of Cienfuegos (site of a failed insurrection the previous year), while the continued bomb attacks, which had now become nationwide, flew in the face of Batista’s emphasis on maintaining law and order.

Eventually, Batista fled a very

volatile Havana practically on the stroke of midnight as 1958 became 1959. His probable motivations were a loss of his most loyal advocates in the armed forces due to the destabilising effect of civil unrest, against which he had emerged as a *caudillo* leader a quarter of a century earlier. His last act was to appoint his successor as commander of the armed forces, who promptly surrendered the entire nation to Fidel, who had already claimed the province of Oriente as his own jurisdiction, and told the guerrilla leader that the entire Cuban armed forces were now at his disposal. Subsequently, as the Batista regime’s chosen recipient of their surrender Fidel, the eloquent, romantic Robin Hood that Matthews had sold to the West – the image that the left still paints of him – became the apparent victor, the flipside to the vanquished

Capitol Hill recognised Fidel as the new Cuban head of state.

currying favour

Of course, in reality, even after the removal of Batista, Fidel’s passage to power was more drawn out. Having nominated the liberal minded bourgeois dissident Manuel Urrutia as President of a Provisional Government Fidel, himself Prime Minister, embarked on a tour to New York City, where he further curried favour with the American media – playing basketball in Harlem, eating a hotdog and impressing on then Vice-President Richard Nixon that he was *not* a communist.

However, Fidel, like Batista before him, was also aware of the power of the Cuban Communist Party, as one by one weak, liberal minded ministers in the Provisional Government

resigned over disagreements concerning the implementation of the 1940 Constitution (only imposed in part), multi-party elections (which never happened) and the proliferation of Moscow-backed Communists from the PSP within the Provisional Government, who within months forced Urrutia’s resignation. His replacement was Osvaldo Dorticós Torrado, a wealthy member of the PSP. In 1961, the M26J merged with the PSP and renamed itself the Cuban Communist Party, with Fidel as its General Secretary.



with Che Guevara

Batista that the international media would need. Only seven days after Batista’s military planes left Havana International Airport,

With all its internal wrangling and jockeying for position, the Provisional Government risked los-

ing control of a rapidly advancing social revolution that was occurring in the near power vacuum that was Cuba in the period immediately following the 1959 Revolution, and therefore enacted some reforms in order to head off more serious social changes. Rent and electricity prices were slashed by the nascent ruling caste, who also finally signed into law land reforms promised by Batista 20 years previously. Fidel personally oversaw a succession of modernisation projects, many of which had been started or at least drawn up by

Batista. The much vaunted nationalisations of foreign businesses that took place in 1960 and 1961 were motivated originally by a desire to claim profits for the Cuban state which historically had left the island, but ultimately Fidel *et al* became embroiled in a game of tit for tat with the offended Eisenhower administration, resulting in Fidel's infamous declaration of socialism in 1961 and the subsequent alliance with the USSR.

shift of focus

In the areas in which Fidel's regime did manage to materially benefit the Cuban people, it was mainly due to the replacement of corrupt *batistiano* managers with non-skimming *fidelista* apparatchiks (although that's not to indicate that Fidel's regime has been without corruption), and the piecemeal reforms thrown to the Cuban people in order to gain their favour and stem the tidal wave of families fleeing the country. The revolution did reverberate in Havana's corridors of power in the sense that it instigated a shift in focus in the ruling class' politics. Hegemony took on a

more human face as capital came to be administered by the state. Social programmes were prioritised over free market economics, but the class structure and the relationship of power were not removed, and neither were many *batistiano* stalwarts (at least two Communist Party ministers in Fidel's Provisional Government were actually veterans of the 1952 coup).

