

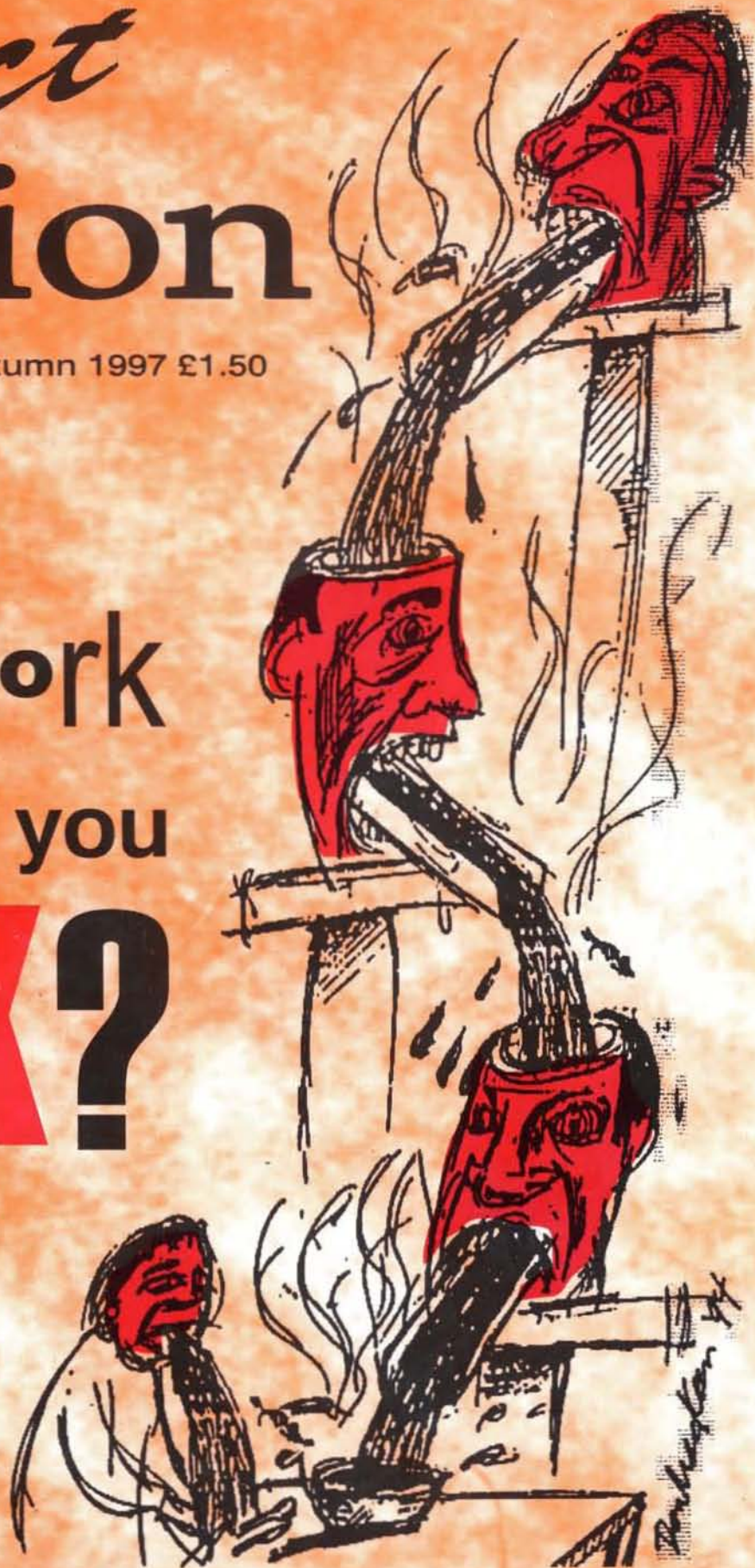
Direct Action

No.4 autumn 1997 £1.50

does Work
MAKE you
SICK?

and...

**consenting adolescents
what fair go?
power trips & dress codes**



editorial

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Work to Live, what sort of a theme is that? Sounds like a sports gear ad. Work kills people anyway. I don't like dying.

Work is not a groovy topic. The traditional workplace is gone. We don't have massive factories and offices with loads of people sitting/standing about being busy all day 5 days a week. No, now it's a question of doing bits here and there to get by, earn a crust. Loads of people either do not earn money or have to get money from wherever they can to survive. Loads of people do work - but do not feel like they have a secure job. Loads of people are part-time, temporary, have stretches of varying lengths being humiliated on JSA. Loads of people get cash where they can and need to and borrow or live off others when they can't get enough. I am loads of people. Almost everyone is loads of people.

Work is not about getting money and it is not (only) about a 9-5 job. It is what we do to make the rest of our life good. By definition, it is obligatory. Washing up is housework; that's work. Moonlighting is work. Signing on involves work. Just about everyone has to work to live. The rest are the 'someones' - who have so much money they can give some to others to make them do all their work for them. They don't look after themselves or pull their weight, and they don't seem to care. The vast majority of us have to work to live; roof over the head, food and drink, warmth and comfort. If we don't, we have to get our fellow workers to do it for us somehow. Or die.

Lots of us work and die, instead of working to live. It's not a choice when you have a dangerous place to work and no other way of getting money. It's not a choice when people who give you money make you work so hard for it you have no real life outside of work. It's not a choice when your work makes you feel knackered, ill, depressed, and sick of life. It's not a choice when you can't get enough work or money to live the life you want and deserve. Who decides what you deserve and what choice (or not) you have?



No-one, except the 'someones' with money, and those who have it. So the answer is to get rid of money - or rather, replace the system we live in, which revolves around money.

Not 'working' at all means you have to rip off those who do, to find subsistence 'for free' somewhere (always made by fellow workers). Working for a wage means someone owns your labour and profits from it. Working for yourself is the only way. But not like the grocer's daughter means it. That's self employment - selling your own labour at a profit. Working for yourself means making your own subsistence, it means building the means to live with others (which let's face it, with 12 billion people around, it's the only way), it means building co-operation amongst ourselves. It means organising with each other and against the 'someones' who own and control us and our planet - in our workplaces - the places where we are being ripped off. It means stopping the 'someones' using games to make us see enemies among us, when they are the only enemy.

Competition means working against each other; you have to put loads more effort in than if you work together.

Competition means worse work, lower wages, more danger, more hours for you. Much of which benefits the 'someones'. Competition means working unnecessarily - less life and more death.

Why are we working harder and getting less? Because 'someones' are taking more. Working to live means getting more out of life by organising work better and getting rid of the 'someone' element. It means starting to build a system where the whole reason we work is to live, not to serve until death. It means changing the way we think about and do work. Work to live means working for real change starting now. And never stopping. Forever looking for better ways of working so we work less and get more life. Now, that is being human. Just do it! as they would say.

Get in touch

Readers' views are welcome. Whether opinions, additional information or letters responding to articles or raising issues of interest, we want to hear from you. If you have questions for the DA Collective, or would like to know more about us or the Solidarity Federation, drop us a line. Do not expect high pressure sales, paper-selling requests or demands for this or that, do expect a reasonably prompt reply.

Notes for Contributors

If you would like to contribute more than brief opinions, we request you send articles (between 500 and 1500 words if possible) in hardcopy and on disk in either Word for Windows PC version not greater than 7 or ASCII format. Contact us for electronic mail addresses or alternative formats. While unsolicited articles are welcome, they can only be returned if an SAE is enclosed.

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Consenting adolescents



Is a change in the age of consent for same-sex relationships a step forward or simply a failure to deal with the problem?

By now most people who might have expected some change from the Blair Presidency will have been underwhelmed. If you're Welsh or Scottish you've got plenty to argue about, and if you're under 25 you're probably feeling persecuted. If you're a black victim of police brutality or indifference you may be feeling a mixture of anger and cautious hope. You're most likely to feel optimistic, with reservations, if you're gay.

While long overdue legal reform to end discriminatory treatment of same sex desire and relationships is not yet on the agenda, the need for it has been recognised. This goes for inheritance and partnership rights for same-sex couples in property and employment law. Where change is most likely in the foreseeable future, is in the discriminatory Age of Consent for sex between males of 18, and of 16 for everyone else. This seems likely to be achieved by an amendment to the proposed Criminal Justice Bill, on which a free vote will be taken, with the majority of Labour MP's now in favour of equality.

dynamics of child sexual abuse

Since we are opposed to the state and its laws, for anarchists this raises two issues. The first is how to take the homophobia out of questions of adolescent sexuality and same-sex sexual relationships. The second

is how best to ensure that adolescents are not abused by those taking advantage of their inexperience. It is important to separate the questions of adolescent sexuality from the issue of child sexual abuse, and to address both clearly. It is also crucial to examine critically the relationship between the Age of Consent and these issues. Before addressing issues around adolescent sexuality, we must briefly examine the sexual abuse of children. The dominant culture assumes that male homosexuality and child sexual abuse are synonymous. I intend to discuss adolescent sexuality, not that of pre-pubescent children. However, it is important to isolate child sexual abuse as an issue and take it out of the Age of Consent equation.

to put it bluntly, little girls are raped by their fathers, step-fathers, uncles and brothers

Anarcho-syndicalists oppose all abusive relationships, which are based on the establishment and exploitation of power relations. The key is to take the power out of our relationships. Statistics indicate that 93% of cases of child sexual abuse are carried out by men against girls, and that 87% of these cases happen in a family context. The power dynamics in the sexual abuse of children are predominantly rooted in the power of men over women, and in the property relationship between parents or other adult relatives and children.

To put it bluntly, little girls are raped by their fathers, step-fathers, uncles and brothers. Child sexual abuse gangs exist, but they are the highly publicised minority of cases. The purpose of the

disproportionate media coverage of these gangs is to establish an identity between child sexual abuse and male-male sexual contact, and to cover up for the role played by the nuclear family in giving abusers access to and power over their victims.

adolescent sexuality, adult "orientation"

The reason for the disparity in Ages of Consent at present is the persistent, unacknowledged, Freudian belief that everyone is originally bisexual, and that to ensure that as few people as possible take the "wrong course" and act on same sex desires, adolescents have to be conditioned into exclusive heterosexuality. The presumption of a binary gender system where the only stable relationship can be between one man and one woman for life is unchallenged.

The more liberal version of this argument is that a fixed, "damaged" minority of possibly 10% (after Kinsey) really is lesbian or gay, but that every opportunity should be tried to find out if they can't lead a heterosexual life before society gives them up to Sodom. And of course no-one is bisexual, that's only an immature phase. In order to avoid the implication of "choice", or sin, the idea that sexual orientation is genetic, and pre-destined at birth, has gained increasing popularity among "assimilationist" lesbians, gay men,

and their allies. The viewpoint of an adolescent "crossroads" ignores the testimony of lesbians and gay men themselves, who usually have had some same sex desire since childhood. It also completely erases the possibility that a bisexual life history is perfectly valid as an expression of your sexual and emotional relationships. In fact it is the pressure to choose, and the discrimination between same-sex (bad) and other sex (good) desires and relationships that causes any confusion bisexual people experience.

It causes untold misery for lesbian, gay and bisexual people, and their sex partners, to deny the validity of any life choice other than exclusive heterosexuality. The first thing that an Age of Consent does, and this applies to any form of sex which is not simply about reaching childbirth, is to deny proper sex education to anyone below it. So you get very little education on pleasure, emotions, relationships, etc.; and are left with the strong impression that lifelong monogamy with a view to childbirth is the only valid outcome, and that anything else means you're defective. Unless your parents are able and willing to tackle this, you're lost. While the concept of "underage" sex continues to exist it is criminalised. Meanwhile, proper sex education when young people need it - before they are likely to become sexually active - is regarded as incitement, and "corrupting our kids".

proper sex education

The liberal imagination might stretch to teaching girls how to avoid becoming pregnant before they have sex with boys, but not to teaching all kids (some of whom are bound to be gay or bi) about how to safely explore their sexuality, before the gay teenagers start cruising and cottaging. The problem even the most liberal opinion has is that if you empower young people to say "no!" to sex, you are giving them the knowledge and confidence to make a choice - which can also mean saying "yes!". If a gay or lesbian teenager has no knowledge or information on how to find someone to experiment with safely, it is far more likely that in secrecy and ignorance (s)he may end up experimenting with an abuser. No Age of Consent can protect adolescents from abuse by older people when they start to experiment sexually.

Nor can it stop abuse once they are older. Consent for girls and young gay and bi men is assumed once they are over the Age of Consent and become sexually active. Child sexual abuse should not be separated from the sexual abuse and rape of adolescent and adult people. We have a culture that assumes anyone who is sexually active, or "provocatively" dressed, consents to sex with the men who rape them.

"no means no!"

Accepting that "no means no!", even in a sexualised context, is necessary to tackle sexual abuse, regardless of the age of the abused. An Age of Consent clearly denies the possibility of consent if one party is younger than a certain age. But at the same time it denies the reality of abuse. It denies that consent can be withheld as much as it denies that it can be given. Ultimately it denies adolescent sexuality, and leaves adolescents vulnerable to abuse by their peers as well as by older people,

because of the potential criminality of their situation. This particularly applies to those that modern society feminises - teenage girls, and boys who have sex with boys or men.

For a woman to be sexually active is still regarded as incitement to rape by many, and gay men are regarded as sexually indiscriminate, and if you're bi, forget it. *Lesbians are regarded as hypersensual, and therefore asking for "a good fuck" even more than their heterosexual sisters - to show them what they're missing.* And of course they are really bisexual, because all women must be available to men (sic).

So as anarchists we must oppose the Age of Consent, not as a knee-jerk reaction to the interference of the state in our sex lives, but because it encourages the abuse of adolescents, and does nothing to stop the sexual abuse of children. What is needed to protect young people against abuse is proper sex education which is not limited to biology and heterosexual monogamy, and a supportive environment which does not link sexual experimentation to the fear of state persecution. Adolescents need to

Anarchism, Ideology and Same Sex Desire.

A pamphlet about 1930's Spain, anarchosyndicalism, and same sex debate.

Send £1 to: Kate Sharpley Library, BM Hurricane, London, WC1 3XX.

know what they are doing, what the consequences and alternatives are, and that there is help, not condemnation, available if they get into trouble or are abused. This is inextricably linked to a cultural revolution in which the reality of human sexuality is addressed, including same-sex desires, non-monogamy over the life-span, and the possibility of changes in sexuality over the life-span. Dealing with such issues is an integral part of any social revolution. Anarcho-syndicalists seek to build the basis of a new society - not just its organisational culture - within the shell of the old. This goes hand in hand with the project of eroding sexism, heterosexism and the binary gender system, which deny our humanity as individuals. This means overturning the current view that human characteristics are narrowly ascribed - some to men, others to women, the implication being that we need to marry to be fully human in society's eyes.

towards a flesh revolution

Eroding the binary gender system also involves eroding the private, nuclear family. A more open, extended family based on ties of friendship as well as blood and property is a prerequisite for tackling most sexual abuse of children, which takes place within the nuclear family. Combined with a sex-positive culture it can also combat gangs of abusers, by removing the ignorance, secrecy and fear they need to operate. Then the justification for the Age of Consent will disappear.

By establishing informed consent as a human value, we can change the culture of rape and sexual abuse which polices heterosexual women's as well as lesbian, gay and bi people's sexual behaviour. By this means we will be able to realise our full potential as individuals.

A Friend of Dorothy. 

an Age of Consent.. denies that consent can be withheld as much as it denies that it can be given



Does work make you SICK?

Then let's change the way we work.

The number of people killed at work has risen by almost 20% over the past year, according to Health and Safety Executive figures. A similar pattern emerges in the new serious accident statistics, with a rise in the rate of major injuries in every industrial sector, and the overall figure up by well over 60% to 28,040. Figures show a disproportionate increase in the number of self-employed fatalities, reflecting the rise in numbers of vulnerable casual or contract workers.

It is estimated that a third of all ill-health is due to work. Ill-health is increasing with new technology, new chemicals and a general worsening in working conditions. Health and safety can no longer be just seen as the domain of the industrial worker. The new type of worker now sits at a computer or answers the telephone all day, perhaps in the same space as hundreds

of others. The health problems we face - limb disorder, eye strain, lack of fresh air, lack of space, lack of breaks - may appear different from traditional health and safety concerns but many are really no different and no less damaging than those that workers in sweatshops have been facing since the beginning of the 19th century.

Taking up health and safety issues at work can be a daunting prospect. The whole area is a confusing mass of regulations, procedures and law. But health and safety remains a major issue for many of us, and things are getting worse in many workplaces. Below, we look at just a few of the health and safety problems you might come up against. We focus on the problems that modern workforces suffer, now that service, care and office-based industries have increased. We also look at how you can use the law to help you and suggest where you might go to for information. Most importantly, we also look at how you can start getting things changed with health and safety, with an eye to the fact that ultimately the only true healthy and safe workplace can be one which us the workers run ourselves.

health hazards

Health hazards are often not immediately obvious and some are virtually invisible. Take a typical office work example. Bad design and poor maintenance in modern sealed workplaces with their artificial environments can be responsible for allergies, exhaustion, depression, asthma and other respiratory illness, eye problems and infections such as humidifier fever. Keyboard workers are suffering an epidemic in Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI),

a term grouping together a number of Upper Limb Disorders. It currently affects 200,000 workers a year in Britain, many of whom are in constant pain and disabled,

sometimes permanently. RSI also affects manual workers in all kinds of repetitive jobs - food, electronics, clothing, cars, packing, care work, cleaning, furniture and many other industries. Many workers realise the danger too late, and become disabled. Photocopiers and laser printers give off Ozone which, can cause health problems such as eye, nose and throat

irritation, dermatitis, headaches, premature ageing and possible reproductive and cancer hazards. The ever increasing use of computers also subjects up to 10 million UK workers to a range of possible hazards - eyestrain, RSI, skin problems, miscarriages, stressful work organisation.

