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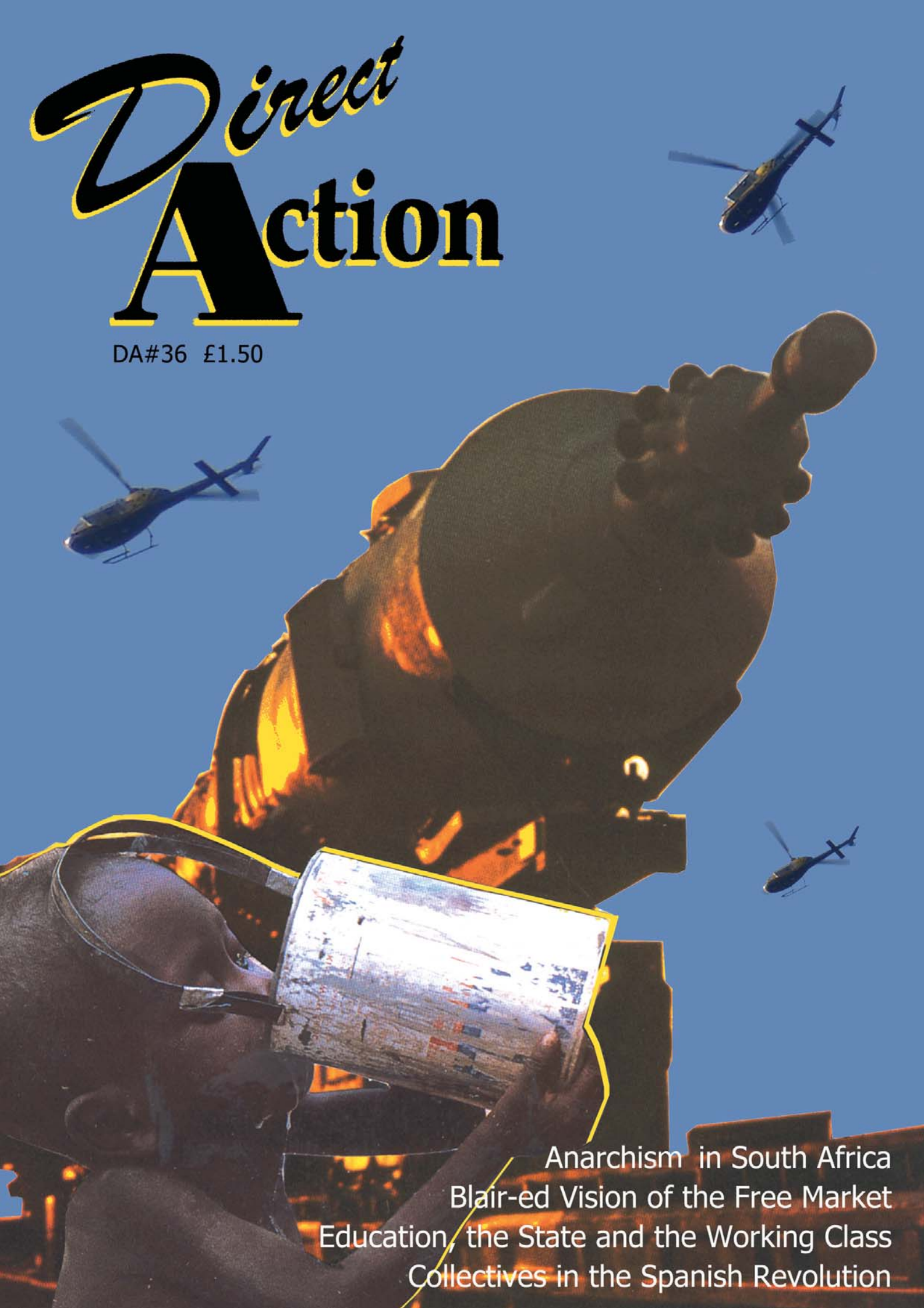

Anarchism in South Africa
Blair-ed Vision of the Free Market
Education, the State and the Working Class
Collectives in the Spanish Revolution

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Aims of the Solidarity Federation

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

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

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

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

the state of *us*

Some people like government, many just because they get good jobs out of it, but others like it because they see it as a beacon of truth and light leading us on the path of righteousness. If the 'right people' get power – preferably the nice, wise types who eat in (non-smoking) Italian restaurants and drink the right red wine – the whole country could be so lovely, healthy and wealthy that we'd abandon all our filthy habits. Binges would be drunk no more; tabs and coughs would be dumped into our dark and dismal past; and we'd be 'empowered' to wear Fair Isle jumpers and go on long walks *past* pubs. Amazing!

But, despite the best efforts of the schools, churches, Guardian and BBC there's still some right miserable, moaning bastards. Everything the delightful 'Big Toe' and his government mates do gets slagged off. Nothing is sacred – take our friendly 'local representatives'; our 'civil service'; the law, the cops, the army; even our education system. Everything these wonderful people do gets pasted for something or other. Why are some people just so nasty?

Well, it could be because they don't see government as nice at all. Some would say that all the different arms of government do is to give license to lazy bleeders to ponce off the rest of the taxpayers. There's millions of people in cushy numbers looking after millions more who won't get off their arses and go to work. They get long holidays – nearly as long as the 'dole dossers'; they're always off sick; they get massive wages and massive pensions and there's more of 'em every year. 'What do we pay our taxes for?' they ask, as they crack jokes about shooting riff-raff on a golf course in Torremolinos.

As for the really bone idle – them doley's and foriegners on state hand outs of £2,000 a week (who even have the nerve to have babies) – they should look at that sweet tasting Richard Branston. Now there's someone who's 'made fantastic amounts of money for this country', by 'providing' jobs, pickles and train rides for everyone. He looks more like Father Christmas as every day passes and he's never had a single penny off the state.

Even worse than doleys are the disabled. Don't they know that Nelson beat the French on his own with only one arm and one eye? They

should all follow the entrepreneurial path or starve, or at least go and work for rich whizz kids for half the minimum wage. Clearly the state makes people lazy – and some of its laws are crap too. Why shouldn't the stinking rich be allowed to driv down the motorway at 150 miles an hour? What's wrong with the line of coke on the dash and the mobile on the ear? The state just gets in the way of making dosh and that's what makes the world go round. In fact, the only laws needed are the ones that keep the 'scroats' from robbing the rich.

Others are unashamedly nasty to government for other reasons – ***Direct Action*** and SolFed included. We see all the various bits of government as working to maintain the current state of affairs. That is, it allows ridiculously wealthy megalomaniacs to uphold their positions by paying some 'lackeys' to keep quiet and other 'lackeys' to keep the rest of us quiet by getting us to believe that it's all 'natural'.

Plods, Camera...

We've all seen them on TV – 'Police, Camera, Action', 'World's Wildest Police Video's, 'Rail Cops' *ad infinitum*. The chances are that some of us have also heard sections of the so-called 'moral majority' sounding off about how awful it is for us to be shown crime as entertainment and for the community at large to wallow in the misery of others.

There are a number of reasons for this televisual trash. It is cheap to make, high on unthinking action and thus easily marketed. It costs little to film as most footage comes from police cars, helicopters and CCTV footage. All that's needed is some editing, a roll of credits at the beginning and end plus a cheesy ex-plod presenter to drive home the show's hidden messages. A simple equation: cheap show + high ratings = increased profit for shareholders.

The 'moral majority' purport to abhor such shows, their reasons varying according to political opinion. The right see them as affording criminals and yobs free publicity and an ego-boost at the expense of their victims. The left see them as a form of 'name and shame' retribution, an offence against the human rights of the hooligans pictured. Not that the average delinquent minds public exposure.