Simultaneous to what has been referred to as the second Cuban revolution of 1959-1961, Fidel *et al*



Museum of the Revolution: anti-aircraft gun supposedly used to repel the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion with the official red and black colours of the *Movimiento de 26 de Julio*.

also instigated the hounding of Cuba's notoriously militant and independent workforce as it attempted to assert itself once more in the new political climate. Workers' and peasants' cooperatives had sprung up through the length and breadth of the island – in shoe workshops, on newly created rice fields and in the tobacco factories of Pinar del Río. Yet they all found themselves subsumed under the centralised control of the state run National Institute of Agrarian Reform and its communist bureaucrats, who concerned themselves with enacting further Batista designed reforms. The Cuban union movement, barely recovered from Batista's repression, was "provisionally" hijacked by unelected Communist Party leaders, who promptly purged all independent

voices and eventually banned all non-state affiliated labour organisations and even the right to strike, leading to many voices drawing the comparison with the corporatist devouring of the Italian workers' movement by Mussolini's fascist state almost 40 years earlier.

anarchists imprisoned

Resistance to this counter-revolution led to imprisonment, and many Cuban anarchists did find themselves alongside homosexuals and right wing dissidents on the infamous Cuban labour camps. Fortunately, most militants were able to flee to the United States, where the Cuban Libertarian Movement in Exile was formed, and continues to this day.

Meanwhile, the Castro dynasty appears to have withstood its post-Fidel cosmetic reforms and continues almost unchecked in

Havana. Cubans are forced to resort to the black market for fundamental foodstuffs while the state relies on tourism to resuscitate its starved economy. The Cuban working class, denied even the right of immigration, as well as the legal means with which to defend itself against state capital's attacks, has developed something of a stoic survival instinct and defiant humour, while international handwringers bemoan the state's inhumane treatment of its discontents.

The Cuban experience stands as empirical evidence of the folly of a popular revolution being accredited to one man and his clique, as well as providing a means of distinguishing between the empty promises of anti-imperialism as opposed to genuine class struggle activity.

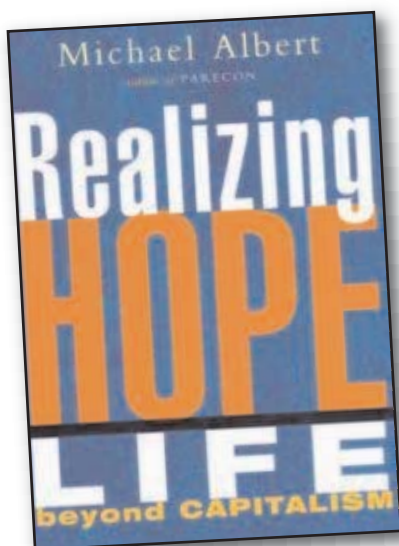
Realizing Hope

Life beyond Capitalism

Michael Albert – Zed Books 2006 – 208 pages –
£14.99 – ISBN: 978-1842777213

Michael Albert is perhaps most renowned for his acclaimed exposition of participatory economics in *Parecon* and *Moving Forward*. In *Realizing Hope*, his most recent work, he transcends the primarily economic framework of participatory economics, and thoughtfully applies the principles of equity, diversity, justice and self-management to wider domains of human organisation, interaction and experience.

This well constructed text critically evaluates the theoretical tenets and practical application of



both marxism and anarchism (and their derivatives) in the contemporary world. The counterproductive and dysfunctional elements of each tradition are convincingly dismissed, while the more useful tendencies are discerned to good effect. The net result forms a fresh, but nevertheless pragmatic vision of a better world.

In sum, this publication deserves to be extensively read, debated and recognised, not only for the invaluable contribution it makes to our understanding of today's society, but also of how a future beyond capitalism can be envisioned, constructed and practically realised.

A Century of Writing on the IWW

Steve Kellerman – Boston IWW 2007 – 38 pages – \$5.00

This bibliography of books on the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) is the most complete work of its sort by a considerable margin. It is divided into four sections – general works (books exclusively about the IWW); biographical works; miscellaneous works with some bearing on the IWW; and writings by IWW members. The appendix on the IWW in fiction is so extensive relative to what has been available in the past as to constitute virtually an original work.



Available for \$5 a copy from: IWW Literature Dept., PO Box 42777, Philadelphia, PA 19101 (\$2 shipping for first item, 50¢ each additional item). For bulk orders contact Boston IWW, PO Box 391724, Cambridge, MA 02139 (50% discount on orders of six or more).