Occupational Stress in areas such as office work, social work, care work, nursing education etc. is now widespread and growing, not least because of increasing casualisation of work in these areas, and the added pressures this brings. Staffing cuts, increased workload, long hours of work, the pressure of caring for or supporting increasingly poor and deprived people with very few resources or service; all lead to stress both in and out of work. As cuts bite, and new, more hierarchical systems are imposed in workplaces, the tendency for managers to harass and bully workers into increasing their workload becomes greater. Workplace bullying (99% of the time by managers) has also become a recognised workplace problem. All leads to more stress, which can result in stomach and heart disease and a variety of psychological illnesses. It is related to increased accident rates, relationship problems, absenteeism and increased drug and alcohol use. The most extreme effect of stress is sudden death, i.e. people working themselves to death.

These health problems, many of which have long been documented, are now widely recognised as legitimate health and safety concerns. This is a start, but some employers are still denying even the existence of major work-related health problems. As if to compound the conspiracy, the Government has been covering up the problem, if the Health Department's suppression of a 1995 report it had commissioned from Manchester University is anything to go by. The findings included the warning that people who work a 48 hour week double their chance of heart attack. The Government at the time was contesting in the European court the Directive of an imposed maximum 48-hour week, on the grounds that it was nothing to do with health and safety. Unfortunately, the level of sanctions against employers for injury remains pitiful. Out of the 29,000 injuries and over 3,000 deaths of workers in 1993-4, there were only 1,507 convictions under Health and Safety law and the average penalty was only £3,061. And getting convictions for



OXIDISING



CORROSIVE



DANGEROUS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT



EXPLOSIVE



(VERY) TOXIC



HARMFUL/IRRITANT

non-accident health effects is even more difficult; health risks take time to become evident, as the effects are usually cumulative and delayed. The effects are chronic rather than acute. These problems are notoriously prone to abuse by bosses. Increasingly, workers are finding themselves sacked after being off due to a work-related health problem.

the law

To get to grips with Health and Safety you need to have some knowledge of what the law says and how it can affect you. It's a bit of a minefield, and the best up-to-date and jargon-free interpretation is the Labour Research Department (LRD - see information at the end of this article). But it is also important to keep track of new directives, regulations and legislation, which are now coming in, either directly or indirectly, from the European Parliament.

A good basic starting point is Common Law which includes the contract of employment, which imposes duties on management and worker. Management has a "duty of care" to workers, and may be sued if they neglect this (see inset). TUC unions put large resources into compensation claims for breach of this contract. Statute law applies to specific points of health which have been introduced since the 1840's, beginning with the Factory Acts, leading up to the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSW Act). The latter is a major Act, and is summarised in the LRD pamphlet, Health and Safety Law. This Act sets out the broad general duty on employers to maintain places of work so they are safe and without risks to health. European Directives come from the 1987 Single European Act (SEA) which laid down general duties and minimum standards. In Britain, this has resulted in the Management and Safety at Work Regulations, 1992 (Management Regs). These make it much clearer what employers must do to comply with their duties set out in the HSW Act. The central feature is risk assessment, which is the procedure a boss needs to follow to decide what health and safety measures are suitable and sufficient. However, there is a potential problem here for the workforce. To win compensation it has to be proved that management didn't follow their own procedures. If management have conducted a token risk assessment, and informed workers of the hazards, they can

sit back with the secure knowledge that whatever happens to workers in the future, they have done their duty under the law, and so probably can't be touched. Another potential problem with the SEA is the appointment of Employee Health and Safety Representatives. Where there is no recognised trade union, "employee representation" is invariably organised by management, thus by-passing the involvement of workers, in much the same way as European works councils do.

getting started

Raising Health and Safety as a long-term workplace issue cannot be done alone. Like

any workplace issue, a strong, organised workforce who are prepared to take action to force management to act is essential. Health and safety has normally most effectively been dealt with within union structures, so that all workers have the information they need and can act on it collectively as they see fit. Without union organisation, health and safety is better used as part of a general strategy of building organisation and confidence. Either way, it is an issue that can provide a focus around which a group of workers can act together and rapidly gain some useful collective confidence.

unionised workplace

If you are in a recognised union, in theory, you have a number of clear rights. Reality is often different. As with any other workplace issue, organisational strength is a basic requirement both to prevent victimisation of reps and to push management to make improvements over specific issues. Ideally, reps should get an

office, access to telephone and fax, time off with pay to attend union training, and use of a suitable room for meeting with and reporting back to members.

no union, or as good as

There are more and more non-unionised, casual workforces where even minimum standards of health and safety are ignored by management. This makes it tough to start, but not impossible; there can even be advantages in starting from scratch. If there are no clear management-run structures to deal with health and safety, this makes things a lot clearer. And if workers recognise that they are the ones who can identify problems and can force change, then confidence can be gathered around the health and safety issue. Whether you are in a recognised union or not, the first step for dealing with a health and safety issue is to establish what the problem is and how it is affecting workers. This can be done through questionnaire, inspection, or "unofficial" documentation by means of a diary or record book. You can get model questionnaires or suggested checklists for inspections from most unions, or devise your own. An inspection can consist of simply taking statements from each worker about a particular problem, and how it is affecting them.

courses

The next step is to find out what your boss should be doing about it. The best way to acquaint yourself with the main hazards and issues is to get on a trade union health and safety course. Most unions run these, although some are using management courses. Nevertheless, it is a good way to meet other stewards or union reps, and find out where you can get information. If you are in a union, you can get a list of courses from your branch office, and they will give you advice on the best way of approaching your employer to have time off (you should get paid for this). Otherwise, the LRD can help. The next step is to meet as a group.

cutting through the jargon

Employers, Government and bodies like the HSE traditionally try to diffuse health and



Main employer requirements of the Management of Safety at Work regulations (1992):

1. Carry out risk assessments
2. Make & record arrangements for implementing the health and safety measures in the risk assessment
3. Appoint competent people to help in implementation
4. Set up emergency procedures
5. Provide good information and adequate training, and;
6. Cooperate and coordinate health and safety with other employers sharing the same workplace

work to live: health and safety

safety issues into "non-conflict" issues around training, perpetrating the "careless worker" myth - that if only workers would be more careful there would not be as many accidents. And they will try and individualise problems, putting the onus on the workers to change rather than doing anything about the workplace. For instance, workers have witnessed and documented the epidemic in occupational stress of the past few years. The Labour Research Department and the public service workers' union, UNISON, have published a booklet on Stress. Even the HSE have brought out a glossy booklet on the subject. The main response of the HSE and employers to the issue has been to recommend stress management measures such as counselling, thus making it the individual workers' responsibility, and taking the onus of the problem away from the workplace itself. If workers are suffering stress what needs to be done collectively to change the workplace? The answer is to do with conditions of work.

Another example is management attitudes to hazardous substances, as covered by The Control of Hazardous Substances to Health (COSHH) Regulations, 1989. Employers must carry out a COSHH assessment by a trained and "competent person" (the HSE have produced guidance on this). To control or prevent exposure to hazardous chemicals employers must work through a hierarchy of measures:

1. Elimination of the hazard;
2. Substitution with a less hazardous substance;
3. Control measures such as exhaust ventilation, and;
4. protective clothing.

To eliminate the risk of a hazardous substance it must be got rid of. As the HSE say, "in all cases prevention or adequate control of exposure should be achieved by means other than personal protective clothing, so far as is reasonably practicable". Like most other situations, how "practical" this is depends on how much money your boss will spend on safety. In reality (for instance with asbestos), employers, instead of getting rid of the dangerous substance altogether, will try to control it or make



workers use protective equipment, which can often be flawed anyway. Health and safety is about making the workplace fit for the worker, not vice versa.

reporting the boss

The main advantage of contacting the authorities is that they have the power to serve an employer with a Prohibition or Improvement Notice. But remember, their bark is often worse than their bite. Cuts mean the HSE rarely have time to carry out inspections. And fines and claims for damages - although possible - are few and far between. It is estimated that at least 70% of workplace injuries are caused by employers' negligence, but only around 5% actually get compensation. Still, if you have a good case and plenty of persistence, it is worth contacting HSE and/or the local authority Environmental Health Department with any uncovered problems which aren't being dealt with by management.

it is estimated that at least 70% of workplace injuries are caused by employers' negligence, but only around 5% actually get compensation

changing the way we work

We need to forget the stuffy and bureaucratic image of health and safety. The result of the erosion of working conditions and training means we take more risks and work more dangerously - the statistics speak for themselves. We don't have anyone else who we can trust to deal with the issue, but ourselves. This may just seem like fine words, but once you start looking critically at your own workplace, and how it could be changed to suit workers, the view of the self-management process snowballs. It becomes clear that if we could control our workplaces ourselves, and if we were running them for people's needs, then they would look very different. If we can enforce a safe working environment we can then go on to question the right of employers to profit

from our labour in the first place. A small victory over health and safety breeds a bit more confidence to go further and change a bit more, and a bit more... The laws may not be made for us, by and large, but, in conjunction with collective action, we can use them to our advantage.

The Solidarity Federation does action in an area that has become the domain of TUC bureaucrats who sit on management safety committees but change nothing while thousands of workers are killed. The enforcement of safety standards through direct action in the workplace can turn this horrific situation around. And at the same time, we are on the way to fundamentally changing the way we work forever.

information

Labour Research Department:

78 Blackfriars Road, London, SE1 8HF.
Tel: 0171 928 3649 Highly recommended. They produce a monthly magazine and regular pamphlets on workplace issues, and have an enquiry service for affiliates.

Health and Safety Executive

HSE Library, 2 Southward Bridge Road, SE1. Government funded body, mainly geared towards employers. Free leaflet on basic workplace health and safety rights for employees (HSE Books, Tel: 01787 881165)

HSE Information Centre

Broad Lane, Sheffield, Tel 0114 289 2345.
free leaflet line: 0114 289 2346. For technical knowledge of equipment, chemicals etc.

London Hazards Centre

Interchange Studios, Dalby St, London NW5 3NQ. Tel 0171 267 3387 Publishes the Daily Hazard, and provides hazards info. to unions and affiliates.

TUC Publications Department,

Congress House, Great Russell Street, London, WC1B 3LS Tel: 0171 636 4030. Wide range of health and safety publications.

Building Worker Group

c/o Colin Roach Centre 56 Clarence Road, London, E5 8HB Tel: 0181 533 7111. Currently campaigning against deaths on building sites, by picketing out sites where deaths have occurred.

Solidarity Federation

PO Box 1681, London N8 7DN. Tel. 0161 232 7889. Write for: free info 'Your H&S rights - at a glance'; support and advice; details of forthcoming H&S surgeries.

Asbestos - A century of warnings and still killing workers

Over 3,000 people die every year of asbestos-related diseases, and this could double over the next twenty five years. It was a known hazard in 1896, a 1906 government report, clearly recognised its dangers. Government, factory inspectors, and the unions failed to act until the scandal broke in the 1960's and 1970's when the London dockers banned it from the docks. Subsequent action and banning from workplaces came from outside official union structures.

1984 - HSE printed thousands of awareness posters entitled "If you think a substance is asbestos, stop work". At the last minute, the campaign was axed after pressure from construction industry bosses. A decade later, the HSE admit that tens of thousands more construction workers will die as a result.

Anarcho-syndicalist education - the first step?

Practical organising for self-education

Getting to grips with health and safety is not so tedious and meaningless. Like overcoming any threat, awareness is the first step, and that means (self) education. An approach taken to self-educating SolFed and others about health and safety was developed early this year – basically a short 5-session course. Issues covered included the blindingly interesting basic health and safety standards and why we need them, as well as practical sessions around workplace support surgery activities, and current anarcho-syndicalist organisational methods and tactics. There are close links between this health and safety initiative and the support surgeries. Regular SolFed support surgeries are now established in London and Norfolk, with plans to extend the project elsewhere. In the area of health and safety, SolFed has joined the London Hazards Centre and affiliated to LRD, allowing access to various specialist information.

union support surgeries

The aim of the surgeries is to be more pro-active towards workplace struggles than before. Usually workers look for assistance once they have got into dispute, and mostly they have already lost. Practical support is more possible before workers get to this stage. Surgeries are not about sorting people's problems for them, but working with them to help build organisation and take effective action. It is about self-organisation in the workplace, and organisation beyond it. The sooner that such an organisation starts to work, the sooner it becomes credible, and the sooner

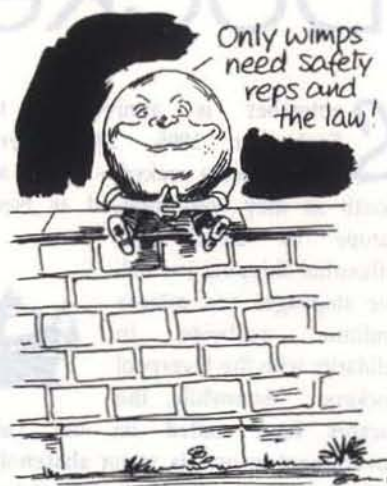
Most people I know think anarchist ideas are good, "but I'll believe it when I see it".

people will benefit from it. Hopefully this will be a quiet process, so we sneak up on the bosses and the reformist unions unnoticed! To do this a reliable, successful and credible profile is essential. Action must be based on reality and real situations. This doesn't mean compromising; anarcho-syndicalist ideas are practical as well as radical, and are part of a living, constantly growing tradition.

What makes a revolution is as much about how you work as what you do. With strong libertarian culture, attitude, and tactics, and structures which make an accommodation with the bosses impossible, mere "trades union consciousness" can become Leninism's nemesis. That tradition needs to be strengthened by pooling experience and knowledge, rather than relying on having experienced individuals in your Local.

self-education

Which is where anarcho-syndicalist education comes in. Most of us who have shop steward experience went through Trades Union Education, usually carried out by the Workers' Educational Association. There is not that much difference between a direct action approach to workplace organisation and what I was introduced to as the Trades Union Approach. It is a short step to apply and adapt anarcho-syndicalist methods to practical organising, the



surprise is that we haven't really done it before. Most people I know think anarchist ideas are good, "but I'll believe it when I see it". Anarcho-syndicalism is an organic whole, linking ideas, objectives, organisational methods and tactics. Taking a piece out of the jigsaw may make it look identical to the reformist version, but in context it can be seen for what it is. The lack of a practice has led many to assume that anarcho-syndicalism will inevitably end up reformist, when our critics see the real thing, most will realise their mistake. Some, of course, subscribe overtly or covertly to the Leninist idea that "trades union consciousness" is the enemy of revolution. This misses the point that anarcho-syndicalist ideas are revolutionary, but they are nothing without a practice. For too long we have left whole areas of working class life to reformism. Workplace organisation is the most neglected, but this applies to "single issue" campaigns, and whole other areas like anti-racism also.

So, Health, Safety & Welfare should be just the first subject on the curriculum. The SolFed project has produced experience and written material on tactics, resources and regulations which can be used as a tool to organise and fight with. The Public Service Workers' Network is also planning a "roadshow" of regionally-organised HSW workshops to begin in 1998. Write to DA for details. **DA**

Service industry – the new factories of hard labour



Dockers and Magnet

September is anniversary time. September 1995, 500 Liverpool Dockers were sacked – in the same month as they were praised as best in Europe by Lloyds list influential shipping journal. The stoppages and actions continue worldwide in solidarity with the Liverpool Dockers. Meanwhile, the dockers have called on the Labour Government to use its major shareholding (14%) in Mersey Docks to reinstate the dockers. They were also calling for a public inquiry into the millions of pounds of government and European money that has been ploughed into the Mersey Docks over the last 3 decades of public finance and private abuse. The picket line news is that police violence has taken a definite turn for the worse. New keen Mersey Police promotions have brought serious physical attacks and trumped up charges as main tools used against the peaceful law-abiding pickets. Such tactics indicate the Dockers' strength and our opponents' weakness.

September 3rd 1997 was the first anniversary of the Magnet lockouts. This summer has

seen a step up in the picketing of Magnet showrooms up and down the country. The showrooms have, however, been having a half price sale – and not many customers.

Where potential customers do turn up, the information pickets have for them is often enough for them to make up their

minds. With sales flagging, Magnet have plumbed for full colour full page ads in The Guardian (we are sure the Magnet bosses were gratefully received). The ad reads "A Magnet Kitchen is a reflection on you." Potential customers note.



The things people do. That's 0800 887744. The anniversary was marked with 2 weeks of action, including a mass rally outside the Darlington Factory on 23rd August. The support for Magnet workers is crucial for them and is massively appreciated, giving them the strength to go on spreading the Magnet dirty word until the dispute reaches a satisfactory conclusion. Magnet head office: Magnet Limited, Royd Ings Avenue, Keighley, West Yorks BD21 4BY. **DA**

one for the kids

Magnet's literature asks you to 'phone 0800 887744 for a free no-obligation site survey and quote for windows, kitchens, made-to-measure conservatories, etc. We have heard reports that loads of anonymous callers have been wasting surveyors time on call-outs to bogus and empty homes, 'just for a laugh', or 'because Magnet pay the call'.