As usual, and perhaps deliberately, both sides are missing the point. In reality, these shows serve a far darker purpose than providing cheap thrills for insomniacs and vicarious pleasure for voyeurs of human misery. They serve to drip-feed a number of myths into the public consciousness that offer a view of how sophisticated State propaganda has now become.

unopposed image

The real purposes of these shows are many and varied. Firstly, they provide an image, totally unopposed and often unfounded, of an apparently infallible and invincible police force. No 'criminal' escapes their clutches. All are caught and all are punished. A constant subtext of 'we always win in the end so don't even consider rebelling' runs through each and every episode. There is a subliminal attempt to convince us of the absolute inevitability of our being defeated regardless of what we try to achieve or how we try to achieve it.

Another purpose is to manipule public opinion. These shows are usually, if not always, shown from the point of view of the State and its servants. Never is dissent, informed or otherwise, hinted at, much less explored. The plods are always the hard-pressed public servants, grimly holding back the tide of criminality in the face of few resources and an often-ungrateful public. The public is shown as either the bad guys or pathetically co-operative bystanders, only too eager to lend a hand to the brave guardians of law and order. Never do we see

...Direct Action

any hint of racism or corruption, incompetence or persecution, police brutality or deliberate attempts to frame people with 'inconvenient' politics. To believe the image presented to us is to believe that Rodney King, the Birmingham Six *et al* never even existed. And if plods do like a spot of hippie-bashing, who cares anyway?

A good example of this tactic is the 1984-5 Miners' Strike. Most of the footage shown was shot from the point of view of the police lines. Miners were shown striking at plods with fists, feet, boots and makeshift weapons. Burnt-out barricades and streets littered with debris were shown as an awful foretaste of things to come if the miners had their way. The flames of Cold War paranoia were fanned to burning point to influence public opinion against the miners and their cause. Stories of hit squads, of SWP influence were accorded banner headlines in the mainstream media. Plods on the other hand were portrayed as the bold defenders of freedom and democracy, while the fact that many were actually squaddies in police uniform without ID numbers didn't even come out until a couple of years ago.

state-sponsored terror

We also see a very subtle use of the 'stick and carrot' approach. The plods are shown to be caring and polite with the public at large, even those they arrest, only using force when no other option is left. Again, this is bullshit. Anyone who experienced the Battle of the Beanfield knows that not only is state-sponsored terror not only a last resort, but also frequently a first option, especially when no journalists happen to be around.

Even when the press do attend there is no guarantee of free and fair coverage. It is standard police practice to confiscate or smash the cameras of any press or legal observers present if they attempt to photograph or film an arrest involving the use of force. At one May Day demo in Ireland in 2002, Indymedia reporters were arrested and members of the corporate press had digital camera batteries confiscated. At an anti-war demo in Brighton pepper spray and batons were used on people simply for sitting down in the road. Yet little or nothing was reported outside of the Schnews weekly newsletter.

In an older episode of 'Rail Cops' a police baton instructor is seen to admonish 'over-enthusiastic' trainees by listing the possible consequences – loss of job, possible jail sentence, etc. He even sickeningly mentions the Rodney King case as an example of what not to do. The fact that there is a vast disparity between the number of complaints made and officers disciplined or even investigated is simply not reported. In a real and highly Orwellian sense, and if you believe these shows as they are presented to you, dissent doesn't exist; it never existed. There is only law and order triumphing over the evildoers, in black and white with no middle ground.

Education, the State

The argument that the state helps maintain the right climate for the few to exploit the many is not new. Kropotkin and others have argued that this is the state's 'historic role' – violence against the oppressed is 'legalised'; tributes and taxes are demanded; a few have exclusive 'rights' to what was once the property of all. The result, in Tolstoy's words, is 'slavery' and 'the irregular distribution of wealth'. 'Slavery' may seem too harsh a word, what with 'nice Mr Blair' leading us to the promised land, but for many 'employment' is merely 'wage slavery'.

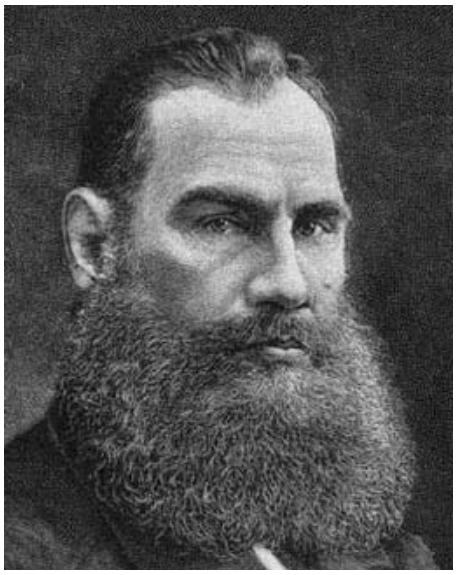
This 'historic role' of the state is especially clear when there are changes in the productive process and in social relations – the change from feudalism to capitalism, for instance. The state serves to 'legalise' violence and backs this up with force.

Kropotkin

Nor is it new to argue that smoothing these transitions and maintaining exploitative relations requires the majority to believe the oppression of the many by the few 'to be a natural condition of human life'. Tolstoy added that it was not surprising to him (an aristocrat) that 'slave owners sometimes sincerely think that they are emancipating their slaves by loosening one screw when another is already screwed tight'. Not surprising, that is, because they are 'accustomed' to believe it. The 'loosening of screws' is reform which, as Tolstoy realised, while seemingly liberating one aspect of life for the oppressed, closes off another.

eternal principles

Taking education as an example of reform, during the rapid spread of state schooling in late 19th century Britain Marx pleaded that 'eternal principles should be violated' if people sent their children to state schools. Such principles, like mutual aid and resistance don't fit the capitalist need for a compliant, flexible labour force looking out for themselves, rather than supporting each other. So the role of state education was to legitimisein the minds of the 'slaves' the legalised robbery by the ruling class, and to develop 'skills' for wage slavery and the temperament to work to instructions and to the clock. This was dubbed by Hodgskin as 'the training of cattle that are broken to the yoke'.



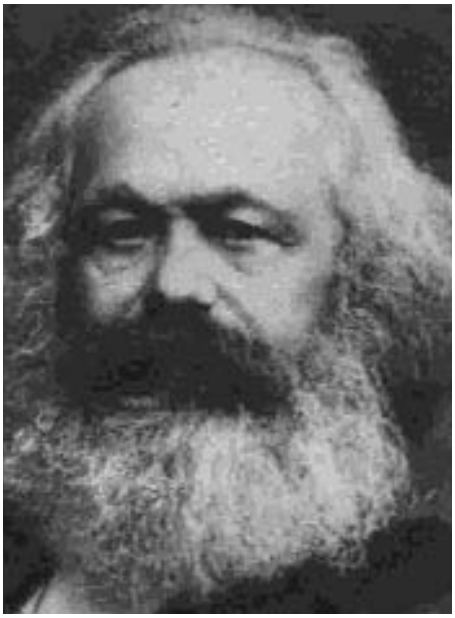
Tolstoy

So a seemingly liberating reform, state provision of education, has tightened the screw elsewhere, maintaining 'hegemony', inducing a dominant capitalist culture; and introducing a 'hidden curriculum' that serves the needs of capitalism.

Paolo Freire argued that education is not neutral. It is either an instrument for the integration of younger generations into the present system *or* it becomes the 'practice of freedom' – the means by which we deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in transforming the world around us.

The present market based policy results from the 1970's 'great debate' on the nature of education – should it be about *training* for the labour market, or *educating* for good citizenship? The

& the Working Class



Marx

'marketeers' won and their whims are now shot through the compulsory schooling that Marx dreaded, through adult, further and community education and are now spreading into the lower reaches of higher education.

really useful knowledge

The 'great debate' goes back further than Callaghan's 1976 speech. When the 'Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge' was set up in the early 19th century, some working class people set up their own societies for the diffusion of 'Really Useful Knowledge'. The first was for a market led, skills based education; the latter was about how this leads to exploitation and how to fight it. In other words this reflects a debate about what education is, and who decides what any 'curriculum' should contain.