Demanding the Impossible

A History of Anarchism (updated edition)

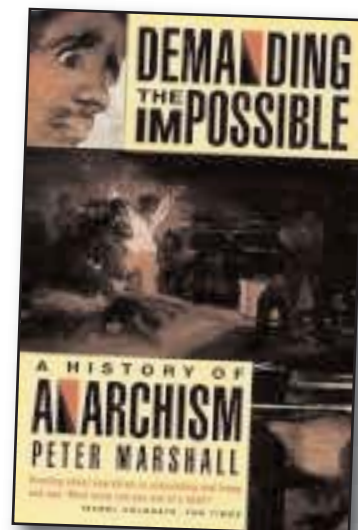
Peter Marshall – Fontana Press 2008 – 784 pages – £14.99 – ISBN: 978-0006862451

Navigating the broad “river of anarchy”, from Taoism to situationism, from Ranters to punk rockers, from individualists to communists, from anarcho-syndicalists to anarcha-feminists, *Demanding the Impossible* is an authoritative and lively study of what is to many a widely misunderstood subject. It explores the key anarchist concepts of freedom and equality, authority and power, society and the state and investigates the successes and failures of anarchist movements throughout the world. It covers not only the classic anarchist thinkers, such as Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Reclus and Emma Goldman, but also other libertarian fig-

ures, such as Nietzsche, Camus, Gandhi, Foucault and Chomsky. No other book on anarchism covers so much so incisively.

In this updated edition, a new epilogue examines the recent developments in theory and practice, including ‘post-anarchism’ and ‘anarcho-primitivism’ as well as the broader contribution to the peace, green and global justice movements.

Described by *the Observer* as “the book Johnny Rotten ought to have read”, this indispensable work fully warrants the critical acclaim it so richly deserves.



Chris Wood – Dulwich, 19th December 2008

CHRIS WOOD IS A RARE *thing indeed, an articulate English folk singer with moving songs and an approach that takes on many of the ills of the modern world from a radical perspective.*

I was fortunate enough to have been given a double album of his two CDs, *The Lark Descending* and *Trespasser*. These are both fine records that examine what it means to be English in a much more sensitive way than the likes of Billy Bragg, mixing contemporary songs with traditional, with a slight emphasis on Wood's home in Kent.

He began his set with a song called "The Grand Correction". Without any fanfare, it starts with the narrator taking some basic steps to dealing with the current economic crisis, such as planting an allotment and eating pigeons. It ends advocating overthrowing the whole

damn system. I knew then it was going to be a great night. He followed with plenty of other gems, such as the stripped down "sexy little folk song" "Cold Haily Rainy Night" that he has performed in an in-yer-face version with The Imagined Village.

Other highlights included "The Cottager's Reply", a Cotswold poem set to music, with updated prices, as the poet tells some rich folk down from London why he won't sell his smallholding. "Walk this World" stakes a claim to music as belonging to those who sing it, and use it to mark the seasons and the changes of our lives. "True North" is about the peasant poet John Clare, who really was a peasant, and was declared insane at the time of the enclosures. As Wood said, "most English audiences know more about the Highland clearances than they do about the theft of our common land". There's a reason why English history is taught as kings, queens and the second world war, and he knows it.

He also sang a song, a truly powerful song, about Jean Charles de Menezes. I twigged about one verse in, but the clues got stronger as the song went on detailing an every day journey that turned into tragedy. When it finished, there was a momentary pause as people took in the strength of the story they'd just been told, its power and tragedy. The hush was broken by tremendous applause, unusual for the first hearing of a song. I think Wood's real strength is the way he allows the songs to speak for themselves and in his clarity of voice.

That's not to say his between song banter isn't good; it's funny and warm and sharply political. It shouldn't need pointing out that our ancestors in these islands would have been burning things down faced with some of the nonsense the ruling class do.

He played his best known song, "One in a Million", a retelling of the traditional folk motif of finding a lost ring inside a fish, set in a chip shop in Whitstable. He ended with his atheist spiritual, "Come Down Jehovah", drawing on sacred music to mark out the sacred in everyday life.

I'm an internationalist, but I'm also English. Wood's work is a reminder that Englishness is a contested idea and that there is a history we can learn from, if only we can find it.

Let's go back to a time when there was no 'England' and there were no 'English'. A class of people came along and decided they wanted to rule over this place and these people but before they could rule over somewhere they needed to give it a name. And before they could govern the people who lived there they had to give them a name too. 'England' and 'the English' were a necessary construction for a governing class and remain so to this day."