Sol-fed groups up and down the country have been backing and organising boycotts and pickets locally. If you want to join in, or organise your own and want any help, contact them via your local group or via us at DA. Address for support and donations (and the £6 T-shirt): 'Magnet Families Hardship Fund' 109 Jedburgh Drive, Darlington, Co. Durham DL3 9UP

Forthcoming stuff in DA:

- **food - a poisoned plateful**
our food is bad and its time to act
- **tomorrows world**
-as it could be
- **greening society**
environment matters – but does greenwash?
- **human resistance management**
contract culture, personnel, prejudice and unions

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Prisoners' Justice Day



August 10th saw pickets of prisons up and down the country as people highlighted the farce and failure of the prison system, the high death rate in prisons (a suicide on average every 5 days) and the need to support class struggle and fitted up prisoners. Jack Straw has already reversed election promises to press ahead with Tory plans for another 4 new private prisons, to cope with increasing 'bang 'em up' policies. The prison population is well over 63,000 and increasing by almost 200 people a week. Meanwhile, none of the stated intended effects of these policies have materialised. Crime and fear of crime continue to plague ordinary people's lives.

The spectre of a US style prison system is upon us. A system where, more than anywhere, those without the capital get the punishment. 20 people have been murdered in the Texas Gulag so far this year; it will be 60 by year-end; and there are

PRISONERS JUSTICE DAY AUGUST 10

Imagine yourself either isolated in solitary confinement or crowded with three others into a cell meant for one person. Your possessions limited to two boxes 18 inch square. You are vulnerable to beatings, strip searches random and regular cell searches by prison officers and their dogs. You are under constant surveillance, forced to take drugs tests with loss of privileges if you refuse. Imagine you can't take any more...



Prison destroys our families, it divides and alienates people. Looking up people, often for 23 hours a day, affects them so badly that the only way out is suicide. Others still are killed by prison officers or by alienated and psychotic prisoners. Neglect, lack of proper medical and psychological care kills many others. In our society, the laws are made by the ruling class - the rich. Working class people who break these laws to survive or fight back against injustice in their lives will most likely, if in the wrong place at the wrong time, end up facing police, courts and prison.

Prisoners justice day is a way of remembering all those that have died unnatural deaths whilst inside. It began over 20 years ago in Canada and has now become an international solidarity event.

For the last few years, the International Prison support group Anarchist Black Cross, here and abroad, have been involved in demonstrations, vigils and protests outside prisons to show solidarity, support and highlight the injustices, injury and death that the prison system causes.

On the inside, many prisoners take action such as work strikes, protests and non cooperation on this day. We encourage this, and aim to broaden prison protests on Prisoners Justice Day.



plans to kill one a day in 1998. Terry Washington was killed despite being 'functionally retarded'. The next day Ken Gentry was executed, still proclaiming his innocence, and after someone else confessed to his crime. Authur Williams is still on Death Row, wrongly convicted of another 4 new private prisons, to cope with increasing 'bang 'em up' policies. The prison population is well over 63,000 and increasing by almost 200 people a week. Meanwhile, none of the stated intended effects of these policies have materialised. murdering a plain clothes policeman who attacked him outside his apartment. A black man in a corrupt white texas system. To contact him or send support, contact **DA**.

**If you want to get involved in prisoner support write to:
London ABC, 121 Railton
Road, London SE24 0LR.**

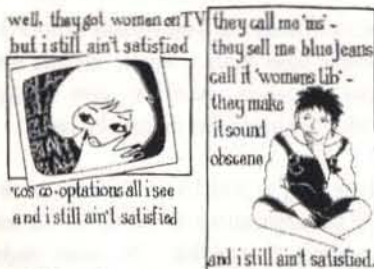
Sick of British Airways

BA have admitted to a bill of £125million and rising, for strike action by cabin crews. How much would it have cost to settle amicably? The dispute has had all the hallmarks of BA dirty tactics (remember the flight fixing debacle?). BAs' crooked bosses spent months secretly training middle managers and gathering scabs covertly through employment agencies in preparation for the strikes. The threats by bosses made to those taking part in this entirely legal and justifiable strike action, meant that many were forced to stop striking for fear of their jobs and families.

But over the 3 days of strikes at the end of July, more than 3,500 workers didn't come in as planned. BA reckons only 275 took strike action. Normal sickness rates in July would have been 580, but 1,943 reported sick and 965 were away sick on July 29th alone. This veritable plague of cabin crew sickness necessitated cancelling 1,000 (13%) domestic and European flights and 220 (8%) long haul flights - even after the strike threat was lifted. BA bosses have now implemented new rules on sickness aimed to prevent any staff being sick of them ever again. Not.



**Official advice from DAs is that
BA flights remain unreliable
for the foreseeable future -
don't use them, go off sick
instead.**



Quadrant Bites

New Labour plans to privatise Royal Mail caterers Quadrant. Let them eat flies, say SolFed Communication Workers.

Having successfully defeated Tory attempts to privatise the post office wholesale, we now face the Labour Party onslaught section by section. Meanwhile, the post office reveals record profits yet again. Royal Mail states they can give "no guarantees" to Quadrant workers. Enough is enough.

Quadrant workers are postal workers and the Labour government plan to sell off 49% of it. This raises one question, who's next? The cleaning section? The security section? It will not be long before they arrive at the "core business". Give an inch, they will take a mile. Some branches of the CWU have organised a liaison committee against Quadrant privatisation, and this is a good start. But there is action we can all take; a consumer boycott of Quadrant.

Quadrant staff need to get together with all post office staff and build solidarity. Where you work is irrelevant, we are the same. The British Airways dispute also involved contracting out of catering staff. It also saw familiar private management tactics in action, trying to divide workers. The plan for Quadrant looks and smells pretty similar. We need to learn from this now, and learn fast; solidarity and action is the only way out.

Let's start now. Privatisation will undoubtedly mean job losses and more profits to management. These profits will come from everyone that uses the canteen, as reasonable prices turn unreasonable. The Quadrant managers' greed for higher profits will reach new heights. The costs will be on the users. **Don't pay, don't buy it, don't eat it!!**

Write for info or to get involved:

BOYCOTT QUADRANT
Communication Workers Network,
PO Box 29 Manchester M15 5HW

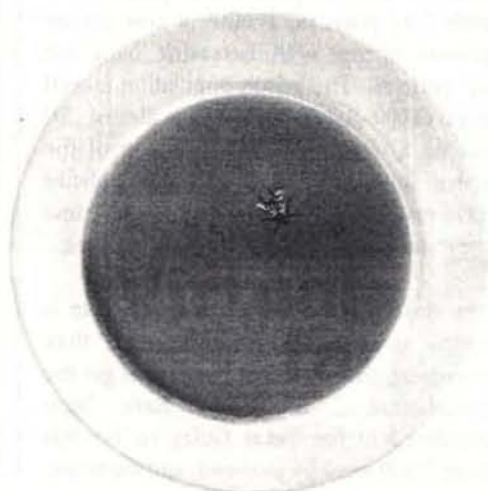
IN MY WORDS

(by Caroline, Quadrant worker)

I started work for Quadrant 8 years ago as a clerk. At that time, Quadrant was in its first year, recently changed from post office catering to Quadrant earlier that year. This was the beginning of the downfall. At that time we were still being paid by post office pay role system and the terms and conditions were integrally linked with our postal colleagues. But that was soon to change for the worse. When I started working for Quadrant in 1989, I was taking home £135 per week and now, 8 years down the line, my take-home pay is £139 per week.

For the first 2 years, from 1989 to 1991, we still had the same pay rises as our Royal Mail colleagues, we still enjoyed the same benefits, such as sick pay, pensions, night allowance, Saturday Premium and scheduled attendances but, unknown to us at the time, this was all to change. We became the guinea pigs for all Royal Mail's dirty deals for the future. Total quality management, appraisals, the employee agenda, etc. Whatever they wanted to do in the Royal Mail, they would use our Quadrant members to trial first, as they were the Cinderella Grades, and the least likely to kick back.

First of all, they set up their own payroll department. Although that's not strictly true, they actually contracted the final bits out to a private company and also their own so called support centre. With this came a new pay date and separated and divided us from the collective strength of our colleagues in Royal Mail. The big divide had begun, and the threats began, and they really started to come for us. Initially they came at us with unit efficiency, which reduced our staffing levels so much that we had to work twice as hard for no extra reward. Then they started chipping away at our allowances, always using the threat that we had to become more competitive with the outside catering companies. This began with pay deals that took away our pension and sickness payments. To entice people into accepting the deals, they dangled the most popular bribe. The golden carrot lump sum buy out payment. They soon learned that that was the way



they were going to tempt the lowest grades in the Post Office to accept their deals. Morale became low amongst our members, and we were asking ourselves, "what are they going to come for next?"

We didn't have long to wait for an answer. In the next round of pay negotiations, they came for the rest of our allowances in one hit. No more night allowance for those people who worked between 19:00 and 22:00 hours or those people whose duty happened to start before 06:00 hours. Then they took away our Saturday Premium, our scheduled attendance and, to bribe us into accepting this deal, offered us a miserly one hour reduction in the working week. The now familiar lump sum buy out and scheduled attendance became a thing of the past. At this point, we believed they could do no more to us. They had taken everything. What could they possibly do next? Well, I'll tell you what happened next. A new grading package, that's what we are going to have next. Although it was generally felt amongst our members that we did need something doing with the existing one, it was being abused by local and area managers alike, and it was basically left up to them to decide what grade they would award workers upon recruitment regardless of agreement. Needless to say we ended up with a lot of grade 3s and 4s who should have been graded higher and consequently this has had a knock on effect to the new grading agreement that we currently have. For example, we have chefs and breakfast cooks in

dresscodes

category C, which is a non cooking grade, so we now have an agreement worse than the last.

Well that's where we are up to and now we face the big one; BACK DOOR PRIVATISATION. Having divided us from our colleagues in Royal Mail, the fat cat bosses in Quadrant, hungry for their free shares, are hoping that we will be isolated and defenceless. We are now being turned into sacrificial lambs of the Post Office. Instead of uniting the full force of the union behind the campaign to hold privatisation bandwagon, our own headquarters seem to be welcoming the selling off of Quadrant as an innovative means of raising private capital. We know what will come if the proposed sale goes ahead. Deteriorating working conditions, job losses and union de-recognition are our only future unless our colleagues in the postal grades help us to fight the selling off of our industry.

As a Quadrant employee, I have always been able to call upon the experience of my postal branch officials and found it utterly deplorable when they are excluded from the recent briefing at headquarters. Our members in Quadrant have never felt so afraid of their future than at this present time. We are all feeling isolated and abandoned. We need your help and support more at this time than ever before. Please lobby the NEC and the national offices to mount a campaign to stop the privatisation plans going ahead. This union has a policy of opposition to privatisation. Help us to ensure that this policy is pursued and we are not abandoned to the wolves.

PLEASE DON'T LET QUADRANT BE A CASUALTY OF ROYAL MAIL DIRTY TRICKS CAMPAIGN; IF THEY DO IT TO US, AND GET AWAY WITH IT, THEY WILL BE COMING FOR YOU. 

Over the last few years, local authorities and other public bodies have begun to introduce stricter dress codes, both for people who deal directly with the public and those who are behind the scenes. There are a number of assumptions around this that I want to examine to try to find out management's real motivation for their introduction.

Firstly, we are told that it's what our "customers" want. (Notice how whenever a service gets worse, its users become customers - but that's another article). No evidence is produced for this, but presumably our "customers" are much more concerned with how workers are dressed than with the quality of the service.

Secondly, Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) is used to justify it. If council workers don't look smart, wear suits and so on, private contractors who do will win all the contracts. This defies all logic, even under the quality elements of contracts. I wonder if the people who write these contracts are aiming them at spivs, who always wore suits.

Behind this is a management drive to get more control, incrementally rather than in one swoop. A few years ago, I heard the

ridiculous justification that a dress code (or even a uniform) would make choosing what to wear easier in the morning. I'm sick of being patronised by public school

riff raff and power dressers. The only restrictions on what people wear to work should be based on health and safety and common sense. Dress codes are relatively easy to force through in a workforce that is worried about job security and redundancy. They are the thin end of the wedge, and will be followed by other restrictions, therefore they

should be resisted. A more sinister agenda is seen where workers do deal directly with the public, often the unemployed or people who are very poor. Here the dress code is about erecting barriers between those with a job and those without, discouraging people from seeing what we have in common. Most of these initiatives show up authorities equal opportunities policies to be a sham, as well. While they are happy to let a sikh wear a turban, there will be uproar if people wear T-shirts or shorts. Yet for some people, the way they dress is as much part of their identity as a turban is to a practising sikh.

These silly codes and their sillier advocates can be beaten. A few years ago, manual workers in Leicester were told they couldn't wear shorts as part of the council's new uniform during the hot summer months. After a couple of weeks with them appearing for work in summer dresses, management changed their mind. It seems wearing what you want to is one thing, subverting sexual roles is quite another. 



The Disposables

More and more people lack basic employment rights because of their status as 'self-employed' temporary workers. A large proportion of these are agency workers, hired by the day, not knowing from one week to the next how much they are going to earn. This trend is only part of a wider process within the New Order of the 'free market' - a trend towards the conversion of human beings with rights and needs for material security into profit-making machines. Employers want workers who can be hired, fired and mistreated at will and as casualisation increases, that is what they will get.

Most employers of temporary workers, particularly agencies, make their workers sign contracts stating that the worker is 'self-employed'. This is because the self-employed lack protection under most health and safety legislation; the right to claim unfair dismissal in an industrial tribunal, security of employment after maternity leave, the right to redundancy pay, the right to unemployment benefit, statutory sick pay and industrial injury benefit. The 'self-employed' status of agency workers was successfully challenged by members of Norwich Solidarity Centre when they took on the 'Staffing Solutions' employment agency (see DA#3). However, legal challenges on this issue have been less successful. The courts have generally defied common sense by treating agency workers in the same way as they would a self-employed business person. This only reflects a wider tendency for judgements on employment law to reflect the interests of the employers rather than the notions of 'natural justice' that ordinary people might hold.

But no rights does not necessarily mean no obligations. It must be stressed that the agency workers' conditions of employment do not make them a sort of anarchic free spirit. It is true that not all agencies directly pressure workers to work when they do not

the agency worker is the ideal worker in the employers' view. When Tony Blair talks of the need for 'flexible labour markets' it is a call for us all to have agency worker status

want to (though this is not unheard of). Indirect financial pressure is another matter. While hourly rates of pay may be similar to those of permanent staff in the same work, agency workers usually do not get paid holidays or sick leave. There are also, of course, slack periods when the agency worker will have little or no earnings. Agency workers are under pressure, therefore, to take whatever work they are offered. When I worked for a care work agency most of the other workers aimed to get a minimum of sixty or seventy hours work a week. The agency seemed oblivious to the health and safety risks involved in exhausted workers providing care and medication for vulnerable clients.

It might seem that the problem of agency work is only an isolated one, an example of the 'employer-employee' relationship gone wrong. Nothing could be further from the truth. Any worker in the market system is simply a commodity to be bought and used by the employer to make a profit. The conflict between bosses and unions and between capitalism and socialism meant that workers were granted rights to sick pay, redundancy pay and so on. It was hoped that these reforms would head off the conflict between the working class and the employers. The situation is very different now. The employers never liked the idea of workers' rights. Rights and entitlements cost money. Once the post-war period of full employment came to an end in the 1970's job insecurity meant that the workers would be reluctant to strike.

The employer's and the state realised that they could now start stripping the workers of their rights. This process has continued ever since. The casualisation of employment is only the latest stage in a process that started in Britain with the anti-union laws. The agency worker is the ideal

worker in the employers' view. When Tony Blair talks of the need for 'flexible labour markets' it is a call for us all to have agency worker status.

If the process of casualisation is to be reversed, a good place to start might be among the casual workers themselves. A conventional union organisation drive among agency workers is not the answer. The agency can get rid of union activists by simply not phoning them up to offer more work. It will require a more flexible approach. The fact is that while all agencies are bad, some offer better pay and conditions than others. A small minority of agencies offer their staff paid holidays for instance. A well organised group of workers employed by different agencies could gather information about relative pay and conditions in different agencies. Boycott campaigns could be organised against the worst agencies. As long as the work of picketing and leafleting an agency was not done by those workers in the group actually employed by it the risk of victimisation would be greatly reduced. A problem, however, is that agency workers often only work with each other for short periods of time before being sent off on different jobs, making self-organisation difficult. Permanent staff who work alongside agency workers therefore need to help out with organising. They could distribute details of the agency workers group to agency workers and help them get in contact with each other.

getting organised

The key thing is that agency workers do start getting together, organising campaigns and putting out publicity. They must overcome the demoralisation that comes from having signed away their rights. Workplace activists must get out of the habit of moaning that agency workers are undercutting their conditions of work. The right thing for activists to do is to help agency workers to achieve equality of pay and conditions. Otherwise the permanent workers will find themselves reduced to the status of the casual worker sooner rather than later.

