Direct Action

issue 38 spring 2007 £1.50

Notional Health Service/ Iraq and the War on Terror
Discrimination/ Discrimination/ Discrimination

Direct Action

Direct Action is published by Solidarity Federation, British section of the International Workers Association (IWA). DA is edited and laid out by the DA Collective, and printed by Clydeside Press.

Views stated in these pages are not necessarily those of the DA Collective or the Solidarity Federation. We do not publish contributors' names. Please contact us if you want to know more.

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ISSN 0261-8753

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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.

War games

What is it good for? Depends if you're part of the ruling class or not

There's not much fun in war. Even so, some people enjoy it so much they make games out of it. I don't mean them little kids crawling through the grass playing commandos - or, more likely nowadays, on their eye knackering, toxin leaking, power guzzling, 'x boys boxes' thingy which comes free with every ten ton of McDougles fat-dog burgers and chemi-coke.

Nor do I mean them big kids in 1970's anoraks playing sophisticatedly stupid trogladite nerd games.

Nobody actually gets hurt in them. They might cry a lot but that's about all - and their first shag will cure that. No, what I'm on about is those people who play war games with real lives.

For some of them, part of the game is to wear a different uniform for every occasion. One when they go for a shit, another when they go shooting things, another when they slobber down to eat what they've just shot, another for sending people out to get shot, another for parades to celebrate sending people out to get shot - all full of brass and gold and medals for shooting things and getting people shot. They give these medals to each other - the more dead the more medals.

You can see how much of a game it all is by looking at parasites like Charlie boy - the real inspiration for action man. He's got all the uniforms there's ever been made.

A fanatical collector, with his minions all over the world searching out ever more obscure uniforms. And medals, he reckons that since he's got that much dosh some of the profits from every war must end up in one of his bank accounts, so he should get the campaign medal every time.

They're all the same. Even the corgis have uniforms with shoulders and epaulets like angled flight decks - they get their medals for biting commoners

All over the world you can see these bloodthirsty bastards, modelled on the generalissimo cockroach in the Freak Brothers magazines.

In one episode, after his scouting party gets eaten by Fat Freddy's Cat while he is as far away as possible, the generalissimo gets asked 'should we sound taps, sir?' and replies 'no, there's millions more where they came from'.

Back in the real world, where these 'millions more' come from to get shot up in US wars is 'small town America', where there's nothing left except Jesus, smack, crack and Iraq.

Fed on a childhood diet of films of bravery and derring do, young macho men full of rising sap sign on to shoot and get shot. They become the 'pawns in their game'. And, of course, it's not just in America.

All over the place there's pawns signing up for Afghanistan, Darfur, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Palestine, Chechnya, or wherever it is that the latest megalomaniacs have decided to fight battles using other peoples lives.

Some of the megalomaniacs dress up just like the generalissimo, others have thawbs and turbans, and yet others just wear suits - which brings us to another crew who play war games with other people's lives.

These don't walk around with tons of brass and gold. They just get freaked out on power, status and money.

Politics is their game and, as Lenin once said, politics is just 'who does what to whom'.

This 'doing what' sometimes includes killing them, meaning getting someone else to do it, while at the same time pretending to 'hang tuff', 'kick ass' and ride 'off into the sunset', or some other such drivel straight out of Hollywood.

Politicians fight the class war too. For them, it's just another game, seeing how much they can con us, control us and get us at each other's throats.

Then they can sit back and watch it all over free grub and booze donated by arms dealers, oil magnates and anybody else with enough dosh to pay for a knighthood or to ben-

>> continued on page 10

The STUFF YOUR BOSS doesn't want you to know

The following articles give an overview of some developments in Solidarity Federation's ideas and activities around workplace issues over the last two years or so. The first goes into some of our work around casualisation; the second is one SF member's take on the value of local workplace meetings or assemblies; while the third gives a case study of a struggle in which one SF local played a role, and which involved resistance to casualisation based on local workplace organisation and assemblies.

The 'Stuff Your Boss' leaflet (see page 31 to order bundles) gives an outline of your basic rights at work regardless of any employment contract you may have, whether you have a full or part time position, or whether your status is temporary, permanent or agency employed.