(From Chris Wood's website)



Oil Be Damned

why global capital, state power and oil dependence is a recipe for disaster

IF MONEY makes the world go round, oil sure comes a very close second. With surging worldwide demand, upward price trends (despite recent falls) and dwindling reserves concentrated mainly in US-unfriendly states, this priceless fossil fuel has become a major magnet for conflict, instability and power politics. Most recently, this has been borne out by the imperialist forays by Russia into the Caucasus, and by the US in Iraq and Afghanistan. The slavish and unwavering pursuit of oil as the catalyst to economic growth also remains the principal cause of global warming, with energy related emissions set to double by 2050.

Across the industrialised world, oil forms the lifeblood of the economy, not only for the petrol which fuels transport and industry, or the energy that heats our homes, but also for products as diverse as PCs and pesticides. Many scientific observers predict that sometime around 2010 we will hit "peak oil". Peak oil refers to that point when supplies of this finite resource, in the face of growing demand, falls into irreversible decline. It is precisely this fear – and the prospect of wholesale economic collapse – that the oil industry vigorously exploits to realise massive profits and to cajole governments into pursuing their blinkered policies. Sustaining profit levels may also explain the

reluctance of the oil majors to invest heavily in developing renewable energy sources.

artificial scarcity

With the price of a barrel of oil having peaked in the region of \$140 last year, all of us have felt the pinch both at the petrol pump and with our domestic gas bills – the latter having doubled since 2000. But other more complex forces than (oil producing cartel) OPEC are increasingly bearing on global oil prices. True to form, market forces have conspired to massively and artificially inflate prices. The deliberate limitation of refinement capacity, for example, greatly exacerbates scarcity when in reality there is a glut of (unwanted) Iranian crude

Exxon Mobil, BP-TNK and Shell are now the world's second, third and fourth biggest corporations respectively.

Oil, as a commodity, is traded on the global markets by speculators with a vested interest in buying low and selling high, thus pushing up prices which are then duly passed on to the consumer. Estimates suggest that as much as 60% of today's oil prices are down to sheer speculation. As prices are driven ever higher, and demand also increases (as at the present), there will come a time when it becomes too expensive for oil based capitalism to afford. At that point we enter a slump until such time as demand and prices fall significantly.

At the end of 2003, BP estimated there to be reserves of some 1.1 trillion barrels of oil, unevenly distributed around the globe. Of these, Saudi Arabia holds about 25%, and Iran, Iraq, Kuwait and Abu Dhabi nearly 40%. Outside of the Middle East, the 2 largest reserves are in Venezuela (6.8%) and Russia (6%). However, global consumption of oil is also very uneven. The US



oil just waiting to be processed. In the last 30 years, US oil consumption has increased by some 35%, with no new refineries built to reflect this growing demand. This bottleneck has enabled the likes of oil giant Exxon Mobil to return profits of \$14.83 billion in the third quarter of last year alone. Oil means big bucks. In fact,



consumes over 25%, whilst producing only 9.2%, making it the most heavily import dependent nation in the world. The Middle East meanwhile, consumes 5.9%, while the Asia-Pacific nations (Australia, China, India and Japan) import the greatest percentage of their 28.8% share of global oil consumption.

a bizarre alliance?

The US's dependence is of particular significance here, spawning some seemingly bizarre alliances. Of these, the House of Saud and House of Bush cabal may seem the most odd. Most of the 9/11 hijackers originated from Saudi Arabia, a nation which remains a hotbed of anti-western Islamic fundamentalism and maintains a hard-line in Sharia law. With Saudi's 4,000 princes living lives of (US funded) unparalleled luxury, their impoverished people endure a torturous, inhumane justice system condemned by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch alike. Iraq is another case in point. When outgoing US Vice-President Dick Cheney was CEO of oil company Halliburton, the Chicago Tribune reported that he did almost \$24 billion in business with Saddam Hussein. In September this year, a former colleague of Cheney's pleaded guilty to funnelling millions of dollars in bribes to secure lucrative oil contracts in Nigeria for

Halliburton. That global capital acts without morals should come as no surprise, as should not the securing of the Iraqi oilfields as the first action after the 2003 invasion. With US foreign policy indelibly focussed on the Middle East, the supply and control of oil has emerged as the prime fuel not only for the economy, but also for war and terrorism.