Further reading: Lockton, D *Employment Law* 1996 Macmillan. 





temporary jobs

the

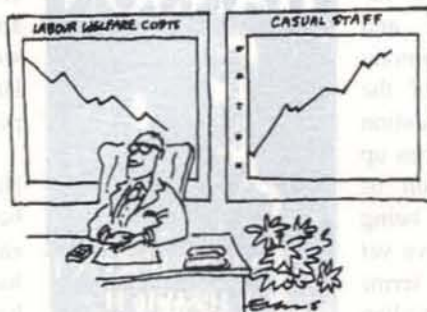
Drawn from Labour Research Department
Booklet 'Temporary Workers and the Law - a
guide to employment rights'

FAQs

Basic facts for temporary/agency/casual workers.

Q. Can I force my employer to make me permanent?

A. Employers cannot be made to change temporary contracts into permanent ones as is the case in many other EU states where there is a limit on the length of temporary contracts or the number of times they are renewed. But if you are employed on a series of fixed term contracts, one following on from the other, or if the break between temporary contracts is less than the period when they are in force you may be able to show that in reality you have continuous employment. Where this can be established then your basic employment rights are the same as those of permanent workers.



Q. The original fixed term contract which I was given did not have a waiver clause but now suddenly my employer has said that one will be issued. Can I refuse to sign it?

A. An employer can ask for a waiver clause to be included at any time of the contract's operation. Of course you can refuse to sign it although this is likely to lead to the employer not offering a new fixed term contract. But remember, if by that stage you have already been employed for two years you would be able to pursue an unfair dismissal claim, if your employer proceeded to dismiss you.

Q. My employer is offering contracts which just fall short of two years so that individuals cannot get unfair dismissal or redundancy rights. Is this lawful?

A. There is no law which prevents UK employers from setting what-ever limits they want on the length of contracts, but if your employer offers a series of such contracts you should be able to establish continuity.

Q. My employer wants me to sign a "waiver" clause. What does this mean?

A. A waiver clause is a clause in an employment contract under which an employee waives the right to pursue a claim for unfair dismissal and/or redundancy. An employer can only ask someone to sign this if they are employed on a fixed term contract.

Q. I have been working for my employer for over seven years but always on six month contracts which have followed on one from each other. I have now been told that there is no more work, can I claim redundancy pay?

A. Provided you have not signed a waiver clause you can claim redundancy pay. You may also be able to claim unfair dismissal.

Q. Can I claim continuity even if the work I have done for the employer has differed depending on the contract?

A. You do not have to have done the same job on each contract to establish that your employment is continuous, provided that the work is for the same employer and the other rules for continuity are met.

Q. My employer pays temps at a lower rate and does not give them the same sick pay or holiday rights. Is this legal?

A. There is no law which makes your employer offer equal terms and conditions to temps. However, it may be possible to use discrimination law to challenge unequal treatment.

Q. I am employed through an agency. What does this mean for my rights?

A. Most agency staff are not "employees" and therefore cannot take advantage of many employment rights which depend on the worker having this status. However, the courts appear to be moving towards implying employee status in agency cases.

Q. For a number of years I have worked as a freelance casual worker. I usually work for the same three employers but for differing lengths of time. One of them has decided not to re-employ me. What are my rights?

A. Freelance and casual workers may be in a precarious legal position due to the fact that the courts often define their contract status as one of self-employed. Self-employed workers are excluded from most employment rights, including maternity rights. **DA**

For more in-depth advice, write to DA stating basic details of your situation. We reply to all queries we receive. If we can't help we know someone who may be able to:

**DA, PO Box 1095
Sheffield
S2 4YR**

What fair go?

Put Lorenzo, a history of aboriginal oppression, and 'new' racists in the same country and mix. What do you get?

The speaking tour organised by Australian anarchist group Angry People for former Black Panther and activist Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin led to a media feeding frenzy and the attempted deportation of Ervin in July. The tour was designed to raise the issues and problems of Australia's Aboriginal population, latent racism, and to offer some Anarchist critiques and solutions.

It had ground-breaking potential to push the ideas of Anarchism beyond the political ghetto into the streets and communities. It lit a fuse which exists in Australia due to its unique background and current social situation.

background

Australia has a good image abroad, based in part on realities, but also on ignorance. It has a higher standard of living than the UK, and is one of the most multicultural societies. But its history is not all the tale of giving immigrants a fair go. Australia was founded on convict slavery and genocide of Aborigines.

The apparent workers paradise was the result of the ruling class accepting a higher than usual standard of living for its white workers - but only them. Aborigines were not given citizenship until 1967! Some so-called socialists were happy with this deal, to accept white Australia, while others, like the IWW, always fought it. Needless to say, Aborigines have always stood up for their rights.

Aborigines were not given citizenship until 1967.. needless to say, they have always stood up for their rights

In Britain, racism exists in the atmosphere of an ex-imperial power with immigrant (black, Asian, Irish) groups on the receiving end. Australia, on the other hand, has an Aboriginal, then Anglo/Celtic followed by European and Asian population history. Aborigines are scapegoats for the fear and uncertainty among large parts of the Anglo population who have given up on the fiction of Britain being home, but have yet to come to terms with Australian history. This insecurity can lead to anti-Aboriginal racism, encouraged of course by the economic interests (mining, pastoral etc.) who reap the benefits from the dispossession of Aboriginal Australians. Asian contact with Australia pre-dates European colonisation, and anti-Asian racism has been present at various times in Australia's history.

current social situation

Attempts are now being made to push anti-Asian racism onto the political agenda. This follows the long-established and locally accepted anti-aboriginal feeling. The debate on race in Australia has featured the rise of Pauline Hanson and National Action. Hanson, supposedly an 'Independent' MP, says the things the Government

cannot openly spout. Racist rhetoric is her forte. Both want a return to the fifties when, if not all the population was white, those that weren't were out of sight. Both are now using Asians as well as aborigines as the political scapegoats. Both are playing the race card, the Government to assist in an offensive against working people, and Hanson to feather her political nest.



National Action have been dormant since the early 1990s. They now have the money to open bookshops and headquarters. Hanson likewise has had behind the scenes support to enable her One Nation party to launch. The ruling classes are supporting and using these two groups to push for a more racist and divided society, not merely because they think they can do without the labour power of new migrants, but because they want to weaken progressive opposition. They hope to divide and conquer.

But we have seen resistance. The publicity surrounding Lorenzo's tour is paying off. The Government have really messed up. People are starting to realise that effective action needs to be organised. What with the Olympics being put on in Australia in the year 2000, it's not the last time Australia will hit the news. Let's hope that the experience gained from this tour will strengthen the Australian working class - of all colours - to win more battles in the future. **DA**

Lorenzo factfile

1. Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin is well known to activists around the world for his work on prison struggle, anarchism and black liberation. He has been involved in political issues since a boy growing up in "the segregated south" of the United States. He is probably most well known for his work with the Black Panther Party during the sixties and seventies.

2. After a farce trial, Lorenzo was imprisoned and served fifteen years at various federal prisons before a world wide campaign was mobilised, and eventually succeeded in his release. Since his release, he has continued to fight the injustices heaped onto black people, immigrants and the working class around the world.

3. On Tuesday 3th of July this year Lorenzo was arrested shortly after arriving in Australia for a speaking tour. He had just finished a similar speaking tour of Europe where he had spoken to a diverse range of audiences, from middle class white school girls in Southern England to immigrants in Belgium. He was invited by the Australian anarchist group Angry People to speak on several themes: his personal history, his life in the US prison system, the formation of a coalition to organise against the death penalty in the US, raising black awareness of autonomous organisation and the need to address racism within the anarchist movement.

4. Lorenzo was arrested after giving only one talk. He was seized in Brisbane, Queensland for a trumped up visa infraction. Apparently, he had filled in an incoming passenger card properly, but because of his not so good eyesight, had not filled in the section concerning previous convictions as it was written in very small type. He was placed in maximum security solitary confinement in Brisbane's Sir Arthur Gorrie Centre prison. Yes, you did read it correctly - maximum security, solitary confinement!

5. A minor visa problem was actually a smoke screen put up by the Australian government, what seems to have happened is: The far right group Australians Against Further Immigration heard of Lorenzo's visit. They then contacted Queensland MP Pauline Hanson, who represents the far right "One Nation" party. Hanson claimed that Lorenzo was there to "stir up racial hatred amongst Aborigines" (She should know all about that!) She pressurised the immigration minister to scrutinise Lorenzo's paperwork, and the racist government, together with the Queensland authorities, were determined to get him out of the country.

6. Queensland has been described as the "Alabama of Australia" where racism is not simply tolerated, it is a part of the territory's rationale, where harsh sentences are given out by a

white judiciary to indigenous people who fall foul of the law. Remember it was only in the 1970s that the practise of paying a bounty of a few dollars for an Aborigine's head was stopped..

7. Not content with arresting him and keeping him under extreme conditions, Lorenzo was also beaten.

8. Meanwhile, news had spread out of Australia that he had been imprisoned, and a spontaneous international response began as people voiced their condemnation by faxing, phoning, e-

mailing and demonstrating. From Stockholm to Swindon, Moscow, to Atlanta, embassies were flooded with protests. Just a few examples;

Stockholm: "We demand that Mr Ervin is released immediately" - *Anarchist Black Cross*

Swindon: "Mr Ervin is in Australia as part of a speaking tour about racism, and it appears that certain right wing politicians in your country would prefer that racism in Australia was not exposed. This is an attack on free speech and a racist one at that". *IWW-UK*

Moscow: "...the right to move across the earth freely is a basic human right that nobody can regulate or deny.." *Moscow Black Cross, "Humanity" Group, IWW, World Without Borders*

Atlanta: "The political inspiration which Mr Ervin stands for cannot be eradicated by simple repressive measures by a powerful state.." *Georgia Green Party, Black Autonomy Food not Bombs-Atlanta, IWW, Workers Solidarity Alliance, Malcolm X Grass Roots Movement and the Southern Organising Committee for Social and Economic Justice*

9. On the 11th of July, the hearing was reconvened. The Chief Justice of Australia, Sir Gerard Brennan ruled that Lorenzo had indeed not been accorded natural justice and granted him bail. Before adjourning, he said "There is an obligation to accord natural justice which has not been observed".

10. The government was ordered to pay Lorenzo's legal costs, and all in all were thoroughly embarrassed. Lorenzo was also given a 90 day visa (he had only originally applied for 30 days).

11. Lorenzo carried on his speaking tour, visiting indigenous groups' (Government backed!) celebrations in Musgrave Park, Brisbane as a guest of the Murri (Aboriginal) People. He then travelled on to Lismore, New South Wales, then onto Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne.

12. On his return to the US, Lorenzo said it was a bad time in prison but he was glad about the coverage, international response and ground breaking ruling in the Australian courts.



For more info., and about a forthcoming video of Lorenzo speaking in England, write to DA

Power trips: the

In Britain just 250 companies take almost half of everything we spend. General Motors sales revenues (\$133 billion per year) are roughly equal to the combined GNP of Tanzania, Ethiopia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Zaire, Uganda, Kenya, and Pakistan. That's more than 500 million people. Twelve of the world's most important industries - including cars, aerospace, electronics, steel, oil, computers, media - are each more than 40 per cent dominated by five or fewer corporations.

Their power is not just financial. They are now beginning to dictate the fundamentals of life. Just 10 corporations control virtually every aspect of the food chain; four control 90% of the world's export of

corn, wheat, coffee, tea, pineapples, cotton, tobacco and forest products. These same companies now handle the storage, transportation and food processing. The growth in the last 20 years of some transnational companies has been incredible. They are becoming more successful at centralised planning of production and sales, hence what we do and don't buy, than Moscow ever was in its communist days. The sales of five Japanese corporations in 1991 were roughly the same as the GDP of the entire former Soviet Union.

So large are they growing and such is their skill in manipulating

The largest 500 companies control 42% of world wealth.

Of the biggest 100 economies in the world, half are countries and half are corporations.

Only 27 countries have a turnover greater than Shell and Exxon combined.

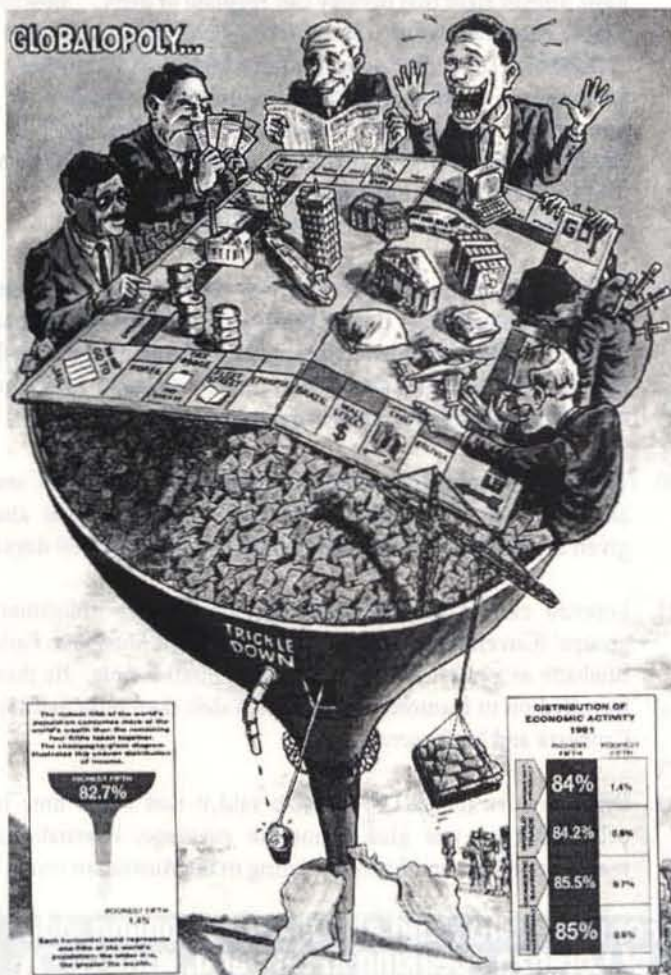
Shell owns or leases 400 million acres of land, making it larger than 146 countries.

markets, so great their resources and political influence, that they are now effectively governments themselves - world governments. At the same time they remain totally unaccountable and undemocratic. And they are now virtually ungovernable. What person, community, or even politician or government can influence or limit such powerful corporations? Even the task of monitoring their development is beyond the individual and certainly most governments.

Power is swiftly and silently slipping out of the hands of governments into those of transnationals without the realisation of both people and to a certain extent often governments themselves. Whereas governments were nominally accountable to their population and at least pretend to rule in the interests of all, who are the transnationals responsible to? When companies

such as General Motors "shed" 40,000 workers in a single day who do they answer to? Politics is of course intimate with financial power, so today governments are being forced to respond to transnationals. Governments bribe companies to set up within their borders, offer them sweeteners, tax breaks and more. These developments are the beginning of two-level world economy. One, that of corporations; the other of national governments which are increasingly slave to the former. Unlike government, corporations have no pretence of obligations. They don't even pay lip service to the notions of accountability and openness. Instead, they hide behind "commercial interest" and work in secrecy.

Whilst Tony Blair and all other politicians try to give the impression that they are "running the country" and have control over the economy, they are in reality



real politics of power

reduced to acting as labour brokers - a national temp agency - competing with every other country in selling their workforce (us) at the lowest price and on the most inviting terms to transnational corporations.

There exists the high probability of nation states handing over social services, health, pensions, even prisons and crime prevention to corporations who are often only nominally based within their borders. In Britain, energy, the media, water, public transport and much more is already moving to transnational ownership. Transnationals have and continue to succeed in their rise through having political friends, those who facilitate subsidies, centralise power in central government, ignore regulations, etc. Donations to party funds, "cash-for-questions", foreign aid deals, the wheeling-dealing of lobby groups have all produced scandals and increased the contempt in which we hold politicians. People increasingly no longer trust politicians, but tend to ignore the role of corporations in these events.

It is in Brussels, within the World Trade Organisation (previously Gatt) and Nafta, that the policy decisions that affect millions of lives are being made mostly by and for the interests of the corporations. It was two industrialists who drafted the original proposal for the single European market. The European Round Table (ERT) is a lobby group of senior European industrialists set up in the early 1980's. In recent years it has pushed massive infrastructural projects that financially benefit the small club of people who oversee

the construction of roads, power stations, dams, and push particular technologies. When the ERT brings out a report, whole passages are often reproduced in EEC policy papers.

Likewise in the US, where the Business Round Table (BRT) is one of America's most powerful and exclusive organisations. Its 200 members include bosses from 42 of the top 50 US corporations, 7 of the 8 largest commercial banks, and 9 of the 11 largest utilities.

The BRT claims to "reflect sound economic and social principles" Sound social principles? Its membership is limited to "white males over 50 whose salaries are at least 170 times the US average". An example of corporate power was the pushing through of the Nafta deal between Mexico and the US in 1993/4. BRT officials backed the deal with all their might, so that the agreement would open Mexico to the arrival of polluting companies, enable the exploitation of cheaper labour and allow the dumping of heavily subsidised products on the Mexican market. All but 4 of BRT's 200 representatives sat on Nafta advisory panels. Since Nafta was established Mexico has increased its import of food from 20 to 43 per cent, 2.2 million Mexicans have lost their jobs and around 40 million are now in "extreme poverty".