It also covers health and safety issues like the working time regulations; the 'one-size-fits-all' grievence procedure introduced in 2004; and also makes the point that the most effective way of defending our rights is by organising ourselves.

The leaflet is used by SF members to campaign around casualisation and to raise awareness of the kinds of abuses that bosses get away with, more often than not unchallenged.

We generally get a good response from passers by; people take small bundles of leaflets for their own workplaces or to pass round their friends; others stop to talk to us about their own issues, examples including being sacked for getting pregnant, being paid below the minimum wage, being bullied in hotel and restaurant kitchens, to name but a few.

In the north west of England, SF groups and members carry out this type of activity under the banner of the 'Stuff Your Boss campaign against casualisation'.

In Bristol comrades are involved in the 'Bristol Against Casualisation Campaign', which among other things produces the Casual Times newsletter.

In London, members have initiated a series of informational pickets outside branches of Starbucks in solidarity with IWW members in the US sacked for union organising.

As well as being good in themselves all of these activities are useful in terms of discussion of the politics and practicalities of solidarity with casual workers and the best ways of encouraging these workers to organise.

While casualisation is rife in the private sector, there is also a growing army of 'long term' casual workers in the public sector.

Here the injustice of casualisation can be especially highlighted. Throughout the NHS, local government and the education sector there is an increasing use of rolling temporary contracts which deny casual workers many of the employment rights of their 'established' co-workers.

Rejecting the idea that casual workers are somehow different to other workers helps us to address the fragmented

nature of many workplaces.

Our work on casualisation seeks to unite workers in concrete terms by promoting organisation in the workplace, not according to type of contract.

In Manchester, the 'Stuff Your Boss' campaign is being developed in the direction of advertised 'drop in sessions'.

The aim is to share our knowledge and experience to encourage workers to seek collective solutions to their workplace problems.

This type of work has been done in the past through workers contacting us via phone, email or letter, and this will continue along side the 'drop in session' approach.

While seeking to promote workplace organisation, we clearly understand and certainly do not hide the fact that this approach is not without risk for the individual worker.

We see our role therefore as offering practical solidarity in organising at work. It is not to provide legal solutions.

However, if a worker approaching us wishes to go down the legal road for whatever reason we can help put them in contact with a more appropriate organisation - whether that be a TUC union, a law centre or a citizens advice bureau.

In summary, we seek to promote the broadest possible approach to casualisation.

It's basically about the erosion of working conditions - lowering of pay; abuse of the minimum wage; increased part-time working; spread of temporary and short term contracts; denial of basic rights to immigrant workers; even the government's obsession with driving single parents and others off benefits.

Over the longer term, we see these approaches to casualisation as part of a wider strategy based on taking on some of the functions of unions.

Workplace assemblies and SF industrial strategy

Among other things, SolFed's industrial strategy outlines an approach to workplace organisation that can apply equally to those in the official trade unions who wish to organise independently of the union bureaucracy and those who wish to set up other types of self-organisation.

In that sense, it is something that can be applied equally by workers who are permanent and in a recognised union and to workplaces marked with a high turnover of staff, where casualisation and all that goes with it is rife.

One such strand of the industrial strategy is the workplace-based meeting or assembly. The following is one SF member's experiences of using this tactic in a unionised workplace.

Unions proclaim in their handbooks to be 'democratic member-led unions' but have a hierarchical and bureaucratic structure that mitigates against this. However, often our unions are where our workmates are organised and they have helped to protect wages, pensions and conditions so we have a certain attachment to them.

But we can empower members and encourage more democratic practice by holding local meetings (which can take place either within or outside of the workplace).

When I became a steward I spoke to everyone individually then organised a local meeting where I pointed out that I didn't want to act like an MP - 'you vote for me, I'll consult you then make decisions on your behalf...' - but as a delegate acting on an agreed 'mandate' from meetings. I also encourage members to recall me via a local meeting at anytime if they feel I have acted over their heads.

There is a significant difference between the approach of a steward who tries to act as a delegate and the approach of one who acts as a representative.