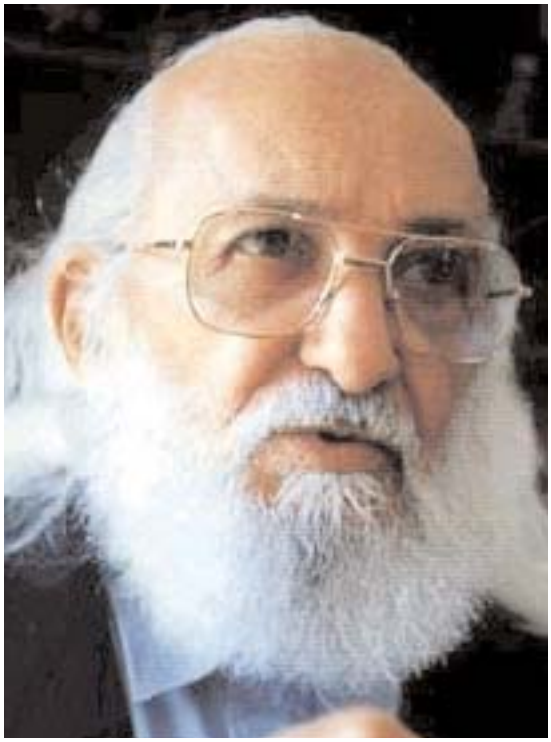
There is also a debate about *process*, for example how is the curriculum to be delivered? By what Freire calls the 'banking method' of top down delivery? Or by the more democratic method of using 'dialogue' to solve problems where an 'organic intellectual' is just as prepared to be the 'educatee' as the 'educator'?

Much depends on how we believe people learn best. On one hand, there are those who believe that people are motivated 'extrinsically', from the outside – the need for a job, or fear of failure, or just a 'sound thrashing' – and respond best to a formal 'schooling' set up, where 'right answers' are committed to memory and teachers are the gods of knowledge. Such people also tend to believe that there are different types, or classes, of people. The 'leaders' get one sort of education, the 'soldiers' of the state another, and the workers yet another. Each type of education is related to a 'natural' role and is given separately, as any intermixing is 'injurious to the state'.

On the other hand are those who believe in 'lighting lamps' and encouraging a desire in people to learn whatever they want to learn. This is 'intrinsic' motivation. It is not achieved through schooling, but through much more informal methods, similar in fact to how the working class has always learnt – the most natural method on earth. The state doesn't use intrinsic learning methods because they might encourage us to think for ourselves. Radicals realise this and have tended to adopt the methods of the oppressed to educate themselves. As Godwin put it: 'let the most oppressed people under heaven once change their mode of thinking, and they are free'.

State education crushes our 'eternal principles' and replaces them with a slave-like stupor, preventing us thinking for ourselves. It is an act of class war waged by the 'soldiers of the state' on behalf of the 'slave masters'. And too many of us are 'accustomed' to believe that this is the natural condition of human life.

A longer version of this article is available on the Education Workers Network website at: www.ewn.org.uk.



Freire

Collectives in the

a glimpse of what can be achieved

'seventy years on, collective organisation based on workers self-management... remains a real and modern alternative'

Seventy years ago, in July 1936 General Franco moved against the Republican Government in Spain. The initial failure of his coup is down to the General Strike and the resistance of the working class who took to the streets. While much has been written about the events in Spain between 1936 and 1939, we concentrate here on the positive achievements of the revolution – the collectives established by the anarcho-syndicalist union, the CNT.

The collectives remain a striking example of the possibilities of collective organisation and economy. The scale and pace of collective development were remarkable, as were the confidence and zeal with which it was embraced. While the achievements of this period were short-lived, seventy years on, collective organisation based on workers self-management along the lines of Spain 1936 remains a real and modern alternative to capitalist and Marxist state-run economic models.

The collectives, built across many areas of Spain, were the means by which the CNT organised production and consumption of

barricades in Barcelona

Spanish Revolution

by the working class free of state control

goods and services. Building the new society within the shell of the old, a core principle of anarcho-syndicalism, served the CNT well in 1936. Democratic ideas and methods had been developed over a long period within the CNT, and these were swiftly applied to the Spanish economy and wider society. Thus, the transition from capitalism to workers' control was quick and orderly.

republican opposition

There were problems given that the CNT did not inherit a self-contained national economy since many areas were in fascist hands. Even in the non-fascist zone, since the country had not functioned properly for years, there was a need for massive overhaul and investment. Added to that, where the republican government maintained control, they could not be relied on for support. In fact, the Republican movement vehemently opposed bringing the economy under workers' control and did all it could to sabotage the collectivist movement.

While facing these problems, the CNT also fought off the threat of fascism and attempted to liberate areas the fascists controlled. In the immediate aftermath of the coup, CNT militias, having defeated fascism in their own areas, marched to Aragon to liberate it from fascism. Lacking modern weaponry, the assault became bogged down, leading to a front line being established across Aragon, where anarcho-syndicalists and fascists confronted each other. Fearing an anarcho-syndicalist victory, the Republican government cut off supplies to the militias. This meant that the areas under self-management now had to carry the burden of supplying the militias with clothes, food and even arms.

Collectivisation took place in both the industrial and agrarian economy. Within Catalonia alone, textiles, construction and engineering industries, bakeries, public utilities, trains, buses and taxis, health services, theatres, cine-

the Barcelona Ritz became a workers canteen

'the Republican government cut off supplies... and the areas under self-management had to carry the burden of supplying the militias with clothes, food and even arms'

mas, beauty parlours, hotels, restaurants, and many other workplaces were all collectivised under workers' control.

Each workplace held an assembly to elect a committee to co-ordinate production. Thereafter, regular workplace assemblies were held and through them, committees were recallable and answerable to all workers. The workplace assembly could remove the whole committee or any of its members at any time. The committee was there to carry out the decisions made at the assembly, and was controlled directly by it.

In each local area, all the collectivised workplaces in the same industry formed a local workplace federation, which coordinated local production. This meant, instead of competing and duplicating production as in capitalist times, far greater efficiency was achieved by this local federal system of co-ordinated production. In addition, all the workplace federations in a local area formed a Local Economic Council (LEC). Since all production and service facilities were represented here, co-ordination of all work in the locality was possible. In turn, the local workplace federations and LECs were organised into regional and national Confederations of Industry and a National Economic Confederation.

food distribution

This integrated collective system was not the result of a master plan imposed from outside. It came about by the workers themselves putting the ideas and methods of anarcho-syndicalism into practice. Even while fighting was still going on in Barcelona, the CNT began to organise food distribution. Food committees were established in the city's neighbourhoods. These collected and stored provisions in large warehouses, which acted as distribution points. Markets reopened under workers' control. Mobile committees went into the surrounding countryside to collect freely donated food to supply the markets. No compulsion was used, and since many Catalan farmers were CNT members, or at least sympathised with its aims, solidarity between town and country was easily established.

The food committees worked with the CNT workplace organisations in the food, catering and hotel industries to establish local communal feeding halls. Within a few weeks, these food halls were feeding upwards of 120,000 people per day. This soon began to evolve into a democratically controlled food distribution system.

Once started, collectivisation spread rapidly. For example, the Barcelona transport system, critical to the life and productivity of the city, was quick to reap the benefits of workers' control. The most important form of transport in Barcelona was the tram system, with over 60 routes criss-crossing the city. It was privately owned, employing 7,000 workers, 6,500 of them in the CNT. After the fascists were evicted from Barcelona, the CNT transport section requested members of the Militia to accompany them to the Barcelona Transport Company.

But the management had already fled, taking all available funds with them. The workers quickly got the tram system functioning again. Not only that, they began to improve on the outdated and worn out infrastructure.

Safety was the priority, as power cars replaced old and dangerous trailer cars, and poor sections of track were re-laid. Repair shops, which before the Revolution had been restricted to general mainte-

'instead of competing and duplicating production as in capitalist times, far greater efficiency was achieved by this local federal system of co-ordinated production'

nance and emergency repairs, were transformed. Improved productivity allowed repairs and maintenance to be completed faster. They also began to replace the old power supply system and to build new tram units designed by the workers themselves, which were lighter, safer, and able to carry more passengers. New machines meant less workshop space was needed, and sections were converted to arms production. Before long, the workers at the repair shops were building howitzers and rockets too.