Some would claim that the economic system simply requires reform, that its excesses only require curbing. Such notions can be likened to believing that nuclear weapons could be used in war

The 10 biggest *companies* turn over more money than the total of the smallest 100 *countries*.

without civilian deaths! We should not be distracted by hopeless idealism of this sort. An alternative form of economics that is both sustainable and geared to need not profit will only be achievable when coupled with a true and mature form of democracy - that is joint self-management by those who create the world's wealth (that is workers, not chairmen, shareholders, etc.) and by communities. This will entail ditching the structures of

centralised power that governments maintain in favour of genuine federalism - one that stems from democracy in the workplace and real local democracy. **DA**

Sources:
McLibel, Burger Culture on Trial. (John Vidal)
Solidarity Bulletin. (Norfolk & Norwich Solidarity Federation)



"And now that the UK has been set up as a limited company, we can dispense with the cabinet and all its front men!"

Note: Old cartoon: please substitute in your mind each old tory cabinet member for the corresponding new labour one.

strikes and strife

south africa

On July 2, there was a general strike in South Africa, called by the main union federation, COSATU. The basic issue revolves around new legislation on working conditions.

Rallies in Johannesburg city centre attracted 10-15,000 supporters. The employer federations are calling for "flexibility" and a "two tier labour market". In other words, they are aiming at minimal protection for workers. They want new entrants into employment to have no minimum wage, no benefits, "flexible" rules on child labour, flexible working hours with minimal extra compensation for overtime etc. Similarly, they want minimal and unpaid maternity leave. These views are generally reflected in the bill, which will also affect existing workers, by: (i) creating a ill-paid and under-organised "second tier" labour market (ii) removing current rights when they change job (iii) setting a precedent which could be used in future to erode workers jobs.

bangladesh

July 13th: over 300 people were injured, 50 seriously, by police charging a demonstration by employees of Yang Wan Hightec Ltd, a Korean company, near the factory in Savar. The demonstration followed the arrest of 15 'agitating labourers' and the prolonged detention of 2 of them. Witnesses saw some 5,000 employees mass in front of the factory (see photo) to press for release of two workers and for an 11 point demand that included removal of the factory's personnel director. The demonstrators ran helter skelter as 300 riot police, brought earlier from the capital in anticipation, attacked them

indiscriminately. The fifty seriously injured were admitted to Savar Health Complex. Labour spokespeople reported that the police had asked the Health Complex not to admit the injured workers. 30 workers were arrested. Meanwhile, the factory is re-opened. Workers report that physical torture, and even termination, is commonplace. 9 workers are currently in jail, 300 injured, 97 dead, and there are proceedings against 800.

**National Garment Workers Federation is supporting the workers. Send money and support to:
NGWF, GPO Box 864,
Dhaka, Bangladesh. Fax
880-2-9562562**

bangladesh 2

At Dulamia Cotton Spinning Mills, 30 miles from Dhaka City, workers are treated like slaves. No trade union is allowed. Previous attempts by workers to form a union resulted in torture and sackings. Sick workers have never been allowed medical treatment nor sick leave. In March, the union was formed and pertinent documents were submitted to the government's Labour Department but registration was rejected. The owner hired goons and attacked the workers on the night of May 3. On May 5, the management offered a

"conciliation" meeting, where the workers were attacked again.

**Letters of protest to: (cc:
the ALARM Sec and BJSF)
PM Sheikh Hasina
Bangladesh
Fax (880-2) 811015 /
813244**

bangladesh 3

No children are employed in the garment industry any more and workers are not forced to work more than 60 hours a week. So said the president of the association of employers in the garment industry of Bangladesh (BGMEA), in reaction to the US announcement of plans for a label to certify that garments are 'produced by non-sweatshop labour'. The label will only be granted for garments produced where workers are paid at least a minimum wage according to the standards of the country and granted a weekly holiday. The latter two 'benefits' are still unusual in Bangladesh. Regulation exists regarding wage scales but employers and the authorities largely ignore it. A buyers' boycott in the US has assisted the political pressure for labels. The BGMEA president had the cheek to ask for compensation for the losses incurred by factory owners, who, he said, cherished their workers and could not possibly act against their interest.



pakistan

On 11th June, 20,000 of the most harshly exploited workers in the world went out on strike, closing all 130 workplaces in the city of Lahore. After 30 years without striking, the carpet workers want substantial wage rises and the implementation of labour laws in the industry, retirement pay, measures to protect their health and safety and an end to child labour. The average wage is Rs1600 (\$40) a month and has not changed for three years while prices have risen more than 20%.

Labouring intolerably long hours with no protection, carpet workers suffer all kinds of debilitating health problems. In the washing processes, chemicals are used that burn the skin from face and limb. In the cutting rooms, the heavy dust goes straight into the lungs. Worst of all, the bosses that make the big money out of this sweated labour sub-contract out to avoid any responsibility. The strikers' are no longer prepared to work for employers who put their lives at risk and take away thousands of childhoods.

The Lahore strikers are giving the 80,000 Pakistan carpet workers a hope by making a stand. They are well organised and determined to press home every one of their demands. They deserve and need the support of the whole international labour movement.

**Messages of support to:
Ittehad Carpet Industries
Union, 40 Abbott Road,
Lahore, Pakistan.
Fax: ++9242 7239128
E-mail:
edu@found.edunet.sdupk.
undp.org**

Protests: PM Mian Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister House, Islamabad, Pakistan. Fax: ++92 51 256687, and Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers & Exporters Association, Ali Complex, 23 Empress Road, Lahore, Pakistan. Fax: ++92 42 6305296

india

MS Paharpur Cooling Towers Ltd has 20 production facilities, more than a dozen subsidiaries throughout India and several joint ventures with different multinational companies. It is a market leader in the power, steel and petrochemical industries and profits annually increase. In Calcutta (West Bengal) and Gaziabad (Uttar Pradesh) alone, MS Paharpur has 3,000 workers. Two of its six factories at Gaziabad were closed after the company declared a lockout on 4 June 1997. Another 200 workers of Bhasa (West Bengal) factory have been sacked by the management. At present, there are at least 1,800 workers out. Paharpur is a trend-setter in India for engaging contract and subcontract labour. In line with the liberalisation policy of the Indian Government, the company is engaging large numbers of contract workers, who have none of the benefits of permanent employees.

Management has waged an all out attack to crush the unity of the workers. 1,850 workers from different unions at Paharpur have lost their jobs through mass retrenchment, dismissal, lockout and closure, while the rest are deprived of their right to organise and bargain collectively.

Letters to: Chairman and Director, Paharpur Cooling Towers Ltd., Paharpur House, 8/1/B, Diamond Harbour Road, Calcutta 700027, INDIA

romania

On June 20, most of the 45,000 coal miners of Valea Jiului in Romania struck over pay and government guarantees against forced "privatisation" and lay-offs. Romania's government deployed riot police against miners in order to contain the strike and prevent the miners leaving their districts. In response miners blocked major highways, and demanded the prime minister of the new government to come down for negotiations. By then, strikes were spreading all over the country and, after 2 weeks, the miners won most of the concessions they sought.

russia

FAD/RKAS (Federation of Anarchists of the Donbass / Revolucionnaya Konfederacija Anarchosindikalistov) have had to stop the publication of three bulletins 'Anarchia', 'Golos Truda' and 'Anarchosindikalist' because of their growing involvement in the activities of the regional miners. Since the summer of 1996, when there were big miners' strikes with railroad and main road blockades, miners of Donetsk and the surrounding area have increased their protest activities and formed a radical regional organisation around the miner Mikhail Krylov, who has been made responsible for the 'unrest' of last year and stands trial as a result.

france

On June 2nd, the left won the elections. The CNT-IWA went with a group of illegal immigrants to the place the Socialist Party was having a meeting and reminded them of their promises to these people. Within minutes of them being elected, the pressure from the streets was on them. That's the only way their politics will look anything like left wing...

france 2

The CNT-IWA staged an occupation of a schools administration building in Doubs, near Besancon in order to

table demands on staffing levels, contracts, the reinstatement of 8 teachers and other matters too complicated to detail here in a short space. Thus, the exercise was a successful demonstration of what non-violent direct action can achieve.

italy

Around 400 people demonstrated in Ancona against the Italian-led 'peace-keeping' intervention force in Albania. Called by the Italian IWA section (Unione Sindicale Italiana) and the Marche Anarchist Network, the demonstration also saw the participation of anti-institutional union structures from the Marche region, Ancona students, youth activists from occupied social centres, anarchists from other parts of Italy, and the Communist Renewal provincial federation.

At the rally, the USI orator, after having illustrated the real motives for the "humanitarian" intervention in Albania and the necessity of opposing the culture of war and neo-colonialism, went on to state: "...The USI, as well as fighting for the day to day interests of the workers and the unemployed, is also a vehicle for social transformation, and thus fully endorses solidarity amongst all exploited against divisions and borders... Should the military occupation of Albania continue, the USI will endeavour to organise more incisive mobilisations, such as a general strike against militarism, as it did during the Gulf War." (source: 'Lotta di Classe', June 97)

Ancona, anarchists, syndicalists and antimilitarist sentiment are not strangers. In June 1914 the city was the epicentre of a general strike cum insurrection which came to be known as "Red Week", and which spread from Ancona to much of the country following a police attempt to repress an antimilitarist demonstration. And in June 1920 conscripts in Ancona mutinied against being shipped to a colonial adventure in Albania and made

common cause with the once again insurgent city.

germany

In July, production at Opel Bochum was disrupted by spontaneous strikes triggered off by the bosses' termination of the works' agreement on bonuses. The agreements guaranteed payments above agreed union rates in all German Opel plants. Its termination means the reduction of the Opel wages to standard wages and a reduction of the special payments for difficult working conditions, etc. The loss of wages amounts to about 33%.

Following this "provocation" spontaneous strikes took place in Plant I and afterwards in the other Bochum Plants, II and III. About 3 - 4,000 workers took part. The works' council chairman and the works' managers confirmed the withdrawal of the termination of the works' agreement.

usa

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) have been organising at the Keystone Job-Corps Center in Drums, Pennsylvania. Financed by federal grants, the Job Corps recruits young people (aged 16-24) with promises of job training or education. Its real purpose is to prepare the working class kid for underpaid work at the bottom of the job market. Keystone Job Corps Center is managed by a private company called Management Training Corporation. This company also manages several correctional facilities in the prison industry, and their Job Corps Center is run after the same principles. Students are subject to harsh restrictions on leaving the campus or expressing their civil rights, and can even be neglected by the infirmary to the point where their lives are endangered. The lessons the students are to learn are not so much the vocational training they get, but to keep their mouths shut and take orders from their superiors. (contd over page)

IWA global news updates

(contd from last page)

On June 26, 1997, the Keystone Job Center suspended the two most vocal supporters of the union drive, Matt Wilson and Joe Marra, for 10 days, and threatened them with final termination after an investigation. Joe was told he was "inciting a riot" by management while signing up a fellow worker. Matt was told he was harassing students, when no students had complained about him and in fact, had expressed much interest in what he had to say. Both were told that they were employees of the federal government 24 hours a day, seven days a week and were not permitted to organize on company time. On the final signed report, the reason for their suspension was "inappropriate" behavior that poses a threat to self or others. Matt and Joe were kicked off campus with no place to go, and had to stay with IWW comrades in Philadelphia.

The IWW demands an end to harassment of student employees at the Keystone Job Corps Center and an investigation of alleged malpractice at their infirmary by an independent third party.

Fax letters of protest to:
James A. Bodnar,
Regional Director, Job
Corps Region III
fax: 1-215-596-5076
tel: 1-215-596-6302

usa2

2,000 journalists and staff at the two Detroit newspapers, the Free Press and the Detroit News, have been on strike/lockout for over two years. The two papers, have since July 95 been made by scab labor. Detroit is a union town and both papers are actually losing money because of low sales and fewer ads. But the papers owners, Knight Ridder and Gannet (publisher of USA Today), will rather finance these losses with the profit from their other papers than give in to the unions.

Despite the fact that the Detroit newspaper strike have become a

national symbol, the AFL-CIO the trade union federation has done little to help its striking members. Finally union members were forced by their leaders to make an unconditional offer to return to their jobs and technically ended the strike Feb. 14. The newspapers accepted this offer, but decided to retain their 1200 replacement scabs, thus making few jobs immediately available for returning strikers. Only 200 of the 2000 was called back to work.

The union bosses defended this surrender by explaining that this officially made the strike into a lockout and that the newspapers was now legally obliged to take in the rest of the strikers. The AFL-CIO called for a national labor march on Detroit to put pressure on the owners. This call was widely circulated, and between 50 and 100 thousand unionists and activist marched through Detroit on Saturday June 20th, making this the largest rank-and-file mobilization of US labour in recent history.

A subsequent blockade of the plant was attacked by police and hired scab guards, causing over 60 strikers serious injuries, including brain damage from repeated beatings. The National Labor Relations Board has ruled in favor of the unions, stating that the newspapers have to hire all the strikers back to work. The newspaper owners reportedly laughed hard upon hearing this - and immediately appealed the decision. It might take years for a final ruling to be handed down. In the meantime the papers are still run by scabs and 2000 strikers are still out of work...

mexico

The Swiss transnational, F.Hoffman-La Roche AG. Has used a carrot and stick approach in its dealings with the union. When the union refused to agree to substantial outsourcing, the company fired 19 workers, recognised a protection union and pressured workers to join it, and

threatened workers that unless there were a change in union leadership they would be fired, they would receive no wage increases in the up-coming negotiations, and that the company would move its Mexico City production to Cuernavaca.

On the eve of a strike over the question of wage increases, the Mexican labour authorities (which had previously accepted a protection contract in violation of Mexican labour law) stepped in. They convinced the company to cease recognising the protection contract and convinced the union to agree to an internal union election at the offices of the board. The old union leadership, many of whom had been fired by the company, lost by one vote.

It appeared that the company intended to resolve all remaining conflicts by paying off the discharged workers and approving an extraordinary pay raise of 24%. But they did not stop there. They also began pressuring workers to accept severance pay and leave. The one person who refused to accede to company pressure, the General Secretary of the union who had just lost the election, refused the company's offer of \$180,000 pesos, or approximately \$22,500 U.S. dollars - an amazing amount of money for a worker in Mexico. The company then fired him.

They are asking that we send letters to the company, protesting the company's actions in firing Heladio Perez and its continued flagrant violation and disrespect for Mexican law. Letters to DA will be forwarded.

venezuela

In August public transport and other commercial activities have ground to a halt in the Venezuelan capital Caracas as the result of a general strike over low wages and gasoline price increases.

The 12-hour protest strike called by the Venezuelan Workers Confederation was carried out

without violence, although security forces kept guard outside government buildings. This was the biggest single labour action in the past eight years, coming 15 months after the government brought into effect an IMF-approved economic readjustment program that included sharp increases in prices of gasoline and other basic goods.

Public transport in Caracas, including the underground Metro, was halted, and stores and banks remained closed. The union called on workers to stay home to avoid confrontations. Spokesman Federico Ramirez estimated that the call to strike was heeded by 90 percent of the union's workers, adding "the response was immediate."

Unions are demanding wage increases promised by the private sector last month when labour reforms were approved by the government. The workers confederation estimates that 3 million Venezuelans do not earn enough to meet their basic needs.

australia

Protests broke out across Australia in response to the imprisonment of the veteran anarchist Lorenzo Kom'boa Irvin by immigration authorities, as he arrived in azzie



for a speaking tour. The internet proved useful in spreading the word and co-ordinating protest message to Australian embassies and other official offices. More on Lorenzo, the tour and the rise of racism in Australia in the articles on pages 16 and 17 of this issue. 

OLD GREEK FOOD FOR THOUGHT

After the death of Naram-Sin a series of rebellions took place which were ultimately put down. Ur-Nammu restored the state's authority and his son Shulgi reorganised and tightened up the state's bureaucracy, which was designed to prevent any further rebellions from becoming a threat. The next thing he did was to re-enshrine the Sumerian gods who had been rejected by the people, this made the people feel that a supernatural power was watching them and was on the side of the authorities.

Having established legitimacy, he now introduced new measures for measuring grain. To ensure the loyalty of the army he set about marrying off his daughters to the governors of Barahshe and Anshan. To placate the native Elamite (Iranian) population, who were a subject people, he had temples built to their gods at Susa. Now the whole territory was under an omnipotent ruler. A network of City-States was set up, each governed by an appointed governor, with organised communication between garrisons, to ensure rapid deployment of armed men should it again become necessary. Between these City-States, alliances and commercial agreements were often cemented by approved marriages.

Power was now highly centralised and the ruling elite owned all estates, factories, workshops and trading centres. Power was dispensed from the top downwards only, and implemented by the Kings Grand Vizier, who was the chief civil service bureaucrat. Lower down the bureaucratic scale, the Prefects, who could afford houses, asses and slaves, paid themselves salaries out of the taxes they levied on behalf of the king, and many became quite rich in spite of them having to regularly send cattle to the capital, Ur.

The temples, which were considered to be a necessary and integral part of the whole system also had their own bureaucratic structure: an Administrator or Prefect, an Archivist, a Registrar, a Tax recorder, an Army captain, a Works Manager, a Sub-registrar, a Post Manager, Throne Bearers, and Foremen. Alongside the Administrative bureaucracy was a growing Merchant Class who sought the favour of those higher up the scale, gave their full support to the system and got more and more wealthy.

At the bottom of the pyramid and sustaining it all as usual was the majority – the Serfs and Slaves.