Although the 'representative' approach is even clearer higher up the unions, it can also be seen at the level of a 'lay representative' such as shop steward who is unpaid by the union and is elected by members locally.

In TUC unions, there are representatives who are not directly elected by members or accountable to them. This has led to a bureaucracy forming which wants to protect its position of mediating with the bosses. To do this they have to contain workers' anger, adopting strategies that focus on legalistic bargaining and lobbying of politicians.

This favours the formation of a layer of professional union employees who monopolise the specialised knowledge and connections involved in that kind of activity.

A union that concentrates knowledge, expertise and levers of decision-making into the hands of a minority isn't one that can lead to ordinary people gaining greater control over their lives.

Instead, we see time and again these unelected officials, who are on far greater pay than ordinary members, doing deals behind the backs of those

same members, selling them out during disputes with employers.

Workers having a greater say will only become possible with their active mobilisation in large numbers. So the alternative is to have an organised effort to build up knowledge and leadership skills among ordinary members and to put their mobilisation at centre stage.

Promoting local workplace meetings is one essential step in this direction. They encourage interest in unions giving the chance for members to try and make workplace organisation relevant for them. Potentially they provide an arena in which workers get to discuss ideas and issues that affect them; they can bounce them off each other, not just the steward who can't pretend to have all the answers.

They can develop their strategies for solving problems they face on an everyday level as well as larger questions. Giving members roles to play in meetings, e.g. chair, minute taker, etc. increases their skills and self-confidence.

Local meetings mean members feel and express a practical sense of ownership of their union locally, a sense of solidarity with each other which makes it easier to mobilise them for larger meetings or other activities.

If we want our workmates to see workplace organisation as something relevant to them (and we are in a fairly strongly unionised workplace such as many public sector bodies) we can't reproduce the feelings of alienation, which they experience at work by making decisions above their heads and filling meetings with dry report backs from higher committees.

There's a danger that if the union work locally is perceived as remote, impersonal and where members' struggles are managed by experts rather than by encouraging more direct control by members themselves, we'll reproduce some of the hierarchical behaviour and relations of the workplace.

There is a stultifying mix of brain deadening dross flowing down the corporate hierarchies. These include 'core briefs' and toothless bodies such as management-led workplace forums, etc. - all a raft of phoney consultation processes, the product of so-called 'Human Resources' and management psychology departments in universities.

All of this increases inertia, passivity and lack of interest whilst masquerading as an increase in workers' democratic participation in the running of their workplaces.

Therefore it is important for us to work 'bottom up' until we have the chance of building more directly democratic organisations.

Workers' reps need to spread the habits of organising local meetings and acting on mandates and recall.

This will provide a transparent process to gauge members' views, hopefully influencing them in a libertarian direction, but at the same time making it harder for members to feel a left wing rep is working to their 'own agenda' and harder for management to drive a wedge between members and their reps.

The approach of different workplace reps can come from their conceptions of democracy - anarcho-syndicalism has something to say about that which distinguishes it from everything else, from New Labourism to Leninism:

Direct Democracy	Representative democracy
Develops consensus by debate	Involves only a few members
Delegate acts on mandate from members; is accountable via meeting and subject to recall; division of roles devolves power to grass roots	Member's decisions-making power usurped covertly; rep becomes insulated from members
Knowledge and skills spread among members; a collective approach	Rep becomes the expert; open to egotism, careerism and 'glorious leader' syndrome
empowers and mobilises members and encourages participation and self-activity	encourages passivity and dependence; creates paper membership waiting from orders from above
workers and service users/consumers can start to campaign for their own interests directly, self-managing their own struggles	asked to elect 'better' leaders...a new ruling minority which maintains its own power foremost via hierarchical structures and bureaucratic manouevres
power remains decentralised	power is centralised

For more on anti-casualisation, visit www.solfed.org.uk, and see how you can get (directly) involved

Case study: casual workers in Bristol working with SolFed

In 2005 SF members in Bristol were involved in a dispute in a voluntary sector organisation. No SF members worked there but we were known to someone that did.