Fares were also revolutionised. A low fare, which was the same for all journeys, was introduced. Many, including the old and young, travelled free. Passenger numbers increased as efficiency rose dramatically. Working conditions for tram workers improved, wages were equalised, the working week was reduced to 35 hours, and the retirement age was reduced to 60 on full pay. Despite this the tram system still made a surplus. The extra money subsidised the bus system and other less prosperous collectives. Similarly to the trams, the privately owned regional railways were also quickly collectivised.

'the achievement of the collectivised health service remains truly a triumph of the Revolution'

Defeating fascism was the main concern of the collective movement. The prime problem was the shortage of modern arms and equipment and the main culprit was the increasingly Communist dominated Republican government, which feared workers winning their battle on the Aragon front even more than it feared fascism. In response the collectives in Catalonia had built from scratch a munitions industry of 80,000 workers. The workers themselves designed and built the machinery needed to produce arms and keep the front supplied.

the health system

Despite the war effort against fascism the CNT was able to put into practice some of the basic principles it had long argued for. One of the most important achievements was the collectivised health system established within the anarcho-syndicalist areas.

The general health of the Spanish working class was appalling. Infant mortality rates were the highest in Europe, and diseases like tuberculosis were endemic. The CNT had a record of fighting for improvements in health provision, as well as in general living and working conditions. They also targeted sexual health and education, both as part of a wider campaign for women's equality, and specifically against sexually transmitted diseases, which were also widespread across Spain.

The massive efforts put into developing health care started to pay off immediately. Indeed, the achievement of the collectivised health service remains truly a triumph of the Revolution. Within a year, every isolated village had free access to health care. Stately homes were taken over and new hospitals began to be built within weeks of the Revolution starting.

As already mentioned the industries in each locality came together to form a Local Economic Council (LEC) and in August 1937 these federated into a National Economic Council at an economic congress of workers' organisations held in Valencia. As with all anarcho-syndicalist organisations, the economic

'the agricultural collective movement was...able to go much further towards a completely collective economy...based on the principles of libertarian communism'

councils were democratically controlled, being run on the system of recallable delegates.

Finance for investments considered by the Economic Councils came from the collectives themselves. Surpluses from collectives were pooled into the non-profit making Central Labour Bank in Barcelona. Through the work of the Economic Councils, the Bank was able to direct resources to where they were most useful, and redistribute funds from rich collectives to poor ones. In many urban areas, money remained the main method of exchange on a daily basis, particularly between the non-collectivised economy and the collectivised one.

agricultural collectives

Around 1,700 agricultural collectives were established during the Revolution, involving some 3,200,000 workers. The scale and intensity of the agricultural collective movement was huge by any measure. So much so that it went much further towards a completely collective socio-economic system based on libertarian communist principles.

In many ways, the agricultural collectives represented a new phenomenon in human relations. This was a huge, and hugely successful, socio-economic experiment, pioneering a new way of living based on mutual aid and solidarity. Indeed, the fact that this movement appeared in rural Spain at all puts paid to the myth that apparently 'backward' rural farmers are incapable of understanding highly progressive ideas.

As in the cities, the peasantry moved quickly to collectivise land vacated by the fleeing landlords and press it into the service of the workers. Again the method of collectivisation was governed by deep-rooted anarcho-syndicalist culture which had evolved over the previous decades. Firstly, land was collectivised on a purely voluntary basis. Secondly, those who wished to join agreed that all but three personal possessions would be pooled into collective ownership. Thirdly, special provision was made for those who did not want to join. Marxists had long agonised over what to do about peasants who did not wish to collectivise. They ended up forcing them to do so, bringing tyranny and famine. The anarcho-syndicalist solution was simple. Those who wished to stay out of the collectives were allocated land and allowed to farm it, so long as they did not employ labour. The agricultural collectives themselves were run in a similar manner to the urban ones. Regular mass assemblies were held, normally centred on the village or town. All members of the collective were welcome, and all had equal speaking and voting rights.

rising productivity

Typically, land was divided according to cultivation type. Workers were then recruited to each sector, and these elected delegates. The delegates would work alongside their fellow members by day, and meet at the end of each day in their own time to co-ordinate production. As in the urban collectives, economies of scale and eradication of profits and absentee landowners led to increased production and greater yields. Surpluses were ploughed back into newer agricultural machinery, to continue the rising productivity cycle.

Keen to use scientific knowledge, many collectives set aside areas to experiment with new and improved crops, and consulted experts on all areas of agro-

research. Agricultural schools were set up in all regions to further foster the culture of modernisation and development.

Here, we begin to see what it was that lay at the heart of collective life. Though the mass assemblies formed the basis of the democratic structure, it was the social interaction and cultural spirit of freedom and experimentation that made the collectives so attractive. Workers had time, interest and the knowledge that they would all benefit from dealing with practical realities facing them. The result was a continuous process of improvement and refinement.

Striving for constant improvement is a feature of the collectives, and is hard evidence that innovation and motivation are not intrinsically linked to the capitalist profit motive. In fact, getting rid of this actually led to an explosion of these precious attributes in the collective movement.

Most agricultural collectives abandoned the internal use of money completely. Some established warehouses, where members took what they needed, with records of what was taken kept for planning production. Some agreed a set amount of goods for each family. Many established their own coupon system based on the family wage, with the amount varying with family size. All introduced rationing if goods became scarce, when those in most need (children, the elderly, pregnant women, etc.) took priority.

Facilities in towns and villages were upgraded, with investments made in local collective industries such as bakeries, construction and carpentry, ironwork, etc. As in the towns and cities, free health care and education were introduced. Great importance was attached by anarcho-syndicalism to culture and knowledge both as liberating forces and as instruments of struggle. Every collective introduced schools and nurseries for children – most also provided free education for children from outside the collective system – and many went well beyond this basic provision.

Tragically, the Spanish collectives were smashed by Republican troops under communist command. In many cases, they had existed for barely a year. However, in this short time, not only did they prove that an alternative to capitalism and the state-run economic system is possible, they also brought to light the amazing creativity of people when they are suddenly freed from the drudgery of wage slavery.

The collectives were a huge economic, social and cultural experiment, based on anarcho-syndicalist ideas. They remain a brief but telling glimpse into a world free from the twin evils of capitalist and state oppression.

In the event, the theory worked in practice almost perfectly, despite the problems of war, shortage and opposition from all sides. We could do a lot worse than to update and learn from the Spanish collectives in developing a modern anarcho-syndicalist strategy for re-creating the society of the future.

a church is used to store agricultural produce

'the collectives... remain a brief but telling glimpse into a world free from the twin evils of capitalist and state oppression'

Anarchism in

Twelve years have passed since the fall of the apartheid government. The end of the white minority rule was greeted with optimism and hope by the South African working class. Despite socialist rhetoric in the initial days, the ANC-led coalition government, together with its partners the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), continue to implement neo-liberal economic and social policies.

To their credit the ANC government have carried out massive anti-poverty initiatives and housing programmes, but the neo-liberal free market policies are more than negating any progress. In the last years of apartheid unemployment hovered around 25%. It is now around 40%. The number of people living in informal squatter camps and shanty towns has rocketed to more than 50% since the apartheid years.

The reason for this is simple to see. Privatisation of key industries, from water and electricity to mining and services, has resulted in hundreds of thousands of lost jobs. At the same time the agriculture sector is becoming more capital intensive, when previously the trade blockade made machinery and new technologies hard to get - again this has left hundreds of thousands jobless. As a result the gap between rich and poor is wider than twelve years ago.

The ride hasn't been rough for some though. The ANC's Black Economic Empowerment policies, aimed at addressing the racial imbalance in education, jobs and income, is also used to install already wealthy and privileged members of the black upper class into prime positions in the newly privatised industries creating an growing black capitalist class.