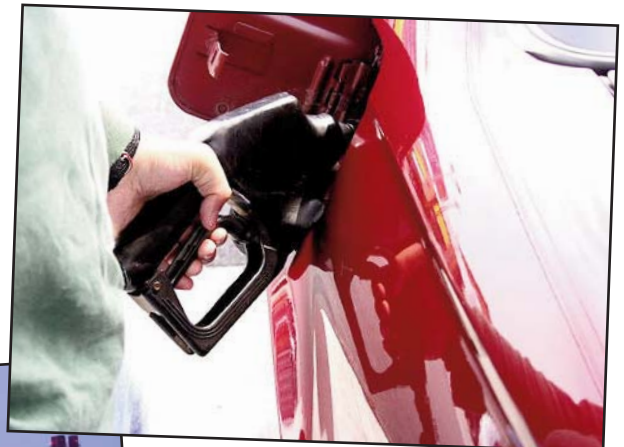
Oil transportation is a precarious task. The impact of a major terrorist attack on one of the global oil shipping routes (such as the Gulf of Aden, the Strait of Hormuz or Strait of Malacca), or on a refining facility like Abqaiq in Saudi Arabia, was simulated in 2005 by oil industry and defence experts. Their conclusions, based on predicted disruption to the world economy, painted a doomsday scenario of epic proportions. In 2005 a US State sub-

The true cost of petroleum is inherently too expensive to sustain. From the social, political and human costs of finding cheap labour and land, to the environmental costs of extracting and burning a non-renewable, toxic fuel, and the destruction caused by war and militarism – the price we pay for an economy saturated with oil is more than any of us can afford.

www.ecologycenter.org

er trigger prompting major price hikes.

The realisation of the EU's dependence on Russian oil and gas explains Gordon Brown's current



enthusiasm for a new Caspian Sea gas pipeline to effectively circumvent the Kremlin's ability to hold Britain to energy ransom. The Caspian region is riven with separatist conflicts, and the need to control import routes via Chechnya explains Russia's unwillingness to grant independence to the Chechen state. The events in Georgia last August are also indicative of Russia's desire to preserve its interests. Amidst the howls of indignation from the West, the siting of US military hardware in Poland and the proposed assimilation of Georgia into NATO may yet prompt the re-emergence of a new Cold War. Thinking ahead, Russia has claimed parts of the Arctic, and American Senators are also eyeing drilling in the region as a means to fashion an escape from the impend-

committee reported that sabotage of Iraqi oil pipelines had cost some \$10 billion in lost revenues, despite protection being a high priority. The mere suggestion of supply disruption – whether caused by accident, war or terrorism – is, of course, another

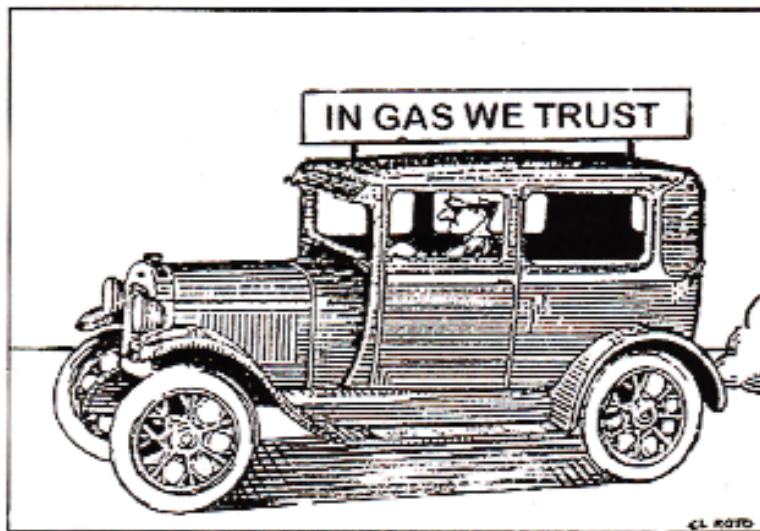
ing energy “crisis”. As an up and coming oil dependent superpower China will also be a major player in the grand scheme of things.