The workers were on temporary contracts or had no contract at all, while the place was run by a voluntary board of directors.

One day all the workers were issued with redundancy notices and were told that they would all have to re-apply for their jobs, only the pay would be less, the working conditions would change and the qualification requirements would be different.

In effect they would either be out of a job or would not be able to afford to continue working there.

One of the workers contacted SF and a meeting was called of local anarchist and libertarian workplace militants.

The worker explained the situation to the meeting. Ideas, suggestions and support were offered, and one workplace militant, who worked in the same sector as the workplace in question, was asked to attend a meeting of all the workers affected.

The workers had spent lots of time discussing amongst themselves what they would like to do and these ideas were discussed at length.

The militant attending the meeting also offered suggestions from the previous meeting on how to organise to resist these redundancies and how to go on the offensive.

He also used his experience of unionising a similar workplace to back up suggestions as to tactics that could be used.

Bristol SF also contacted experienced SF members further afield and put them directly in touch with the workers. All this helped the workers forge their plan of action.

The workers requested a meeting with management. Prior to this they voted on whether or not to have an immediate all out strike and occupation. This was narrowly defeated in a vote of all workers at a mass meeting.

Strike action was discussed at length. Some were wary because of past experience, others had no experience of disputes and were nervous about such a dramatic course of action.

In the end, because the strike vote was not solid they opted to use other tactics instead. The workers also joined the T&G en masse and asked a branch official to attend the meeting with management.

The management delegation turned up to a meeting of what they thought was going to be one or two workers.

Instead they were met with all the workers; a union official; a list of demands; individual written grievances from every worker; a list of health and safety law breaches and funding arrangement breaches; as well as a reminder of workers' whistleblowing rights.

One of the demands was immediate negotiation of a union recognition agreement drafted by the workers with support from SF.

The management agreed and looked very shocked at the sheer power of the workers' case and how well they had prepared.

They initially looked frightened of the union official until he started to offer concessions without the agreement the workers and much to their disdain. He was told to be quiet.

The management delegation scuttled away. The workers recruited as many friends as they could to be 'members' of this organisation (the voluntary sector equivalent of shareholders) and called an emergency general meeting.

Before being sacked by the new members the board resigned en masse, never to be seen or heard of again.

The workers all got permanent contracts, secure jobs, a recognition agreement that gives enormous power to workers' mass meetings and a new board that is under strict instruction as to who is in charge. 1-0 to the workers.

Talking to the workers one year on, they said they should have joined a more agressive militant union rather than the T&G but they were immensely proud of what they had done.

Collective action and imagination, rather than whatever recourse to legal remedies there might be after you've lost your job, is now seen as the way to go for these workers at least.

"One of the demands was immediate negotiation of a union recognition agreement drafted by the workers with support from SF. The management agreed and looked very shocked at the sheer power of the workers' case and how well they had prepared."

Discrimination, discrimination, discrimination

Despite the introduction of legislation that attempts to stop discrimination, it still goes on. Where do we stand on the issue?

It seems that everyone can claim they are discriminated against these days. Smokers grumble that they are being treated as second class citizens because they cannot pursue their addiction in public places. Upper class toffs on horseback protest that their freedom to enjoy ripping foxes to shreds has been severely curtailed and many other groups, ranging from evangelical Christians to divorced fathers, have argued that their values and outlook are under threat and their freedoms are being restricted.

The past decade has seen a marked increase in legislation around the issues of equality and diversity. It has also spawned an increasing number of training courses as well as 'consultants' cashing in on both private companies and public organisations' concern not to fall foul of any new law.

These laws and regulations are supposed to ensure that no one is discriminated against no matter what their gender, race, culture, disability, sexual orientation, etc.

The basis for these laws is that we should recognise the diverse nature of our society and respect the many differences between us while ensuring that everyone is treated fairly. This sounds all well and good but of course many of these differences are incompatible and actually contradict each other.

Some people cannot change what they are. If you have a certain disability then you have a disability. It is not a choice you make. The same goes for your gender, your sexuality and the colour of your skin (Wacko Jacko not withstanding). It is only right that this aspect of diversity should be recognised.