Previously South African socialists thought that capitalism couldn't survive without apartheid, and the SACP, for instance, still continues to argue for a 'two stage revolution'. More and more work-

anarchist social centre in Motsoaledi squatter camp

Platformism and

The 'Platform' - full title 'the Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists' - was written in 1926 by a group of exiled Russian anarchists based on their experiences of the 1917 Russian revolution and its replacement by Lenin's dictatorship. This document calls on anarchists to organise according to 'ideological and tactical unity', 'collective action and discipline' and 'federalism'.

To summarise the difference between 'platformism' and anarchosyndicalism, the following from the 'Anarchist Platform' website is useful:

'We work within the trade unions as the major focus of our activity where this is a possibility. We therefore reject views that dismiss activity in

southern Africa

ing class militants in the trade unions, civic groups, political parties and miscellaneous activist groups are coming to the realisation that it is a question of class, not race, and the anti-ANC mood is growing, especially in the shanty towns. Last year there were close to 900 demonstrations stemming from conditions in shanty towns - over 50 of these turned violent. The South African media has dubbed these conflicts 'ANC vs. ANC' as core ANC voters turn against the new political elite.

an anarchist alternative

Libertarian criticism of a strategy that leaves the emancipation of our class in the hands of professional politicians is striking a chord in South Africa. There are anti-voting elements in many anti-privatisation, community, land struggle and AIDS activist groups, and horizontal organising methods are being attempted.

South Africa has one national anarchist organisation, the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation of Southern Africa (ZACF). There are also some smaller anarchist collectives, mainly associated with various counter culture issues.

Zabalaza has consistently argued that the 'two stage revolution' of first doing away with apartheid and then moving to socialism, as argued for by the SACP, will fail like so many similar schemes around the world before. Instead Zabalaza aims to agitate among the working class for empowerment, self-organisation and autonomy.

Zabalaza operates in the 'platformist' (see below) anarchist tradition, but with a firm belief in syndicalism. It organises mainly among the urban poor, people living in so called 'informal settlements' or squatter camps. Most of the Zabalaza organisers from poor black backgrounds are from these settlements and are essentially unemployed. This has caused the federation's focus to be placed firmly on community organising instead of workplace and union issues.

Zabalaza started in 2001 when several existing local or anarchist groups and collectives federated

Anarcho-syndicalism

the unions. Within them we fight for the democratic structures typical of anarcho-syndicalist unions like the 1930's CNT. However the unions no matter how revolutionary cannot replace the need for anarchist political organisation(s).'

For anarchosyndicalists, the type of union we seek to create is not restricted in scope like 'trade unions' - that is, an anarchosyndicalist union doesn't organise only in the workplace or in the 'economic sphere'. Anarchosyndicalist activity embraces the 'political' as well as the 'economic' seeing no artificial divide between them such as that embodied in the historically discredited notion of the 'revolutionary party'. In other words, the 'anarchist political organisation' and the anarchosyndicalist union are one and the same.

into one organisation. These groups included Zabalaza Books, Anarchist Black Cross, Bikisha Media Collective, Zabalaza Action group from Durban/Umlazi and two anarchist groups from Soweto - Black Action Group from Motsoaledi and Shesha Action Group from Dlamini. Over time most of these groups have fallen apart or changed for reasons such as migrant worker members moving away. The general hardship of the lives of the comrades living in these conditions takes its toll as well.

For more information about Zabalaza, see www.zabalaza.net.

community vegetable garden in Motsoaledi

Anarchism in Swaziland

Swaziland is a small impoverished nation of 1.2 million people ruled under the monarchist dictatorship of King Mswati. Unemployment runs at 40% and the country has the unfortunate status of leading the HIV/AIDS prevalence rates, with 38.8% of the adult population being infected.

Swaziland does not have a revolutionary history and the left is relatively weak. Zabalaza members have now established a base there among the rural poor. Anarchist and libertarian ideas are striking a chord with the young radicals who want to do away with the oppressive monarchy and better their lot.

While there are some reformist anti-monarchy groups in the country, anarchism is the only revolutionary alternative. Other leftist tendencies like trotskyism do not have a presence. While reformist groups push for the end of monarchy and the establishment of a two party alliance government, anarchists argue that one set of rulers should not be replaced with another, citing the failure of the South African government to provide for the poor.

The organising conditions could not be much worse. The state forces are ruthless and the living conditions of the anarchist comrades on the ground are dire. Like so many Swazi people, many of the anarchists rely on UN/US food aid programs and are without an income.

While the number of comrades identifying themselves as anarchists runs only to a couple of dozen at the moment, the situation may change rapidly. Practical solidarity in terms of sending political and other support material is being planned. For further information contact myllyjp@yahoo.com.

Red and Black Forums

One key organising, propaganda and recruiting tool for Zabalaza is the Red and Black forum. Essentially these are public talks on a specific subject from an anarchist viewpoint. The Red and Black forum is requested and often organised by local radicals and a couple of comrades from the federation will then do the talk.

Forums also work as an educational tool for militants who identify themselves as anarchists. As Zabalaza is a 'platformist' organization, recruitment is done carefully and often a potential member takes part in several forums and other educational events before joining the Federation.

Red and Black Forums have successfully advanced anarchist ideas in the communities. For instance the Working Class Crisis Committee in a part of Soweto invited Zabalaza to hold two Red and Black forums in 2005 with 60-70 people attending each. Others are planned for 2006.

Motsoaledi community organising

One of Zabalaza's longest standing organising drives is in Motsoaledi squatter camp in Soweto. Thousands of black families from various backgrounds live in shacks with no legal status, no rights to their homes, no running water, no proper sanitation, etc. The threat of eviction is constant and unemployment tops 80%. There is no school or any other public services. To all intents and purposes the state is not present in Motsoaledi at all, short of occasional police raids on illegal immigrants.

anarchist library in Motsoaledi

In 2001 local Anarchists formed Black Action Group and started practical organising in the form of a community vegetable garden and a library for tools, books and anarchist propaganda. Comrades have also created a crèche, and have been planning recycling facilities - all according to the anarchist principles of horizontal organising and mutual aid.

Local ANC members fear being exposed as liars and traitors and have been saying that 'anarchists are not allowed in this country'. This was not well received in the local community where anarchists now have a long standing presence. The anti-voting and anti-ANC mood is getting stronger. At a recent community meeting, when a local councillor turned up to urge people to register to vote, people turned on him and chased him away.

'Anarchist ideas are there', says a comrade from Motsoaledi. 'People have them naturally. We just have to create an environment where people get interested for more information about anarchism which is why the community library and social centre is so important.'

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Past Tense: History

‘we see our interest in history not just as an academic exercise divorced from our own time, but as relevant to current struggles and including our own experiences’

***Past Tense* is a publishing project based in South London, mainly (though not exclusively) publishing pamphlets on London radical history. Initially it began as the work of one person, uncovering the subversive, hidden and esoteric past around Southwark and the Elephant & Castle. As it exists now, it has grown to include several individuals, autonomously following their own historical trails, publishing new texts and reprinting old, out of print ones.**

However we also work together, forming the core of the South London Radical History Group, which has been meeting irregularly since January 2003, as an open forum, discussing historical issues, organising history walks, inviting speakers on various topics. Our discussions have wandered across many struggles and neighbourhoods, including gentrification in North Southwark, the battles to preserve green spaces in South London, anti-war movements both historically and in our own experiences, the 1983-4 occupation of the South London Women’s Hospital, Mayday in tradition and modern times, and many more. Although we mainly meet in South London, we aren’t bound by arbitrary borders, having even trespassed in North London at times. ***Past Tense*** has published several pamphlets based on the Radical History Group’s talks and walks.

a better future

While there are different interpretations of history and varying reasons for people’s interest in the past, we broadly share an activist background; most of us have spent many years more or less in the anarchist scene, involved in the numerous struggles of the past twenty years or more. While some of us may be more or less active at the moment, it’s clear that we see our interest in history not just as an academic exercise divorced from our own time, but as relevant to current struggles and including our own experiences. A knowledge of the movements, ideas and events of the past can help to shape our actions in the present. History is often either repackaged and sanitised as ‘heritage’, stripped of political content and brushing over conflict, rebellion and repression with a rosy glow; or it appears academic, distant and unconnected to our every day experience. But looking back to such mass movements as the Chartists or the radical clubs of the 19th century, regular history classes, an understanding of how we got to where we are, was considered a vital element to the fight for a better future. An interesting sign is that activists in Bristol and North London are also getting together History Groups, linked to current struggles.

is what's happening

The pamphlets we have issued are written, laid out, printed and put together by us, which doesn't only give a certain sense of achievement when it's done (as well as whiling away many long winter evenings), but also allows us to keep them cheap. The disadvantages of producing pamphlets in this day and age, include the rapid disappearance of radical bookshops, and that many commercial bookshops refuse to stock them. It's clear that these days the spread of texts on the internet, as well as a decline in the number of radical bookshops, has cut deep into small alternative self-publishing like ours...But although the internet does provide useful information, we feel that it's useful to have traditionally produced pamphlets and books out there; not only are they easier to read, but also because if they are visible in places like bookshops and libraries, people can come across them who wouldn't necessarily stumble on obscure websites.