DATE: 2100 BC

PLACE: UPPER MESOPOTAMIA

WHODUNNIT

FOR SERIOUS

PRACTICAL JOKERS

The new manager was threatening to sack everyone and anyone attempting to form a union. At a workers meeting it was unanimously agreed that the new boss should have his office completely refurbished. A woman with an apparent flair for amateur dramatics had turned up, and did a pretty stunning sketch involving the bosses secretary (Miss Teresa Blair). Innumerable telephone calls to office equipment companies followed, very expensive executive office furniture, computers, laser printers, photocopiers, filing cabinets, etc. Between titters, insisting upon delivery by a certain date and that a cheque would be available c.o.d. And it was all on behalf of the boss – no expense spared.

The office equipment companies suddenly found a valuable customer, and vans soon started arriving with various swish new office kit. Some, in the absence of the manager, was unpacked by office staff; 'well, how was I to know it wasn't officially authorised?'. Opened and disputed kit piled up in the manager's office.

Everywhere was chaos and expense. The other managers began to wonder whether the new manager had gone over the top with his grandiose ideas as to his own importance. They were having to cope with old substandard equipment. The questions turned to resentment. Soon it came to the notice of the Director who had to account to the share holders as to the running costs, which had become astronomical, known to all as the astronomical ones.

The manager in question was summoned to explain, he couldn't do

it satisfactorily. He became more seriously in question. His secretary was questioned but appeared to know nothing. Her name wasn't even "Blair".

Threats from office equipment suppliers were turning legal by now, adding to the general mayhem and computer box chaos. Various employees were questioned but were as bewildered as the bosses themselves. They appeared to know nothing and were puzzled and sympathetic. Well, definitely puzzled, and almost sympathetic..

Things eventually came to a head and, as an expedient, the manager was asked to leave. This was a very sad affair at which many a worker shed a tear. To this day the question crops up; "Who was that mysterious "Miss Blair"? Apparently, perhaps she never did work for the company, for good old (rich) BT traced the telephone calls after the debacle and it was found they had been made from a public call box. So that didn't help much in the investigation.

EPITAPH INSCRIPTION IN BIRO ON A MANAGER'S EMPTY DESK:

**AS ANARCHO-SYNDICALISTS,
WE THINK THIS WAS A
DOWNRIGHT NAUGHTY THING
TO DO TO A SAD,
MISUNDERSTOOD MANAGER
WHO WAS ONLY TRYING TO
CURRY FAVOUR WITH HIS
BOSS. GET BROWNY POINTS
FOR HARRASSING WORKERS,
AND SAFEGUARD THE
COMPANIES PROFITS**

Reviews

video:

**ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM:
History of FAUD,
German section of the IWA**
video: length: 33 minutes
(now available in English)
Cost: 15 DM

'Anarcho-syndicalism' was made by members of the present-day IWA section in Germany - the Freie Arbeiter Union (FAU). It would be good to see more productions of this sort that return the hidden past of the working class to the light of day. The film concentrates on Sommerda, an industrial town of 7,000 inhabitants where 2,000 were members of the FAUD, using a mix of historical analysis and the personal reminiscences of members active in the 1920's and '30s.

The FAUD was always a minority union in Germany, although its membership reached 170,000 in the early 1920's, the largest sections of its members being steelworkers (34,000 in 1923) and miners - 90% being won over to syndicalism after the first world war. You find out it was always rich with cultural and social activities and deeply involved in local communal and educational experiments. This caused antagonisms between those who saw FAUD as first and foremost an anarcho-syndicalist union, and those who increasingly divorced themselves from their social environment.

In the Ruhr, where the FAUD initially claimed 90,000 members, the problem was most prominent. The miners and metal workers rejected the FAUD policy of non-involvement in factory council elections. The fact that they received over 100,000 votes in the factory council elections here clearly shows their strength. The FAUD's reservations were tempered by the realisations that these were not revolutionary times, and that if not prepared to fight vigorously for day-to-day workplace gains along with radical cultural issues, they would cease to have relevance amongst the working class. The video also charts the FAUD's Women's leagues, and the initiative of the FAU in founding the International Working Men's Association in Berlin in 1922 - today's International Workers Association.

After the FAUD's destruction in 1933 by the Nazis, a sizeable core demonstrated their continuing determination and conviction. Resistance groups were formed, particularly in the Ruhr area, and illegal periodicals were smuggled in. In 1938, 88 anarcho-syndicalists were in a Ruhr area court charged with "acts preparatory to the commission of high treason". When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936,

FAUD members were there.

This video is a far from a comprehensive or balanced look at the FAUD: Cultural and social activities are visited, as is 'free love' and the role of women. However, of industrial organisation, there is next to nothing. Nonetheless, it is a fine attempt to reclaim some largely lost history.

To get hold of a copy, contact the following address: Thomas Beckman, Dortst. 13, D-16775 Woltsruh Germany.



music:

More of the Same The 1926 Committee

1997 from Norwich Solidarity Centre

Having been on the 'anarcho-folk' circuit for years, The 1926 Committee (and their earlier incarnation as The Proles), should be familiar to many readers. Always willing to play their part in the class struggle, it is no surprise that their

music is unapologetically political. To their credit their music both live and, on this new tape, is never one dimensional or dull. Lyrically they are at turns sharp, amusing and sensitive. Their style might best be described as energetic, with equal parts rock and folk, with various spices and flavourings added to good effect.

From the Latin American tinged Viva Zapata, to the undertones of anger in the excellent Attitude Problem, the ideas keep flowing. As a result of which, it can stand pretty sustained playing. One of the few "political" bands that won't date in the foreseeable future.



magazine: Spectre

Bxl 46, Rue Belliard 79-113, 1047
Brussels, Belgium.

Spectre is a "new international socialist review which will appear initially three times a year", it states in its Contents page. It is published in English and hopes to breach the narrow politics of the current Europe and actively supports solidarity and links between workers. The range of articles is very broad and is clearly non-sectarian. These encapsulate the dangers of so-called democracy in a federal Europe; some interview type articles on leftist parliamentary socialists; a discussion of Euro transport 'policy'; and the situation of women and feminism. Many readers of *Direct Action* will disagree with some of the strategies *Spectre* seems to suggest, but should take note of the clarity of articles and the good *Action!* page towards the end. There's even an invitation to write in with news and views and any paper that actively promotes solidarity is certainly worth having links with. Out in its first issue, *Spectre* is European-based - being produced in Brussels. Other than that, it is pretty anti-European really.

Almost every euro-sceptic left socialist in western Europe has an article on remarkably similar Maastricht issues. This is actually quite entertaining, since it is possible to draw out the different flavours of scepticism. And there is a nice piece on Poland.

books:

**The Motorcycle Diaries:
A Journey around South America**

Che Guevara.

Fourth Estate

ISBN 1-8702-399-4

**Che Guevara:
a revolutionary life.**

John Lee Anderson.

Bantam.

Two books about the same person, but completely different in scope and style.

The first, the Motorcycle diaries is basically written, not copied, from Ernesto Guevara's diary of a tour he took with his friend Alberto Grando around Latin America when he was in his early twenties. It details rather dully his activities begging places to sleep, drinking Mate and wine and discussing leprosy with various doctors they met. It's not a very exciting book, it is neither an interesting and descriptive travel book, nor particularly insightful to the young Che. Except that he was a fairly boorish arrogant young man, with some understanding and compassion to the suffering of the Amerindians, the poor peasant and the workers. It just didn't work for me as travelogue or diary, I just can not understand where all the glowing reviews came from. Unless they just read the blurb, that is a classic piece of work distilling out all the excitement of the book into a few lines.

Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life is a very different book. It is a big book, exhaustively researched (or so it seems) and well referenced. Starting from Ernesto Guevara's early life as a sickly child of an odd middle class Argentinean family never quite having the resources to live up to their social expectations. It traces him though his increasing centred and obsessive adolescence where he compensates for his chronic asthma by sheer will power. Academically able, he enters medical college and undertakes a number of excursions around South and Central America, the major one being the subject of the above diaries. He completes his six year course in three and once again sets out on his travels. In Bolivia he catches the aftermath of the 1952 National Revolution. In Guatemala he is present as the radical government there is overthrown by the US backed Castillo Armas. It is here where he begins to take shape as a revolutionary and begins to gravitate towards Marxism and a lifelong mistrust of the Yankis. Always well and widely read he reads more and more Marx and marxist material. Escaping to Mexico he meets and joins Fidel Castro's group of Cuban exiles as a doctor and sole non Cuban in the July 26 Movement. Also around this time (1954) he also rather begrudgingly marries his first wife Hilda Gadea, with what appears to be very little good grace. They have one daughter called Hildita. Mother and child are soon left behind as Che embarks on the

'Granma' to sail to armed struggle in the Cuban hills of the Sierra Maestra. It was a disastrous sailing and landing, arriving late and missing the supposed co-ordinated actions in Cuba. On top of this an ambush left the numbers of guerrillas at twenty two, with these few they set out to start the Cuban revolution. At this point perhaps only Che and Fidel Castro's brother Raul are communists or marxists of any solid description. To be clear they started part of the revolution, lots of others were working elsewhere in the cities, in exile and in other parts of the countryside. There was almost a rush to see which opposition group would successfully replace the corrupt dictatorship of Batista.

The book then details, and I mean details, the to-ing and fro-ing of the next three years. Lots of politics, lots of marching through mountain jungles, killing people, not killing people, being betrayed, killing people, CIA not able to make up its mind, Soviet Union not being able to make up its mind etc. It makes interesting reading, but basically after much manoeuvring and quite a bit of death Fidel Castro won the big prize, annoyed the US too much and became the Cuban communist party, much to Che Guevara's delight.

Following the revolution in 1959, and his being put in charge of the bank, Guevara marries Aleida de la Torre, with whom he has four children. Later being made a Government Minister and four years travelling the world as a roving ambassador for Cuba, Che began to look for excitement elsewhere. Taking the ideas from both his own writings and experiences in the Cuban revolution and the works of Mao he began to seek opportunities to ferment revolution. Failing to find anything closer to home he set off in secret to Congo to aid and abet the Congolese Liberation Army. The book and the Cubans quoted in it are very dismissive of the Congolese rebels, noting that they were ill trained, ill disciplined, intoxicated, riddled with venereal disease from frequent furloughs and generally lacked commitment and were cowardly in the face of any military confrontation. Given that these are the people, and some of the names are the same, who have just taken over the newly renamed Congo (Zaire) amid much jubilation amongst the international media, though with some rumours of mass slaughter, it would be interesting to hear more about this early episode in 1965/66. I for one know next to nothing about this period of African history and cannot do more than report what the book states.

Basically Che's period in Africa was a disaster. Finishing the debacle so far from home Guevara went to seek one nearer to home. As none of the local Communist Parties were keen on having him, this presented a diplomatic problem or two. With the eventual hope of spreading the revolution to Argentina, he eventually settled on Bolivia where, after training a very few of the more willing locals in Cuba and setting up a base, he set out in cognito to bring revolution

to the whole continent of South America. Unfortunately for Che, things didn't go too well. It all ended for Ernesto 'Che' Guevara on 8 October 1967, when he was finally captured injured by the Bolivian Army Rangers. He was shot on 9 October 1967 at the age of thirty nine, his hands removed and buried in secret.

His legacy still rumbles on amongst various Marxist armed groups still in Latin America. So far, only Cuba managed any form of successful revolution in even terms set by Marxists.

The book is, however, a fascinating insight into a man who became committed to international workers' solidarity whilst stuck in a Marxist/Maoist mind set. He comes across as a wholly unlikable character who was able to command great loyalty and respect from some of his comrades. He was however no great judge of situations or of people, as his increasingly shaky progress from bad to worse, from Congo to Bolivia shows. The biography is well written in a reasonably clear style, and yet should be detailed enough and with enough reference to suit the academically minded. Whilst the author claims not to be writing a hagiography, he undoubtedly has considerably more sympathy with Che and his politics and methods than I can muster. Elitist vanguardism where loyalty to the party is everything, above compassion, above humanity and above any sense of popular will. The failure of Che Guevara shows the dangers of the vanguard even if they don't get power. If you are convinced you are right and can convince a few dozen others, then that is all you need to launch your revolution Guevara style. You don't need to have the trust and support of the people you just need right on your side! The Cuban revolution happened because Batista was so unpopular that the peasants were willing to work with Fidel's group. It didn't happen in Bolivia because it was not perceived to be a popular movement against the regime, even if, as it undoubtedly was, the regime was unpopular.

So, if you are interested in the life and times of Che Guevara, then this book is probably one of the best places to start. Like the very best non fiction books it leaves you, after some seven hundred odd pages, wishing you knew more about the background to what went on, wishing you could just find that flaw you know is there. Then again after seven hundred odd pages I went off to read a novel, a nice light fluffy novel.



FILM

Get on the bus

Dir. Spike Lee
1996

Well, this is another.. Spike Lee film. I have only seen it once, and it may be because I was expecting it to be about the Million Man March, or maybe I just got out of bed the wrong side, BUT..

In fact, there was a Million Man March, and it was organised by Farrakhan, and it was in October 1995. The film starts with getting

on the bus with 20 Black Americans in LA, about to make the several day journey to the march. The journey seems to go on forever, and the question becomes, are they going to make it? The question is eventually answered, after a typically low key storyline slowly starts sorting itself out.

Undoubtedly, there are some good pieces of poignant, not too threatening, father and boy-coming-of-age type scenes and some rather planned but apparently impromptu speeches from bus passengers. Maybe I've been spoiled

by the realism of Ken Loache's tricks in this department, but it just wasn't happening for me, as just about anyone on the set might have said. The religion was bubbling away uncomfortably, as was a real sense of destiny and 'there's not a lot you can do about it'.

I suppose the March itself, with all its baggage, was what I really wanted to see, whereas all we got was news footage of it. And that wasn't enough. Still, as I'm not exactly per-

(cont. next page)

music: LARD - Pure Chewing Satisfaction

Alternative Tentacles 1997 (VIRUS 199CD)

'Pure Chewing Satisfaction' is the third release from this 'ongoing project' between Jello Biafra (ex-Dead Kennedys vocalists, radical voice in the moshpit for decades and the punk rockers Chomsky) and Ministry men Paul Baker and Al Jourgensen. It comes in the usual high entertainment value packaging expected from a release associated with Biafra, from the cover photo of toilet paper as luxury towel to the pets and cutouts from papers and magazines, if eye straining, reading. It more releases in design and the booklet follows on broadsheets issued with occasional previous releases. Also in the booklet are the lyrics. Jello Biafra has always shown an unbalanced mix of an- passion, paranoia and slanted humour. Mocking, outright insulting the right, religious bigots of all creeds, the inflexible left and the cosy liberals alike. Admittedly most of his spleen is reserved for the American religious right born again bigots, cops, and the rich and mighty behind the U.S. Government. Along his way Jello Biafra has put out some of the most radical and fun politics around. Though the early Dead Kennedys singles Holiday in Cambodia and California Uber Alles from the thrill a minute 'Fresh Fruit for Rotten Vegetables' album set a standard for political punk/hardcore never really matched, even by the DKs themselves, despite three excellent further LPs ('Plastic Surgery Disasters', 'Frankenchrist' and 'Bedtime for Democracy'), one essential collection of out-takes, rarities and classics ('Give Me Convenience or Give Me Death') and one E.P. ('In God We Trust Inc.'). Biafra's work has always shown his caustic wit, conspiracy obsessiveness and underlying current that people can and should stop trying to live by how much they can scam. This follows through all his post DK releases, the four spoken word LPs ('No More Cocoon', 'High Priest of Harmful Matter', 'I Blow Minds for a Living', and 'Beyond the Valley of the Gift Police'), the joint ventures with DOA ('Last Scream of the Missing Neighbours' - his best post DKs work and their best by far), the ever glorious Nomeansno ('The Sky is Falling and I Want My Mummy') and good ole country boy Mojo Nixon ('Prairie Home Invasion') and the projects and one offs such as old and odd The Witch Trails, Tumor Circus and of course Lard.

Biafra's apparent paranoia can be forgiven by anyone who is even remotely aware of the society we and he lives in - the US may lead the way but the UK is jogging along behind - and, as happens to anyone who loudly and publicly sticks their head up and points out the shortcomings of the great greedy and corrupt, Biafra has had a few run ins with the powers that be and would be in his time. Like the infamous 'Penis Landscape' court case which broke the DKs. A case where the band, the label, the distributor, the shop and some one who was passing in the street were all prosecuted because some parent got upset her son had purchased a punk LP ('Frankenchrist') which contained a poster of H.R. Geiger's painting, a rather ugly and disturbing piece of art previously shown in galleries in the States. The persecution was backed by the PMRC (Parents Music Resource Centre) a leading light of which was the very punk rock named, if not spirited, Tipper Gore, wife to the current Vice President of the US of A. Biafra and friends won the case, well they didn't lose, but the court costs broke them

for a while. In addition to this and constant sniping from the right and Christian born again bigots he was not long ago beaten badly by a group of numbskull punks because he had apparently sold out! Despite that he has done more for a loosely anarchic punk than almost anyone I can think of. Even if he hadn't spent years shouting about the unpopular things in the US like the phoniness of having a war on drugs when your pet Contras aided and abetted by the CIA are heavily linked to running drugs such behaviour is moronic to be polite and brief. And now the label (Alternative Tentacles) he set up and which has given (well sold) us such glories as Nomeansno and Alice Donut is under threat again. This time it's over a some cover art from a long ago album by Wisconsin's Crucifucks. 'Ours will be done' depicted a picture of a dead cop lying next to his prowl car. The story has it that this was taken from a Philadelphia Police Department promotional poster (don't ask me) and was amended to look like it was the local police dept. Winding up and offending the local police appears to be the reason for the existence of the band. The Philadelphia Police are now years down the line suing for millions of dollars for breach of copyright. A strange way to do it, starting your case with a press conference and a press release giving a whole load of publicity to a small obscure and not very good defunct punk band of whom probably only me and a few dozen other sorry souls ever bother to buy any records.