On the other hand people choose whether to smoke or hunt, they choose what religion to follow, and which particular parts of a culture they adopt.

For example there is the smokers' right to inhale toxic fumes into their lungs whenever and wherever they want to is contrasted with the non-smokers' right not to have to inhale those same fumes.

On another level, the proclaimed right of some religious people to discriminate against others is set against the rights of non-believers to live their lives as they see fit.

What is patently obvious is that some things that are dressed up as a human right are no such thing and that arguing that we must respect others' culture no matter what has eroded basic notions of equality.

Obviously no human can live outside of culture but they do not have to live inside a particular one.

Humans are 'culture-bearing' because they are social beings, but as social beings are also capable of transforming their cul-

ture. Humans have the innate capacity for change, for progress, and for realising moral and political ideas through reason and dialogue.

To see humans as having to be constrained by specific cultures is, on the contrary, to deny such a capacity for transformation. It implies that every human being is so shaped by a particular culture that they are unable to change or challenge it.

It suggests that the biological fact of a certain ancestry somehow make a human being incapable of living a fulfilling life except as a member of that culture.

Belief in a cultural pluralism - when all groups within society maintain their unique cultural identities - is being pushed by the government into every corner of our lives.

This new orthodoxy means accepting that all cultures and ways of life are equally valid and that there is no one impartial or universal viewpoint from which the claims of all particular cultures can be rationally assessed.

Different peoples and cultures have different values, beliefs and truths, each of which may be regarded as legitimate.

Yet this pluralistic approach is logically flawed. If it is true that any perspective we adopt comes from a particular way of life and the historic practices that constitute it, then this must apply to pluralism too. Pluralists can never claim that plural society is better, since, according their own argument; there is no impartial or universal viewpoint from which the claims of all particular cultures can be reasonably assessed.

It is argued that different cultures and ways of life should be treated with equal respect. But how can we?

To treat them with equal respect we have to be able to compare one with the other yet to do so, according to the pluralists, is to impose our viewpoint.

The principle of difference cannot provide any standards that oblige us to respect the 'difference' of others. On what basis can they demand our respect or we demand theirs?

It is very difficult to support respect for difference without appealing to some principles of equality or social justice. And it is the possibility of establishing just such universalistic principles that has been undermined by the embrace of a pluralistic outlook.

After all the idea of equality arises from fact that humans are political creatures.

As such we possess a capacity to create different cultures; but this does not mean that all cultures are equal.

To replace the idea of the equality of human beings with the idea of the equality of cultures denies the possibility of any sort of social equality at all.

It is a critical feature of human development that we have the capacity for social, moral and technological progress, for making ideas that are not simply different but also often better (though sometimes worse), than those of a previous generation or another culture.

The multiculturalists, however want us to ignore the notion of change and development and replace it with the requirement to respect other cultures, no matter what, and to adapt our attitudes and arrangements so that the tradition they represent is encouraged rather than criticised.

So why should I, as an anarcho-syndicalist, be expected to show respect for any cultures whose views and arguments I

consider reactionary and often despicable?

Why should arrangements be made to fit in with the backward, misogynistic, homophobic claims that some religions make for example?

Why shouldn't I look towards a time when these cultures have vanished just as I'd look forward to the disappearance of capitalist, fascist and authoritarian societies?

How am I supposed to give them my respect, without disrespecting my own views?

There is nothing inherently good in itself about diversity. It can be significant because it lets us compare and contrast different values, beliefs and lifestyles, make judgements upon them, and decide which are better and which worse.

It allows us to engage in political dialogue and argue for a more universal set of values and beliefs that would allow true freedom and equality to flourish and so bear a diversity of lifestyles that do not violently contradict each other.

The failure of multiculturalism is that it attempts to suppress dialogue and debate, and the making of value judgements, in the name of 'tolerance' and 'respect'.

It does not really allow what is valuable about cultural diversity to flourish but encourages people to retreat into hardened positions of intolerance.

Even within Asian areas where Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus have lived side by side the different communities have started to divide.