We got big plans for the future: there should be two books coming out this year, plus the Radical History Group has lined up a number of meetings, and a couple of history walks are in the pipeline. On top of this we are always looking for new and old texts to publish, so if you have anything lying around that isn't out there, we would be interested in giving it the once over.

They say the past is another country, but only if you respect THEIR borders.

For more info, email:
mudlark@macunlimited.net
or write to:
Past Tense/South London Radical History Group, c/o 56a Info Shop, 56 Crampton St, London, SE17.

Reds on the Green: a Short Tour of Clerkenwell Radicalism

Past Tense - 72 pages - £2.00

This pamphlet sketches the long and rich history of radical politics and struggle in Clerkenwell. It also begins to address the lack of easily available material on the area's history, while setting Clerkenwell against a wider backdrop of the radical history of London in general:

...the history of Clerkenwell is a microcosm of the larger history of London...whenever there has been major social change and/or unrest in London it has been reflected by events in Clerkenwell, and the unrest often manifested and organised itself here...

Charting the changing fortunes and developments of the area's working class community, *Reds on the Green* takes us through such events as the Peasants Revolt; the Great Plague; the Great Fire; the Gordon Riots as well as the activities of the Chartist movement and the first International. There is commentary on the contributions of the likes of Dan Chatterton, Guy Aldred and, to a lesser extent, V. I. Lenin. There are also passing comments on the Clerkenwell of today, relating the historical Clerkenwell to both to gentrification in recent years, and to some of the names and buildings that still survive.

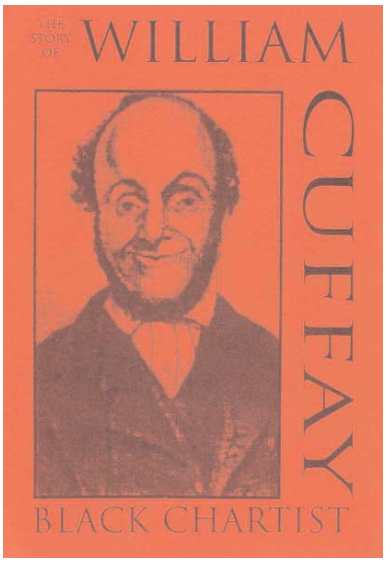
The Story of William Cuffay, Black Chartist

Past Tense – 16 pages – £0.75

Apart from anything else, this pamphlet – a reprint from *Staying Power: the History of Black People in Britain*, by Peter Fryer – dispels the myth that black people's contribution to working class history and politics began only in the 1950's.

The pamphlet tells the story of William Cuffay, a tailor and son of a freed West Indian slave. Cuffay was one of the leaders of the Chartist movement, the first mass political movement of the British working class. He and his family suffered for his political beliefs and activities. His wife was summarily sacked, and he, himself was subject to racist taunting in the likes of *Punch*. In 1848, aged 61, William Cuffay was arrested for allegedly 'levying war against Queen Victoria', put on trial for treason and transported for life to Tasmania.

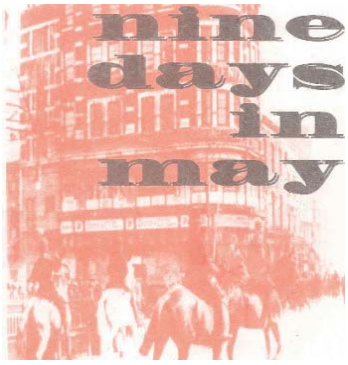
This pamphlet is a powerful tale of an often-forgotten figure in London's working class history.



Nine Days in May:
the General Strike in Southwark

Past Tense – 36 pages – £1.00

The May 1926 General Strike is part of working class mythology. When the TUC called the Strike in support of the miners, nearly 2 million workers across the country joined in. A million miners had been locked out for rejecting wage cuts of up to 25%. However, after nine days, despite widespread solidarity, the TUC caved in. They were simply frightened to death of losing control of the working class power that had been unleashed.



Nine Days in May describes the General Strike in what were then the Metropolitan Boroughs of Bermondsey, Camberwell and Southwark (all now united as the London Borough of Southwark). We get insights into developments in all three boroughs; the role of trades councils in organising and distributing news; the clashes with the police protecting blackleg labour; and the attempts to continue the Strike after the TUC's betrayal. This is supplemented with accounts by local participants.

All in all, we have a glimpse into the day to day running of one of the most crucial battles of our history and an interesting view of how this hugely significant event developed in Southwark.

Poor Man's Heaven:
the Land of Cokaygne (a 14th century utopian vision)

by Omasius Gorgut – Past Tense – 40 pages – £1.00

The poor of the middle ages lived a life of exploitation and suffering. However, they dreamed of a land without suffering, where people lived in harmony and plenty without having to work. In 14th century England, this earthly paradise emerged in a popular song, *the Land of Cokaygne*, a utopian vision subverting the misery and poverty of serfdom:

In Cokaygne we drink and eat
Freely without care and sweat.
The food is choice and clear the wine,
At fourses and at supper time,
I say again, and I dare swear,
No land is like it anywhere,
Under heaven no land like this
Of such joy and endless bliss.

Poor Man's Heaven reproduces a version of the song and describes its context of medieval traditions

of resistance. In the middle ages, the Church was all-powerful. The idea of a better life in 'this world', that 'Earth and Heaven are not Two…but One', was not counter to the 'natural order' espoused by the clergy. It was also seriously dangerous to those who expressed it. We now recognise this vision, or something like it, as the socialist society we still struggle for.

British Syndicalism: pages from labour history

by Tom Brown – Kate Sharpley Library – 27 pages – £1.00

Tom Brown, one of the clearest anarcho-syndicalist speakers and writers and a shop steward through world war 2, is an important figure in the building of modern British anarcho-syndicalism.

These essays outline arguments for 'revolutionary industrial unionism', interweaving British labour history with the international class struggle. Many of the arguments are aimed at rebel stewards – 'syndicalist industrial unions offer a form of organisation superior to trades unionism and, when trade union branches are addressed on the subject, approval is almost unanimous'. Political parties are summed up thus: 'a party concerned only with the welfare of "The Party" and its conquest of power can only do harm to the workers' cause. Its measure of success is its measure of mischief.'

Like many militants, Tom Brown was almost unknown in his lifetime and, despite his massive contribution to the workers' movement, is ignored by pretentious social historians.

A different time, a different language almost, but the message is still the same – it's always jam tomorrow on the basis of shit today, keeping the inmates passive and quiet, while politicians do their self-serving dirty work. Tom Brown saw through party politics, never losing sight of the class struggle – a cracking read.

Rich is Beautiful

by Richard D. North – IEA – 36 pages – hardback – £14.00

The Institute of Economic Affairs dreams of turning us all on to the free market, abandoning thoughts of the state making us happy, looking instead to naked capitalism. North takes on arguments that 'mass affluence' has made us less happy and equal; created extreme poverty; widened divisions; wrecked communities, society and morals; turned us on to junk food and disposable tat; and is destroying the planet.