disastrous direction

On the subject of China, the dramatic ecological toll inflicted by the global oil curse cannot be underestimated. China is rich in coal, but poor in oil. Craving a domestic oil source to sustain economic growth, China has built a huge refinery capable of converting coal into synthetic oil. The “tar sands” in Alberta, Canada, form another potential source of oil. But converting tar sands and coal into something resembling useful oil is massively polluting – far more so than conventional refining. It is of tremendous irony that melting glaciers in the likes of Alaska and Greenland – caused primarily by the burning of fossil fuels – have opened up previously inaccessible oil fields. While these new sources may last well into the future, this ruinous trend leads in only one direction. A global temperature rise of at least 3°C by 2050, forecast by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, will cause drought, famine, extreme weather and flooding, leading to millions of climate refugees and inevitable territorial conflicts. The refining of tar sands and coal, as substitutes for scarcer, less accessible forms of oil, will only hasten this process.

But the legacy of oil addiction does not end there. In countries like Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea, oil wealth and corporate intervention contrive to shore up corrupt, despotic regimes. In turn, this delivers only internal repression, decreased self-sufficiency and abject poverty for the vast majority. In 1995 Ken Saro-Wiwa and 8 other Ogoni people were framed and executed by the Nigerian state for fighting the devastation of their homeland by

oil extraction. Here, in the Niger delta, it is well documented that the oil industry has extensively degraded the eco-system and severely contaminated water supplies. Tribal people in the Amazon are currently struggling against a Peruvian government decree opening up their lands for oil and gas extraction. Moreover, from the Arctic to the Amazon, the corporate quest for black gold is systematically destroying rapidly diminishing natural wildernesses.



The oil industry is also notorious for its appalling treatment of workers, victimisation and failure to recognise unions. Yet it is those very workers and their communities that hold the key to reversing the apparently suicidal road to ruin paved by politicians and oil barons.

beyond big business

While many environmentalists overlook the pivotal role played by workers in making the change to a world based on greener, renewable alternatives to oil, groups such as “Just Transition” in the US form an exciting and necessary development. Amidst calls for action on climate change – a call yet to be fully embraced by British unions – the movement seeks to unite workers and communities affected by oil exploitation. The danger, of course, is that this may become just another watered down, reformist attempt to petition those in power when, in

truth, it is the combined forces of big business and the state which have led us into this horrific quagmire. Only by looking beyond these afflicted powers, can we realistically hope to get ourselves out of this mess. Critical to our struggle is raising awareness and promoting solidarity and constructive social action between workers, local communities, and environmentalists, in other words unity in struggle against our common enemies.

Ultimately, the problems we all face – from global warming, to war, to fuel poverty – are caused by capitalism. Creating a system of self-managed production by workers, for workers which is organised federally and is fully accountable to the communities it serves, is an essential starting point in deconstructing the profit driven, oil obsessed economy. But since, in the words of one industry expert, “it is hardly conceivable that the world could function without oil”, it would be naive to suggest this transformation will be a simple overnight process. However, in the face of the evidence, the urgency for change cannot be underestimated. The requirement for a coordinated global transition to clean, renewable energy sources and the phasing out of oil dependence is clear. Far reaching energy efficiency measures and lower consumption lifestyles are also vital. Such moves, and the replacement of production for profit by production for need, will negate the capacity for conflict and environmental damage, and also ensure that we can all enjoy equitable access to sustainable energy supplies on an indefinite basis.

Without prompt and radical action, however, our future and that of our children continues to look uncertain to say the least.

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Education Workers' Network: c/o News From Nowhere, 96 Bold Street, 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: freesheet from West Yorkshire SolFed.

Western Approaches: freesheet from South West SolFed.

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

'A History of Anarcho-Syndicalism': 24 pamphlets downloadable free from www.solfed.org.uk.

SolFed Industrial Strategy / The Stuff Your Boss Does Not Want You To Know: leaflets available online at www.solfed.org.uk; bundles from the SolFed national contact point for free/donation.

Manchester SolFed Public Meetings: 7.30pm every 2nd Tuesday of the month, Town Hall Tavern, Tib Lane, off Cross Street, Manchester.

February 10th: Nationalisation vs. Socialisation

March 10th: Social Movements (provisional)

April 14th: Economic Crisis (provisional)

| 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.

Kate Sharpley Library: full catalogue - BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX; www.katesharpleylibrary.net.

www.libcom.org: online news and resources

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 St, London, E1 7QX; www.afed.org.uk.

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