They increasingly live in different areas, attend different schools and organise through different institutions.

New council funding and Government regeneration grants are being increasingly allocated to community organisations according to religious and ethnic affiliations.

Because of this the more organised ethnic minority groups with a section of articulate middle class professionals within them have been able to gain funding and support while the white working class groups, excluded by class differences, have found it difficult to come to terms with the rules of the game.

This of course brings us to the one overriding fact that the advocates of equality and diversity seem to have conveniently forgotten; we live in a capitalist society, which by its very nature is built and depends upon inequality.

Economic equality is not considered relevant and worthy of questioning. Class is ignored as everyone is encouraged to identify with either their interest group, their 'community' be that their ethnic background, their sexual orientation or whatever.

The increasing classification along cultural and religious lines means that we are encouraged to identify with others of the same background irrespective of their class.

This means that Muslim workers will see their best interests served by aligning themselves with Muslim bosses, Hindus workers with Hindu bosses etc.

This leaves the way open for far right groups to pose as the 'friend' of the white workers and try to set up new unions for 'British' workers only.

Equality means reaffirming those things that we have in common as workers and not accommodating the State's notion of diversity - or their rehashing of the idea of 'Britishness'.

Workers of whatever cultural background share common problems of exploitation, casualisation and worsening workplace conditions, as well as discrimination along the lines of 'race', gender, disability, sexual orientation.

Whilst the Government-sponsored drive towards multiculturalism masks the economic base of class struggles, workers will continue to be divided along familiar fault-lines.

But it is collective, joined-up resistance that works on all fronts - and this includes the fight for human equality regardless of social or cultural differences.

<< continued from page 3

'saved' for free market capitalism - i.e. for their own back pockets.

Kids from 'small town America' just don't make them so much money any more, so they need the whole world to make money in.

The planet is just one massive Monopoly board now.

Anybody in the way: 'stand on the bastards!' or 'kill 'em with them new rockets our firm has just knocked up, then the Israelis and Saudis might buy 'em after they've been field tested'.

This lot don't mess about on X, Y and Z boxes, but even these don't pull the trigger themselves.

All over the world people's heads are addled by promises of paradise if 'we' can just get rid of 'this lot' or 'that lot'.

Young men and women get their brains pumped so full of shit at the same time as their bodies are pumped full of hot blood, and they become cannon fodder for the real life war gamers - the megalomaniacs, politicians, bomb builders and brass heads.

Muhammad Ali, for one, resisted the draft and went jail rather than go and fight his 'Vietnamese brothers'.

But then, standing up to jikes like 'coward' and 'traitor' may not have been to hard for the heavyweight champion of the world. Not so easy for most of the 'pawns in the game'.

NOTIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

The great health and social care swindle

Most of us at some point in our lives will use Health and Social care services, be they NHS, Local Authority, or private sector. Many of us also will be only too aware of the major funding crisis that exists, threatening many of the basic services we have taken for granted in the past.

Add to this the numerous high profile scandals in the NHS (ie. MRSA, malnourishment of elderly patients, postcode lotteries that deny patients access to life-saving treatments, etc.), and the picture looks increasingly bleak.

There are a number of factors which have contributed to this sorry state of affairs, from demographic changes to fundamental mismanagement. But pure and simple, the root of the problem is chronic underfunding and misguided policy making by politicians who have little understanding of the needs of people using, providing or requiring services.

Nice idea, shame about the funding

In the last 20 years there has been a major push by the legislative bodies to close large-scale institutions and replace these with more person-centred services on a local level.

Indeed, many of us who work in social care will have witnessed a number of positive changes for groups such as people with learning disabilities who were once excluded and segregated from mainstream society.

The creation of monitoring bodies such as the Commission for Healthcare and Social Care Inspection respectively has also gone some way to improving quality assurance monitoring of some services.

However, apparently progressive policies have been stifled in their modest ambitions by a basic lack of funding. People who are vulnerable or recuperating from illness require additional support to enable them to live the lives they choose; in their own homes and in their own communities.