He dismisses critics as dreamers whose accusations have no foundation. In fact, pursuing wealth *creates* real happiness. There's less unemployment in the Anglo-Saxon world than Europe, so getting the state out and letting the rich get richer means 'trickle down' works a treat for the poor. We need more of it, so push 'globalisation' don't criticise it.

As for morals and society going down the pan, that's rubbish too. More rich people means more philanthropists – we can all be Richard Branstons. When do-gooders start making and spending money we'll all realise that high taxes and a nanny state cause unhappiness but pursuing wealth brings nirvana – that's why it's beautiful.

I'm convinced, so I'm joining the 'Movement for Mass Affluence', going to make loads of dosh by 'hiring' you lot as skivvies for a fiver an hour, with no health and safety or holidays. Any questions and you're sacked. We all need to work together to make me more money because that makes us *all* happy. If you don't know that you're a dreamer!

MX-80 – We're an American Band

Family Vinyard – CD – 2005

I don't often notice lyrics but these struck me more than usual. Although the opening words about a brain transplant, the ultimate in consumerism 'giving the brain a new body', got me a bit, I got into the sounds. With some good rhythms, melodies and grooves, MX-80 don't fit easily into any category. The opening tracks have a screaming, psychedelic guitar, later replaced by a vocal lead and things get more rhythmically 'groovy'. Over this are melodies nearly as good as Caribou – not bad at all.

But it was 'Christmas with the Devil' that turned me on to the words. This should be played beside 'Nobby' Holder for yuletide balance. It's about the devil coming to stay, shop, buy DVD's as prezzies, consume, get pissed, watch 'Die Hard', cause trouble then 'split and take his beer' ('but we know he'll be back next year'). So the idea that 'christmas *is* the devil' probably won't reach many more lugs than mine.

Other tracks, like 'Lights Out', are also in an anti-'American-style consumerism' vein. A piss-take with good sounds, it's worth copying for christmas stockings, or any stocking any time really.

Blair-ed Vision of

Free market orthodoxy now directs and dominates the thinking of Britain's social, economic and political elites. The movers and shakers in academia, the arts and the sciences seek to interpret the whole of nature in terms of narrow self interest. They apply this to the running of society to the extent that our leaders now see the market not just as a means of directing the economy but as a means of directing all aspects of our lives. Everything is now seen through market-tinted glasses, with all of society's ills, from 'failing' schools to 'poor' parenting, being solved simply by applying the magic solution of punishment for failure and reward for success – all tried and tested in the cleansing heat of competition.

That free market ideas are now all-pervasive in Britain is largely down to the Labour party. It may have been the Thatcher government that started the market revolution but in truth Thatcherism was never truly accepted by much of Britain's elite, especially the more enlightened elements who saw her as an uncaring anti-intellectual bigot. Much of the establishment held their nose and voted for Thatcher as the only means of controlling union power. In reality they never really accepted her or her methods. It was not until the arrival of new Labour that one could be open about one's free market ideas in polite society. The true success of Labour is that they have been able to repackage Thatcherism, giving it a caring gloss and a progressive image, making it acceptable to even the most liberal of the elite.

'the true success of Labour is...to repackage Thatcherism, giving it a caring gloss and a progressive image, making it acceptable to even the most liberal of the elite'

Labour transformed the free market ideas of Thatcherism from a necessary evil to break the power of trade unionism into a progressive force for change. They moved on from attacking the unions to making the state the true enemy

the Free Market

of the people. State provision and regulation were cast as outdated relics of the grey world of post-war Britain that were holding back the economy and failing to provide proper public services. They announced that their mission was to cast aside the dead hand of the state; set free the dynamism of market forces; and create an advanced economy that would transform Britain into a shiny, dynamic, forward looking society. Poverty and ignorance would be a thing of the past.

'anti-racism and women's equality does not extend to the single mother, the ethnic minorities or the Polish immigrant who are paying most for Labour's booming free market economy'

Direct Action

'choice'

In 1997 the new Labour government was at pains to stress that, unlike the class-ridden Tories, it was a truly modernising force that cared passionately about the poor, the sick and the uneducated. They promised to revolutionise the public sector making it a true force for change that would eradicate inequality in health and education. The old style state provision, in which power lay in the hands of the unions the providers (doctors, teachers, etc.), would be swept away and patients, parents and other 'clients' and 'customers' would be given choice and a real say in the running of services.

Labour's gloss of fairness and justice ensured they could still be anti-racist, could still support gay rights and women's equality, while spouting an extreme right-wing free market philosophy. This freed the educated urban elites who now dominate British public life. It allowed them to mouth platitudes about fighting ignorance and oppression while spending their ever-increasing incomes. Once capitalism realised that Labour's 'third way' amounted to little more than Thatcherism with a caring make-over, they too quickly jumped on the bandwagon. Suddenly the

likes of BP cared about the environment; the likes of Richard Branson cared about workers. Capitalism embarked on a PR exercise to show its caring nature. Before we knew it Britain's rich and powerful were denouncing Thatcherism as a reactionary outdated dogma supported only by a narrow-minded fox hunting minority.

Behind this progressive spin the reality is different. Despite all the nonsense about social justice, inequality has grown under Labour to the extent that the gap between rich and poor has not been as great since Victorian times. Meanwhile, market deregulation, the jewel in the Labour free market crown, far from empowering people, is increasingly enslaving them in a permanent state of job insecurity. Casualisa-tion means that an increasing section of the workforce is only a text message or a megaphone announcement away from the sack. The constant fear of the sack created by labour market deregulation is used by capitalism to drive down wages and conditions. Britain now boasts an army of low paid workers on temporary or short-term contracts, who can be hired and fired at will to meet the day to day needs of capitalism. At the bottom of this pile of inequality are the very people Labour supposedly came to power to help – women and ethnic minorities. Their commitment to anti-racism and women's equality may be alright for the rich city banker faced with discrimination but it does not extend to the single mother, the ethnic minorities or the Polish immigrant – the people who are paying most for Labour's much heralded booming free market economy.

creeping privatisation

As for Labour's plans to put public services under consumer control, these are little more than creeping privatisation dressed up in 'modern' language. Capital spending in schools, housing, railways and hospitals, is funded by the private sector at enormous cost for future generations. The private sector is now involved in health care provision to an extent Thatcher could only have dreamed of. Under Labour whole areas of public life have been handed over to charities, not-for-profit companies and, to be frank, religious nutters – organisations run by unaccountable managers who pay themselves enormous salaries while their workers earn the minimum wage. This army of managers is joined by that other new elite – the consultants. Reform of the public sector is now infested by PR consultants, management consultants and god-knows what other consultants, who charge vast amounts for their dubious services.

For all Labour's claptrap about social inclusion and empowerment, they are creating a dog-eat-dog society in which the better-off use their in-built advantages to cream off the lion's share of the riches, whether that is measured in terms of wealth, health or quality of life. This is paid for by the rest of us in general and by those at the bottom of society in particular. Britain has become a low wage, long hours, debt ridden society; one blighted by growing poverty and increasing social exclusion for a large minority, who suffer poor health, poor housing and poor education. It is made worse by having to listen to those who have gained enormously under Labour's free market policies, carp on about their con-

'government language resembles that used in the USA, where the poor are portrayed as an ignorant lot who'd rather watch TV than go out to work'

cern for the poor and their abhorrence for all forms of discrimination and inequality.

Not that this is new. The rich have always expressed concern for the poor and attempted to justify gross inequality by arguing that only the free market could create the wealth needed for a prosperous society. Under Labour we are back to the 'trickle-down' economics that dominated British thinking right up to the near collapse of capitalism in the 1930's. The idea is that the wealth of the fabulously rich somehow trickles down to enrich society as a whole. The essence of Labour's message is that they are creating an enterprise economy in which the wealth creating sector has to be set free from state regulation and allowed to make enormous profits that will somehow magically be passed on to the rest of us.