I suppose I had better tell you something about Pure Chewing Satisfaction then. At eight tracks and under forty minutes it's not quantity value release. As intimated above the subject matter is the usual Biafra range: from War Pimp Renaissance where the arms race goes solo and promotes death around the world; through I Wanna be a Drug-Sniffing Dog cops, customs officers and born agains getting off on abusing power; Moths society breaks you up and drags you down 'we're not in Kansas anymore'; Generation Execute death penalty as entertainment; Faith, Hope and Treachery the Reagan generation bred on greed, self, mistrust and blaming others; Peeling Back the Foreskin of

Liberty gun nuts in their own conspiracy driven world; Mangoat err... possibly about a radioactive goat, maybe; and Sidewinder which may or may not be about surviving the collapse of human life or eco-catastrophe or something. Musically, it's just about another Ministry style industrial metal LP, not as awesome as the first Lard LP ('Last Temptation of Reid'), but never the less pretty fine. Bludgeoning riffs over fast frantic and heavy bass and drums, on top of which is Biafra distinctive

voice. The only exception is the final track which is more reminiscent of later Revolting Cocks (another band closely related to Ministry) and therefore in my book a far groovier track. If you like Biafra and/or Ministry then you should at least tape this off a friend (and read the booklet whilst you are at it). If you are interested in the idea, but not sure start with something better, any Dead Kennedys LP, the first Lard LP or the Jello Biafra/DOA collaboration.

And finally, does anyone know if Alternative Tentacles UK office is still up and running? No mention on the sleeve and the website's gone. Any information welcome.

(cont. from previous page)

suading you to go and see it, I might as well spill the beans. Do not read on if you would like no spillage to take place. Yes, they never get there, because one of the bus passengers dies of a heart attack. That's about the sum total of action, aside from the wayward adolescent-new-found father bit. I stayed and didn't demand a refund. Bits were even entertaining... I just can't remember which.



magazine: angry people

PO Box 108
St Peters, NSW
Australia

Angry people is written by and for angry people. It is the organ of the organisation of the same name in australia, the people who organised Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin's recent debacle speaking tour (See article 'What fair go?' in this issue).

My first impression was; 'it's like the old Class War but in glossy magazine format'. It is heavy on the classical 'no-compromise' graphics rules, which state that all usable graphics must be of a demo, a large black line-drawn in-er-face cartoon, or the police (preferably seriously wounded, dead or otherwise indisposed).

However, this is a minor criticism and the content makes up for it, with a good mix of material, and a pretty forward looking prospect. The issue I had for review (#14) had articles on racism, racism again, women, prison, salvation army (see review in these pages, of related material), Lorenzo, Bougainville, and 'the case for community control'. The main brunt of the hatred and anger seems to be the police and politicians, and who can blame them?

film:

Crash

Dir. David Cronenberg
1997

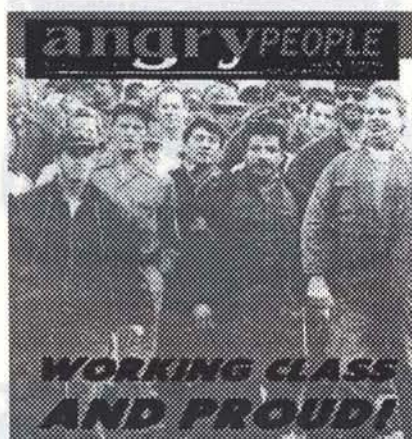
Most people will be aware of this film because of the completely unjustified moral outrage it has generated, from the likes of Virginia Bottomley (who didn't even bother to watch it), the Evening Standard, the Daily Mail and Westminster Council. Ironically, this generated an enormous amount of interest and free publicity for the film, and was probably responsible for getting a lot more 'bums on seats' than would have otherwise been the case. More, in fact, than the film justifies in terms of sheer quality; because it is a pretty average movie, certainly when compared to other Cronenberg releases such as "Dead Ringers" and "Naked Lunch".

The film covers similar ground as other Cronenberg works, which examine relationships between people in the late twentieth century, an era of panic over sexual 'plagues', increasing technological intervention in conception, pregnancy and birth, and increasing drug use. Cronenberg, though, makes these points in a highly fetishistic and even grotesque way.

Crash is a fairly simple movie. An emotionally alienated couple (James Spader & Deborah Unger) become involved with another man (Elias Koteas) following a car accident. They become drawn into a group of car crash survivors, who are sexually aroused by the crashes, live simulations of famous wrecks and videos of simulated accidents because, as they explain, of the "ultimately violent intensity" of the experience. The plot, such as it is, is primarily sexual-with the sex lives of the participants building up to a climax when Spader drives his wife off the road and makes love to her in the wreckage. Although there are a lot of sex scenes in the movie (nine in all), and the context within which they are set is disturbing, the film is in no way pornographic. Even the scene which caused Westminster Council so many problems, where Spader makes love to an accident scar in Rosanna Arquette's leg, is tastefully handled.

Most importantly, the characters are pretty impossible to like or identify with; they appear to be a completely one dimensional, boring and unhappy bunch, unable to interact with other human beings except through the medium of car crashes.

If the film's detractors had bothered to watch it, thought about the ideas that lie behind it and considered the context in which the sex scenes were set, they would have realised that it is a cautionary and moral tale. If anything, the film is a warning against the dangers of alienation caused by modern technology and society, rather than being a celebration of extreme sexual fetishism, as our self-appointed moral guardians would have it.



Starvation Army

Skeleton Army Pub., Sydney.

The mock-up salvation army front didn't catch me out. I could tell straight away it wasn't the real thing, as the paper quality wasn't good enough. The format of this modest A5 number is excellent. It is subtitled '12 reasons to reject the salvation army', and that's exactly what you get; 12 reasons, all in bite sized chunks; some of which are treated in some depth (2 pages), others of which aren't.
(cont. over page...)

book:

The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939

Agustín Guillamón

Translation by Paul Sharkey

AK Press, Edinburgh/San Francisco 1996

ISBN 1-873176-54-6

This is the kind of book which could easily make you want to line it up in the eccentric curio's section of your anarchist bookshelf, containing a host of minutely-focused tomes on tiny movements and insignificant groupuscules. The introduction to the English language edition of this historical account of the Friends of Durruti organisation which emerged in opposition to what it understood as CNT-FAI reformism in the 1936-9 revolution, only partially saves it from such a fate.

Unless you're well read on the Spanish revolution, the introduction will make little sense. This is a pity since the volume does contain a large variety of previously unpublished material from and on the FoD. What follows the introduction is a detailed account by A. Guillamón of the emergence of the organisation and the fate it suffered at the hands of Stalinism and those in the CNT intent on pursuing a collaborationist line.

The tone of the volume, however, oscillates between promoting the FoD as the only real revolutionary organisation, in opposition to all and sundry, to an ineffectual group that could do nothing but hang on to the coat tails of the CNT. While the study denies any meaningful linkages with other leftist groups or Trotskyists and the like, it berates the FoD for not having taken its revolutionary zeal to heart and 'taken power' along with the revolutionaries in CNT and other leftist groups such as the POUM. After a few pages, the reader realises this is the message of the

The Friends of Durruti Group: 1937-1939

Agustín Guillamón



book. The old chestnut of the failure of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism is paraded once more in the pages of this short book and is sealed by the concluding remark that "The Spanish revolution was the tomb of anarchism as a revolutionary theory of the proletariat" (p. 108). If Guillamón had analysed the international situation, the political divisions in the CNT, the realities of Stalinism, the fact that half of the anti-fascist part of Spain was not under CNT control, or even the way in which this power was 'to be taken', then the argument might have been more convincing. But as it stands, it is no advance on all the rest of the Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist analyses of the Spanish revolution, and does not even reach the interest or the sophistication of many.

(*'Starvation Army' from previous page*)

Point six is 'stupid outfits and poor musicianship' which is indeed pretty self explanatory but not, I feel, a reason to reject them in and of itself. Why not? Well, I have been known to practice stupid musicianship myself from time to time..

On a more serious issue, the Sally Anne Brigade is apparently Australia's 'largest and best known charity'. Here, a picture is painted of a quaint old charity group. Then it is smashed and a portrayal of the real salvation army takes over: a racist, hierarchi-



Twelve Reasons To Reject
The Salvation Army

cal, homophobic, exploitative, right wing cult.

Based on historical accounts, media reports and the Salvation Army's own newspapers and texts, the starvation army paints a stark picture of a puritanical, narrow and dangerous organisation committed to curtailing personal freedoms, oppressing minorities, and supporting the political and economic status quo.

And if you don't believe it, you can always check the 72 references (yes, it is a 12 page A5 pamphlet!).



Dear DA

baaa

Ms Lamb.



Sheep authors

have spoken without disturbing the 'official' program.

giving the press a story. The HHW went away with far more donations and support than they would have got if given a 5 minute slot as requested! Direct Action really works.

HS.

Dear DA,

gap years, grants and growing debts

Dear DA,

The dilly-dallying of the Labour Party before this year's 'A' levels is a pitiful sight to behold. As if it is not bad enough for those seeking entry into higher education to experience the nerve racking wait for their results, Labour has to create so much confusion over the payment of fees by students who take a year out.

But of course this confusion marks a more sinister process. The introduction of fees (of 1000 pounds per year) truly does signify the end of free education. Not that it has been free for many years, with grants frozen and many full time students having

Education should be something different than a merry-go-round of market forces, underfunded colleges, stressed university staff. Although we are a small organisation, we will continue to raise the banner of really free education for all, and the fight for universities not to provide fodder for capitalism but as a place where knowledge, culture and ideas flow and are used for the benefit of all.

A Lecturer who is a member of the Education Workers' Network.

DA.

First, I wouldn't bother writing you a letter if I wasn't seriously impressed with your magazine. I'll tell you why when I've told you what I want to say.

The problem with the anarchism movement (I use anarchism because it is more meaningful than anarchist - which has lost all real meaning due to the misconception of the media, public and 'anarchists') is that it is not active enough. It does the right things but in the wrong amounts. If activity was higher we could have a revolution.

There are two reasons for this failure and inaction. Firstly, activists lie about their level of activity. They make excuses, avoid and generally get lazy about the task of organising. Secondly, there are nowhere near enough activists to do the necessary work. The two are related; activist burnout and apathy stems from trying to climb too high and steep a mountain for too long.

Back to your magazine. If there is one thing I detest about activists it is their propensity to be insular and inward looking. This is the main reason why they are few; they operate in cliques and don't talk to the world. DA has less off-putting language and is more hard hitting and to the point. We need politics without boring ourselves to death. I hope your efforts bring a higher standard to the propaganda around anarchism, and I hope this in turn swells the movement with active and committed (but sensible and open) people. Without it, anarchism will remain in a coma for the foreseeable future.

Anarchosmurf

(letters cont'd overpage..)

beached in brighton

For a first-time attendee like myself, the Transport and General Workers Union (T&G) Conference was somewhat of an eye-opener. The debate over the Liverpool Docks Dispute proves the point. The T&G leadership's lack of support for the 320 sacked dockers is widely known. In fact the support and solidarity demonstrated by dockers internationally should put the GEC to shame. Yet this is not the case. In its "Executive Explanatory Statement on Liverpool Docks" the GEC paint the dockers' actions as a threat to the union's funds, because the sackings came after the dockers took secondary action without a ballot (an action made illegal by the Tory anti-union laws). The T&G refused to give them official backing. Funds are sacrosanct but members' jobs are not! The statement goes on to congratulate the GEC on the support(?) they have already shown the dockers and their families and on the derisory offer of 41 jobs back, which they negotiated with the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company.

Then trick number 2 is pulled out of the hat. When the vote came, a show of hands clearly rejected the statement. Yet the chair declared it carried! Not only that, the whole GEC tried to walk off the platform. Not surprisingly pandemonium broke out as delegates refused to lie down and be trampled over by a GEC which was quite blatantly prepared to ignore a democratic decision not to tow their line. The outcome was a properly counted vote the next morning. And, to no one's surprise, the GEC's statement was roundly rejected by 285 votes to 183 - it was that close! This naturally brought cheers and applause from not only the dockers and their supporters in the gallery but from all those present who put basic solidarity above union funds, or the "need" not to embarrass the Labour government.

Then came trick number 3: the motions relating to the Liverpool Docks Dispute put to the vote with no debate. This was obviously a result of some back-room dealing between the GEC, who knew they faced defeat, and dockers' representatives. It enabled the GEC to re-establish control despite their defeat. In the event 2 proposals (one calling on the government to end casualisation of jobs in the docks, and

one calling on the government to intervene to get the Liverpool dockers their jobs back) were given a GEC recommendation and were duly passed. The other motions (calling for the dispute to be made official, for the GEC to give whatever support the dockers ask for and for the union to organise widespread support) were rejected as recommended. In short, the dockers' stewards got so easily duped into accepting no debate.

Having survived one episode when the conference threatened to get out of the GEC's control, there were only a few other motions passed against GEC recommendations to reject. Overall the whole thing was a very highly stage-managed affair. Another successful manoeuvre was to ensure that as few controversial motions as possible got debated, by putting most of them at the end of the agenda. So when the usual proposal came to wind up at Friday lunchtime much of this stuff fell off the agenda. During the debates the Executive had as much time as they wanted to give their view, but anyone speaking from the floor, including proposers and seconders of motions, had only a few minutes to get their point across. It also meant a great deal of waffle and one who waffled more than most was Graham Stevenson, National Secretary of the Passenger Transport trade group. He had plenty of rousing words for busworkers and angry words for the bus companies. "It's

pay-back time for the bus companies"; busworkers "have had enough" and "are going to demand what they deserve". He told us how 93% of busworkers across the national bus companies had voted to support co-ordinated strike action if the bus companies remain unwilling

to improve terms and conditions. Maybe after 11 years of de-regulation, declining wages, increasing hours, and ever more dangerous working conditions, we can at last look forward to a fight back by busworkers. So, busworkers should beware. While Stevenson can make fine noises at T&G conferences, as my previous dealings with him have shown, he can also be relied upon to stick the dagger in your back.

Another example of rousing, but empty words came in the debate on the 3 day strike by cabin crews at British Airways,

which took place during the week of the conference. Despite profits of £6 billion, BA wants staff to accept a two year wage freeze in an effort to achieve £42 million savings from the cabin crew budget. When the union put forward alternative proposals to make the savings they were rejected out of hand and BA

immediately signed an agreement for the new contracts with the scab union, Cabin Crew 89 (Scabbin' Crew, more like). They then proceeded to impose the new terms and conditions on T&G members who make up a 95% majority of crews. Clearly BA wants to drive down wages in its efforts to make sure it is one of the major players who will dominate the industry after the current wave of mergers has run its course. Apart from its efforts on the public opinion front, all that seems to be in the T&G's repertoire is the tried, tested and ultimately morale-sapping series of short strikes. As we have seen, BA are prepared to spend millions on breaking this strike and are well prepared to sit out one, two and even three day strikes. It would have seemed wiser to keep the pressure on rather than let BA regroup. But workers holding the bosses to ransom is out of fashion in the current media friendly climate. Instead negotiation and keeping control of the dispute firmly in the hands of T&G officials is the name of the game.

The T&G has something of a left wing reputation. However, this label is more to do with media perceptions which dub anyone who is not sufficiently "modern" as some sort of ogre. The T&G, like all of today's unions, sees industrial action as something to be avoided at all costs. When it can't, it exerts such a firm control that any action is kept to a minimum and, more often than not, achieves nothing more than dissipating whatever anger had been built up in the first place. And when workers go ahead and take control themselves, like the Liverpool dockers, they are abandoned immediately. Hardly the sort of image that "left wing" conjures up, is it?

Let's hope, then, that it's less than another 75 years before working class people outgrow the T&G. Instead of settling for the organisations of Blair, Morris, or any other careerist politician or bureaucrat, we must build organisations which will look after OUR interests.

T&G Observer.



Beyond the



Pension Rip-off

As the dust settles over the 'missold' pensions debacle, it is clear that state funded pensions are to end. Where to now?

All the major political parties now agree that Britain can no longer afford the cost of a universal state pension provision. The government's current review of pensions is a tool being used to pave the way for the phasing out of state pensions. This will be disastrous for the vast majority, however far we are from pensionable age.

The reason given for why we can no longer afford state pensions is the growing number of pensioners in an ageing population. As the number of pensioners increases, the proportion of the population in work falls. This means that the state faces escalating cost of pension provision at a time of falling income. As the next century dawns, the cost of state pensions will far outstrip the income gained from national insurance contributions.

Their favoured solution to this problem is a switch from state provision to private provision. The current state system, under which each new generation of workers funds the pensions of the generation of workers who have gone before them, will end. It will be replaced with a system under which each individual worker funds their own pensions, through saving, in the form of a personal pension.

Such a switch from collective to private provision was proposed in the Tories'

pension plans, entitled "Basic Pensions Plus", in the run up to the last election. Under the Tory proposals, younger people would no longer pay into the state scheme. Instead they would be forced to take out a personal pension, leaving future governments only having to provide for the those unable to afford a private pension: the unemployed, low paid, carers, etc.