Often, basic services do not exist, are chronically under-funded or are being cut back. Meanwhile in the NHS hospital wards are closed, operations cancelled and patients forced to wait or travel long distances for relatively routine treatments.

Attacking the workers

The response of many local authorities has been to 'outsource' much of their provision to private sector providers who often pay their workers at rates barely above the minimum wage.

The very people who undertake such jobs precisely because they have a social conscience, (often working in particularly demanding and difficult conditions), make up some of the worst paid workers in the EU.

Similarly the NHS has seen fit to 're-tender' many catering and cleaning services to private contractors whose workers endure poor pay and inferior 'casual' conditions of service.

The widespread deployment of Management and IT consultants, allegedly to improve efficiency and performance, has seen further valuable funds diverted away from frontline services.

The recent pensions debacle which prompted widespread strike action (and even led to the public service union Unison temporarily withholding its political levy to the Labour Party) is also a direct consequence of cynical government penny-pinching and corporate mismanagement.

The temporary government concession to review proposals which would have resulted in the removal of protected pension rights and conditions appears to have appeased the union hierarchies.

However, in the longer term, rank and file workers need to be mindful of the longer term plan.

Such moves all appear to be motivated by a wider government agenda to erode pay and conditions which public sector workers have had to fight long and hard to achieve.

The great continuing care con

Linked to the funding crisis in the Health and Social care sector, is the government's proven unwillingness to fulfil its funding obligations for those people who have health needs which are categorised under its own Continuing Care criteria.

Anyone who has suffered the heartache of watching a loved one suffer the effects of a degenerative condition such as Parkinson's Disease or Dementia, will be well aware that at the point that people become too ill to live at home (again, usually only because resources are not available), they will be admitted to a nursing or care home to be looked after.

In reality, it should be noted that most nursing/care homes cater for basic physical needs and little else, despite the best efforts of their overstretched and underpaid staff.

Individuals entering nursing/care homes are financially assessed, and fees for such establishments can run into thousands. Anyone with assets exceeding £16,000 has to use these to finance their (social) care.

As a consequence, many are forced to sell their homes. This only places the burden of further stress on relatives and the individuals themselves at a time of already undue pressure.

How ironic that many of the generation who were promised free care 'from the cradle to the grave' (if they paid their tax and National Insurance) and advised to save for the proverbial rainy day, have suffered so cruelly at the hands of the politicians.

Two BBC Panorama programmes in 2006 also highlighted that many individuals residing in nursing homes who clearly meet the government's criteria for health care (which should be free under Continuing Care legislation) are still having to fund their own care and support.

Although a minority of test cases have overturned Local Authority/Health Trust decisions, it is nothing short of scandalous that the most vulnerable members of society are treated so appallingly. Some reward for a lifetime of hard work and toil.

Likewise, those people who often give up their jobs to look after their loved ones at home are denied basic financial, practical support and advice to help them cope with the massive sacrifice and demands that being an unpaid carer brings.

Warped priorities

So, despite the widespread deployment of costly management consultants, league tables and performance frameworks in the NHS and Local Authorities, patients, unpaid carers, people receiving services and frontline staff have all borne the brunt of a lack of investment and the inability of local communities to have any real say in the type of services they receive.

As the National Health and other statutory services are increasingly cut back, the introduction of private healthcare has effectively created a 2-tier system based on a person's ability to pay.

Meanwhile millions of taxpayers' money is invested in the occupation of Iraq and the new Trident programme.

Chief Executives and MPs award themselves huge pay rises. An obscenely rich minority enjoys a lavish, sumptuous lifestyle, whilst in some of the most socially deprived parts of the country average life expectancy barely scrapes past 50.

People not profit: time to fight back

All the fancy rhetoric and silver-tongued spin of the politicians cannot hide reality forever. When a crisis in capitalism hits, the weak and vulnerable and those that support them are the first casualties.

It is the task of health and social care professionals, patients and carers groups to organise and challenge the powers that be (including complicit union bosses) at every opportunity.

It is only by using our collective strength that we can strive for a more just and equal society where decent health and social care provision for all is a right, not a privilege for those who can afford it.