Measures to ensure that society's riches are spread more evenly, such as increased taxation of the better off, are dismissed by the government as outdated. These apparently act as a disincentive, stifle enterprise and damage wealth creation. Such arguments belong to the Victorian era but Labour has given them a modern spin and dressed them up in the language of 'social justice'. They are ideas which, over hundreds of years, led to gross inequality with obscene wealth side by side with grinding poverty. This was an era in which the rich mill owner spent Sunday in church expressing concern for the poor and spent the rest of the week working children to death; an era in which it was argued that poverty had nothing to do with the way society was organised, but existed because the poor would not help themselves. The poor were portrayed as godless, debauched, drunken malingerers to be blamed for their own predicament. And support for the poor, it was argued, would only be wasted; salvation lay in starving them back into morally uplifting but non-existent jobs

'Labour's message is that they are creating an enterprise economy in which the wealth creating sector has to be set free from state regulation and allowed to make enormous profits that will somehow magically be passed on to the rest of us'

blame game

Now similar arguments are surfacing. As inequality grows, due to free market policies, the poor are being blamed more and more for their own plight. Out of office, Blair and co constantly banged on about the victims of Thatcher's evil policies, about how making Britain a more equal society would be priority number one. But Thatcher can no longer be blamed. Instead blame is heaped on those at the bottom. The longer Labour is in office, the less we hear about suffering at the lower reaches of society. Instead govern-

'against the brutality of the ruling class, it has always been the working class who have put forward an alternative culture of resistance based on mutual aid, solidarity and social justice'

ment language increasingly resembles that used in the USA, where the poor are portrayed as an ignorant lot who would rather watch daytime TV than go out to work.

This is rapidly becoming the government line here. To hear ministers talk, poverty, poor heath and lack of education do not result from their polices but rather from laziness, poor diet and poor parenting. We are returning to that time-honoured notion of the deserving minority who deserve to be helped, and a smoking, binge drinking, drug-taking, overweight, TV-addicted majority who simply abuse the help they get from society. The explicit message being pushed by the government is that the poor are a burden in need of a good dose of state coercion to drive them back to work and to take up their responsibilities as citizens.

That Labour increasingly blames the worse off for their own predicament is simply a return to the historic way of governing Britain. For centuries blaming the poor was the traditional explanation for gross inequality; introducing legislation to penalise the poor was the traditional means of social control. For thirty years after the second world war, sections of the ruling class did support very limited redistribution of wealth. But this was largely due to fear of socialism at home and of the Soviet Union as an alternative to capitalism abroad. With those threats gone, we have returned to business as usual. The poor are pilloried and face ever more draconian legislation. Not that Labour or their hangers on can admit that. Britain's social and political elites have always needed a veneer of social concern to give themselves a sense of respectability; to hide their insatiable greed and hypocrisy. And Labour is the perfect vehicle for this. Thatcher's more honest approach – her clear hatred of the organised working class and disdain for those at the bottom of society – proved too crude for many of our cultured betters. Instead, Labour's social justice agenda has proved the perfect fig leaf of respectability to conceal the return to a world where the rich get richer and the rest of us get poorer.

culture of resistance

In truth, the whole free market agenda, for all its scientific and intellectual pretensions, is little more than a justification for gross exploitation. That is why it has always been the philosophy of Britain's ruling elites. Against the brutality of the ruling class, it has always been the working class who have put forward an alternative culture of resistance based on mutual aid, solidarity and social justice. However, with the defeats and havoc caused by social and economic change over the last thirty years, this alternative culture is severely weakened. This has given free market ideas a free rein to the extent that they increasingly dominate all aspects of society. If this dominance is to be challenged then the workers movement and the collective culture upon which it was organised has to be rebuilt. The only alternative is a world in which those at the top stick together for their own interests, while the rest of society is increasingly blighted by a dog-eat-dog system where everyone competes for a share of the dwindling proportion of society's riches.

Solidarity Federation

national contact point

PO Box 29, South West PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW; 079 84 67 52 81; solfed@solfed.org.uk; www.solfed.org.uk

Birmingham – c/o Northampton (below); 077 76 11 51 97; brumsf@solfed.org.uk

Bristol – c/o SF contact point (above); solidaritybristol@solfed.org.uk

Edinburgh – c/o 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh, EH7 5HA ; 078 96 62 1313; edinburghsf@solfed.org.uk

Manchester – PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW; 079 84 67 52 81; manchestersf@solfed.org.uk; www.manchestersf.org.uk; email list: manchestersf@lists.riseup.net

Northampton – c/o The Blackcurrent Centre, 24 St Michael Avenue, Northampton, NN1 4JQ; northamptonsf@solfed.org.uk

North & East London – PO Box 1681, London, N8 7LE; nelsf@solfed.org.uk

Preston – PO Box 469, Preston, PR1 8XF; 077 07 25 66 82; prestonsf@solfed.org.uk; prestonsolfed.mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk

South Herts – PO Box 493, St Albans, AL1 5TW

South London – PO Box 17773, London, SE8 4WX; southlondonsf@solfed.org.uk

South West – c/oSF contact point (above); sws@solfed.org.uk

West Yorks – PO Box 75, Hebden Bridge, HX7 8WB

Catalyst (freesheet) – c/o The Blackcurrent Centre, 24 St Michael Avenue, Northampton, NN1 4JQ; 077 76 11 51 97; catalyst@solfed.org.uk

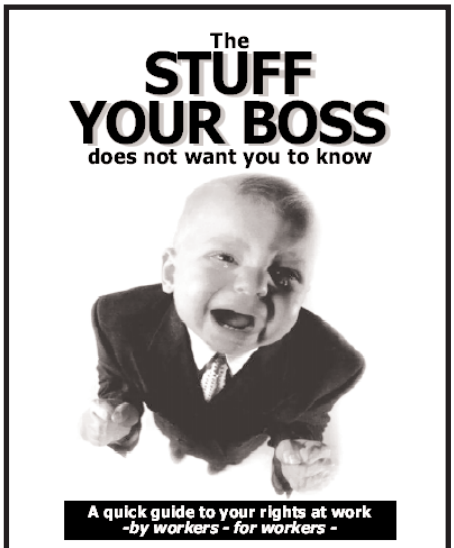
Education Workers Network – c/o Preston; ewn@ewn.org.uk; www.ewn.org.uk; email list: ewn@lists.riseup.net

Public Service Workers Network – c/o Bristol

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

SelfEd Collective

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



know your rights at work – bundles available for free/donation from the SF contact point (seeabove)

Catalyst

SolFed freesheet – issue 14 out soon – for single copies or bundles see contact details above

Manchester SF discussion meetings

8.30 pm, 1st Wed each month – upstairs Hare & Hounds, Shude Hill, central Manchester

friends & neighbours

to get listed here contact ***DA*** – see inside front cover for contact details

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

AK Press – anarcho books and merchandise of every description; PO Box 12766, Edinburgh, EH8 9YE; 0131 555 265; ak@akedin.demon.co.uk; www.akuk.com

the Basement – café, bookshop, library, computers, meeting space; 24 Lever St, Manchester; 0161 237 1832; mustsocial@yahoo.co.uk

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

www.libcom.org – online libertarian community and organising resource for activists in Britain

Organise! – *Working Class Resistance* freesheet/info; PO Box 505, Belfast, BT12 6BQ

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

Stuff your Boss – anti-casualisation campaign in NW England; stuffyourboss@lists.riseup.net; SYB, c/o PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW

ToxCat – exposing polluters, pollution and cover-ups; £2 from PO Box 29, Ellesmere Port, CH66 3TX

Kate Sharpley Library

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

Tom Brown – *British Syndicalism: pages from labour history* (see review on page 21)

Miguel García – *Unknown Heroes: biographies of anarchist resistance fighters* – 18 pages – £2

Anna Key – *Beating Fascism: anarchist anti-fascism in theory and practice* – 52 pages – £2

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Leonardos Kottis – *Konstantinos Speros: the life and activities of a Greek anarcho-syndicalist* – 11 pages – £2

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Are we all snake food now?

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