When the Tories announced the "Basic Pension Plus" scheme, it was attacked by the Labour party as a plan to privatise pensions- which was certainly the case. However, Labour offered no real alternative to the Tory proposals. Their attacks on the Tories amounted to little more than differentiation of policy by propaganda. They did give cast

iron guarantees that the state pension would be retained. This was very good for sound bite purpose, but in the context of British pension policy, amounted to little more than privatisation through the back door. For the reality is that Britain has been moving towards mass private pension provision for the past twenty years.

history of decline

The slide towards private pensions began with the election of the Tories in 1979. From the outset the Tories set about introducing changes designed to undermine Britain's already weak state pension scheme. The most crucial of these

was to stop pensions rising in line with average earning. Instead, the Tories linked pension increases to price rises. As average earnings rise faster than prices, in effect this meant that the real value of pensions has steadily fallen when compared to earning, to the extent that the basic state pension is now only worth 14% of average earning and is set to fall to only 9% of earning by 2030. Given that the basic pension is already below the amount paid out to those on income support, the reality is that by the turn of the century the state pension will be worthless.

Faced with the prospect of having to survive retirement on a poverty income, workers have increasingly turned to private pension schemes, to such a degree that Britain now has one of the highest levels of private pension cover in the world.

If Labour really wanted to reverse this drift towards private pensions, they would first have to restore the real value of existing pensions. Then ensure that, in future, pensions rose in line with average earning. With state pensions set at levels that can guarantee a comfortable standard of living in old age, the need to turn to the private sector for extra pension cover would diminish. This happens in most of the developed world, where state pensions are set as high as 80% of average earning, making private pension cover unnecessary.

Unfortunately, the plain truth is that Labour will not increase state pensions.



work to live: pensions

Britain no longer faces a future funding crisis, and not surprisingly, they want it to stay that way. The value of state pensions has declined to such an extent, financing future funding is no longer a problem. If Labour was to reverse the trend towards private pension provision by restoring the value of the state pension, Britain's funding projections would look quite different. Britain would be placed in a very similar position to that of the USA, Germany and Japan. Here, governments do face a pension funding time bomb, resulting from the growing number of pensioners and no plan to destroy state pensions.

The position of the USA, Japan and Germany is similar to that of most industrialised countries, all of whom are looking for solutions to the impending pension funding crisis. The choice facing these countries is stark. They can go the way of Britain and switch from state to private provision. *There are other solutions:* to increase taxes to redistribute wealth toward the growing pension population for one. However, in Britain the choice has already been made. All the major political parties have adopted the free market solution. The option of the state redistributing wealth, through progressive taxation, to fund pensions, is no longer on the political agenda. The private sector option has been chosen. And yet all the parties agree that the informal drift towards private pensions which has been taking place in Britain cannot continue. It is now accepted that the Government will have to legislate in order to control and regulate the change to private sector provision.

labour's quandary

The argument, as to what form this legislation should take, is the only real difference between the political parties. The Tory solution is relatively straight forward. They would end state provision for young workers, forcing them to take out private sector pensions. This would gradually run down the state sector until the point would be reached where all those in full-time employment would have private cover. The Labour Party are more cautious. They are uneasy about the element of compulsion and are toying with the idea of regulating the increasingly unpopular private pension sector. It is because of these doubts that they have set up the pensions review.

a sudden stock market crash will see the value of pensions come tumbling down

The problem Labour faces is that, though they may have doubts about forcing people to take out private pensions, experts agree that if the private sector is successfully to administer pensions, then this element of compulsion is necessary. This view is shared by Labour's own pension guru, the minister in charge of reforming the welfare state, Frank Field, who favours compulsory private pensions. Labour will probably draw up guidelines to try to ensure that personal pensions are made more flexible and attractive. The hope will then be that, faced with having to depend on a state pension of no real worth, the overwhelming majority of people will leave the state scheme in favour of the private sector. This leaves the way open for the state pension to be incorporated with income support into catch-all benefit for the unemployed and low paid.

There is also a hidden reason why Labour may introduce compulsory private pensions. It has long been argued that Britain's pitiful level of investment is due to the lack of funds being available in the form of saving. When compared with places like Japan, Britain saves very little. A number of reports, the NatWest's "A Changing Nation" and the Demos report "Saving Sense," to name just two, all argue that workers should be forced to save more by introducing compulsory personal pensions. The economic argument is that, with more saving, loans for investment would be cheaper, so Britain's overall investment would rise. The Tories rejected these arguments on the grounds that saving levels should be a matter of individual choice. The saving argument has found much more favour, however, with the instinctively more authoritarian Labour Government, as a strengthening argument for compulsory pensions.

bigger picture

What effect will this switch from state to private provision have on people? Those in favour of the switch argue that the private sector is more efficient and, as such, will deliver better value. The truth is the 'inefficiencies' are there, in different places. Also, the switch to private provision can only lead to greater divisions within society. Those excluded from private provision, through lack of income, will be dependent on ever falling levels of welfare benefits, resulting in increasing numbers of the working class being forced into poverty.

Those able to afford private provision will find the cost of their pensions continuing to rise. The reality of the free market is that a small number of pension companies will come to dominate. These companies will come together and fix prices, safe in the knowledge that the state will compel workers to accept whatever rate they choose to charge. Given the record of the private sector for overcharging, this is a truly frightening thought.

The other major problem with private pension provision, is the increasing instability of world finance. Pension schemes are little more than savings invested by companies on the individual's behalf, in the stock market and, increasingly, on currency speculation. The size of individual pensions will be dependent on the value of the stock and currency markets. A sudden stock market crash will see the value of pensions come tumbling down.

real solutions

Clearly the reasons changes are taking place in pension provision are complex. But fundamentally, the changes from state to private provision are part of the general move towards the free market now sweeping the world. The danger for the left lies in accepting the free market argument, that in a global market, any form of state regulation within national boundaries is impossible. Despite increased international competition, Britain's overall wealth continues to grow. If the wealth produced was distributed more evenly, there is no reason why a decent state pension, available to all, could not be introduced in Britain.

The demand for universal state provision of pensions should form the basis of any pensions campaign. But this demand for decent pensions should only be the starting point of any campaign. There is a fundamental issue here about the way society views elderly people. They are increasingly portrayed as a burden to be pushed on to the margins of society. In the past, the elderly have been seen, as people deserving respect, entitled to a decent standard of living after a lifetime of work. With economic change comes changing perceptions. The elderly are *now* portrayed as a drain on resources, being no longer capable of making any worthwhile contribution to society. This ever



Health cheque

increasing marginalisation of older people stems directly from the undemocratic nature of capitalism. In a democratic society, the notion of "the pensioner" would no longer be relevant. Individuals would be able to contribute to society, by participating in the democratic process on equal terms, regardless of age. Not least by collectively deciding what goods and services society should produce and how production would be organised. Work under such a collective system would take on new meaning. With control of the workplace, work would no longer be seen as a burden to be endured, but rather as a challenging and creative process which would be a source of pleasure in itself. As a creative process, work would no longer be something to escape from through retirement, but something that would be pursued in different forms throughout life. This democratic inclusive society has little in common with the present capitalism system. Under capitalism, the value of people is measured in terms of their productive capacity. Being considered unproductive by capitalism on the grounds of age increasingly means having to endure a falling income, little public provision, and increasingly hostile attitudes. Little wonder that in such a world the aged are retreating into the isolation of their homes.

The answer lies not in treating the elderly as victims, nor in simply increasing the value of state pensions (though undeniably a useful first step). But rather, in the creation of a truly democratic society, under which the elderly can fully participate in and make their contribution based on a lifetime's experience. 

it was discovered that the company had imprisoned healthy people in its psychiatric hospital until payments from their insurance company ran out

Private medicine American style has been hitting the headlines again for all the wrong reasons. Columbia/HCA Healthcare is embroiled in a scandal involving overbilling with some 500 federal agents investigating the company. Columbia/HCA, which boasts profits of 900m dollars for the first six months of this year, is hardly the first company from the "for-profit" health care sector to run into trouble. In 1994, National Medical Enterprise paid out over 380m dollars to settle claims, after it was discovered that the company had imprisoned healthy people in its psychiatric hospital until payments from their insurance company ran out. In recent years clinical-testing laboratories have been fined a total of \$800m for overcharging. While Humana, a

pioneer of for-profit healthcare, spent much of the 1980s besieged by investigators and lawsuits.

Ironically "for-profit" healthcare was introduced to end the widespread corruption of the fee-for-service system which tied

doctors incomes to the number of procedure performed. A system, you will be shocked to hear, that resulted in around a third of unnecessary operations being performed. Who said profit and healthcare cannot be mixed.

We would no want are readers worrying about the problems faced by America private medical companies, so we want to inform you that help is at hand. Professor Regina Herzlinger of Harvard Business School, thinks American hospitals could learn a thing or two from Macdonald's. She points to Macdonald's ability to concentrate on speed, consistency and value for money. She is full of praise for the Macdonald's chip which world wide is a standard 9/32 of an inch thick, crisp

and fluffy and only take a minute to cook. She argues that hospitals should copy Macdonald's standardisation methods and use their step-by-approach to delivering hamburgers.

Regina calls her revolutionary approach to healthcare disease management through "focused factory" methods. Unfortunately for the Prof. the firm that had taken up her ideas and was considering introducing trials was the above Columbia/HCA. It seems that they had a last minute change of heart and decided that straightforward fraud was a better option for making money. But fear not Professor we have an idea for you. Why not pop your ideas in the post to Tony Blair, the Labour party is always on the look-out for new ideas,

especially if it involves more use of the free market. Just think Labour could get rid of the problem of the Health Service by flogging the lot off to Macdonald's. That way we could all look to a future in which it was not just their food that is killing us.



The American government has reluctantly released details of the CIA-sponsored coup in 1954 that overthrew Guatemala's "democratically" elected leftist government. The CIA's planning included a number of assassinations. To make sure the job was done properly, they drew up a training manual. Gems from the manual include "The specific technique employed will depend upon a large number of variables, but should be constant on one point: death must be absolutely certain". To make sure the unsophisticated South Americans got it right, they included a number of suggestions. One of which stated "absolute reliability is obtained by severing the spinal cord in the cervical region". Thank god for the land of the free (sic sic). 

What is the Kate Sharpley Library?

The KSL was named in honour of Kate Sharpley, a First World War anarchist and anti-war activist - one of the countless 'unknown' members of our movement so ignored by 'official historians' of anarchism.

We are dedicated to giving the anarchist movement a true view of it's origins. The Library, the largest collection of Anarchist material in England, is made up of donations from comrades of books, pamphlets, newspapers and other materials. We always welcome donations, in any language and are in the process of cataloguing the English language materials. We have a record second to none for republishing lost aspects of Anarchist history.

Details of our pamphlets and bulletin subscription are available - send an s.a.e. to:

KSL, BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX

A chapter for change?

Following years of Conservative refusal to sign the Social Chapter, Labour have signed it, and it will bring about a revolution in the British workplace. Or not.

Incidentally, it won't be implemented until 1999, but anyway, what will it really mean and what does Tony Blair think of "workers' rights"?

You've guessed. The European Social Chapter, despite all the fuss over the years in Westminster and many newspapers, will bring minimal benefits to workers. The Chapter has only a couple of measures of any significance.

The first requires large companies to establish "works councils" at which elected workers and management regularly sit around a table. This will only occur in companies employing more than 1,000 people, or those employing more than 1,500 in two member states.

The sales' pitch for works councils is that workers will have a say in their company, that we will be "informed and consulted". The reality as lived in Europe is that elected workers are simply informed and dictated to by management. Works councils are considered an attack on workers' organisation by any European union worth its salt. British unions so keen to have works councils over here, will quickly be further transformed into management mouthpieces and find that any influence they hoped for is non-existent.

The second directive entitles new parents to three months unpaid leave. This is great when you consider that currently fathers have as little as three days or less leave granted them at such a time. For most, however, this changes nothing, unpaid leave is a luxury many cannot afford at a time when life's financial demands dramatically increase.

Labour is keen to comply with the 48-hour week Working Time Directive,

which is likely to be brought in shortly. Yet, depending on what form the UK legislation takes, many employers have indicated that they will seek exemption through a loophole on the grounds that the nature of their business makes compliance impractical. Others may "encourage" (and we know what that means) workers to sign an agreement to work for more than 48 hours. This directive also includes the right to three weeks' paid annual holiday. No mention of how much pay for it, and the real downside will come when employers start regarding three weeks as all we deserve, not a minimum.

Labour's part-time promise

Labour's manifesto of last year openly and clearly stated "we recognise the value of part-time workers and the need for equity with full time workers". Hardly a radical statement, and one which, if addressed, would hardly bring chaos to the economy. Yet here is a matter that urgently needs attention - only 43 per cent of part-time workers receive the hourly pay rate of those working full-time alongside them. In addition, part-timers are often forced to work nights, not receive sick pay, and get none of the full-timers paid holidays or bonuses.

Two million part-time workers can be fired at the drop of a hat because they are not protected by unfair dismissal legislation. Employers know the remainder, whilst protected in theory, can often be sacked without comeback because they are too poor to afford lawyers and are not members of a union.

Just before the election, and faced with the whisper that the Sunday Times newspaper might run a story condemning any pledge to part-time workers, Labour acted quickly by ditching its manifesto commitment.

National papers were swiftly informed by the Labour Party press office that it

New Labour, new deal, or new name same game?

had bravely faced-down union "demands" to extend workers' rights. Employment rights and dismissal rights pledges for part-timers were gone in an instant.

The Labour Party spokesmen explained that they would not bow to pressure - except, that is, from a right-wing newspaper.

A decision of this importance and taken with such speed, could only have come from one person, Tony Blair himself. After visiting in the run-up to the election a Croydon telecommunications firm which pays employees £4 an hour and doesn't recognise unions, Tony Blair was asked "Is this a company of the future?". "Sure", he replied. "It's investing in its employees and treating them fairly".

New Labour Same Boss

It might well be a New Labour, but a New Britain? Clearly neither Westminster nor Europe hold out any hope for "workers' rights". Equal rights for part-time workers is a must. When working at the same job, lesser pay and conditions are totally unacceptable - an insult to every workers' sense of justice and dignity. Action by ourselves in our workplaces and across our industries is a crucial. Politicians may well run scared at the whisper of a newspaper story, but concerted and determined working class action for equal rights would certainly make them and our bosses think again. 

Solidarity Federation pamphlet Works' Councils in Britain - Lessons from France

Out Autumn 1997.

Send £1 to

**Manchester SF, PO Box 29,
SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW**



The Solidarity Federation was formed in March 1994 by the joining together of the Direct Action Movement, industrial networks in transport, education and public service sectors, and others. This was a considerable step forward for anarcho-syndicalism in Britain.

The SolFed provides what has been lacking for many years - a concrete base in the working class for uniting struggles in the workplace with the wider political struggle in the community. In other words SolFed is a social and economic revolutionary organisation. The ideas and practice

**Solidarity
federation**

of anarcho-syndicalism are not new, although they constantly change in response to today's

rapidly changing world. Whilst not yet a fully fledged revolutionary union federation, SolFed is a significant step towards this aim.

Networks

As industrial networks grow in members and influence, so does the scope for action. The industrial networks have established a reputation in their industries and are showing real results in membership and effectiveness.

Locals

SolFed is not just organised through industrial networks. It also organises locally through "locals".

A local is made up of all SolFed members in an area regardless of network membership. The work of locals is varied: general solidarity with the networks and other workers; local political campaigns like anti-fascism and environmental issues; holding public meetings; producing and distributing anarcho-syndicalist material. Many of the already established locals have or are working towards getting a local, an actual building as a permanent base.

International Workers' Association

The Solidarity Federation is the British section of the IWA, giving it the strength of international solidarity and experience from the larger sections such as the CNT in Spain and the USI in Italy. Founded in 1922, the International Workers Association (IWA) has sections all over Europe, in South America, Australia and the USA.

Why organise internationally? As capitalism has become increasingly international, always looking for new

markets to 'exploit', so it is essential to stress the need for internationalism among all workers. Capitalism relies on divide-and-rule tactics. It therefore preaches rabid nationalism and patriotism. The Labour Party and the TUC go along with this and continue to use similar slogans whenever the opportunity arises.

A genuine workers movement must completely reject this. Our movement is based on the principle of solidarity. Workers are exploited everywhere - that is our common link. We have far more in common with French railway workers, Polish miners or South African street cleaners than with any boss or politician, British or otherwise.

So where has the IWA been these past 74 years? Until the Second World War, it had over 5 million people worldwide affiliated to revolutionary unions. A combination of war, fascism, state capitalism and communism all but destroyed it. Following the re-emergence of the Spanish CNT in the late 70's, the IWA had a new lease of life. Today there are sections in over a dozen countries, ranging from propaganda groups to functioning unions.

The Solidarity Federation in Britain is currently in the process of transition between these two stages.



The Solidarity Federation is an organisation of people who seek to destroy capitalism and the state. Capitalism because it exploits, oppresses and kills working people and wrecks the environment for profit world-wide. 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 the 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 organisations based on similar principles - revolutionary unions. These are not Trade 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 Industrial Networks and Locals which are the nuclei of future revolutionary unions and 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 and union officials; our decisions are made through direct participation of the membership.

We welcome all who agree with our aims and principles and want to work to achieve social revolution. We recognise that the class struggle is world-wide, and are affiliated to the International Workers' Association (IWA), whose Principles we share.

work to live



Solidarity
federation