We need to work together to design and develop new systems, using all the knowledge and technology at our disposal, to provide people with the type of responsive person-centred care and treatment that they need and want.

As with most other social and environmental issues, this will not be achieved without wholesale changes in society as a whole and, ultimately, the destruction of capitalism.

Foundation trusts: a guide for NHS workers

Essential information on what the health bosses don't want you to know

We all know that the NHS is undergoing a period of 'reform', but what is actually happening? And what does this mean for those of us who work within the NHS?

As you might have guessed, the government doesn't exactly have our best interests at heart, and so their pretty simple policy of privatising any profitable areas of the NHS and closing down the rest of it are disguised in all kinds of strange new terminology and confusing doublespeak. All to try and minimise the number of us who realise what is happening!

There is currently a big push for NHS trusts to become so-called 'NHS Foundation Trusts'. What this means is that the trust in question (usually a hospital) effectively ceases to be accountable to the Department of Health and becomes a privately controlled entity. Its land, buildings and equipment are no longer NHS property and instead are under the control of the Trust directors.

An independent and imaginatively named 'Monitor' is instead responsible for monitoring the trust's performance, as is the case with other privatised industries, and is almost entirely concerned with financial considerations.

At first glance this appears to be a clear case of wholesale privatisation and interestingly has even been referred to as such by Unison general secretary and Labour hack Dave Prentis, who has declared foundation trusts to be 'private hospitals'.

However, since privatising the NHS in this brazen way would be extremely unpopular amongst employees and users alike, the government has introduced a number of (pretty feeble, it has to be said) 'safeguards' which, the argument goes, mean that this

does not count as real privatisation. We examine them below…

Profit-based healthcare

1. Foundation Trusts are, according to the government, 'not-for-profit' organisations. The basis of this claim is that they are not permitted to be owned by, and provide profit to, shareholders.
However, foundation trusts are allowed to keep 'surpluses' (profits by another name) thus providing the clear incentive to run the trust as a commercial concern rather than for public benefit.
They can 'dispose of' (i.e. sell off) former NHS land and assets (even those used for the provision of NHS services) and keep the profit. In addition they can provide private healthcare services - the proportion of their income they can earn from these is currently capped, though this cap is under review.
They can also enter into joint ventures with private corporations, which essentially allows the trust to engage in all the dodgy commercial activity which it is formally not allowed to do!
These joint ventures can, for example, finance private loans out of NHS revenues, charge fees (which can account for as much of its revenue as it wants) and must make profits and distribute them to shareholders. What's more, they don't even have to have anything to do with healthcare!

Corporate structure

2. According to the government foundation trusts are 'accountable to their local community' - they even have the cheek to try to present it as some kind of democratic advance!
The reality is that executive directors, responsible for the day-to-day funding of the trust, are completely unelected. Non-executive directors are indirectly accountable to a vaguely-defined 'membership' which is supposedly representative of staff and the local community, though there are no rules as to exactly how representative it should be.
This membership (along with interested local bodies such as the local council, Primary Care Trust etc) elects 'governors', who in turn elect the non-executive directors. All rather complicated, but when it comes down to it the structure of a foundation trust is very similar to that of a private company, with power just as concentrated and unaccountable.
Despite government attempts to create an Orwellian new label ('Public Benefit Corporations') to define foundation trusts, the Office for National Statistics correctly classes them as private rather than public bodies due to this unaccountability.
So when you combine points one and two the implications are clear. Foundation trusts are structured and run just like private corporations.
They can make and keep financial 'surpluses' and even distribute profits to private shareholders - just like private corporations do.
They will compete against private hospitals and other NHS trusts for money from 'customers' and Primary Care Trusts - just like private corporations do.
In short, a foundation trust looks like a private corporation, sounds like one, and clearly it will behave like one. So what are the implications for staff?

"With the leadership of the main health worker unions irrevocably tied to the Labour Party it's clear that the massive opposition needed to reverse these changes is not going to be organised for us - we'll have to do it ourselves"

Foundation Trusts and you

The responsibility of a foundation trust is to provide health services 'effectively, efficiently and economically' - i.e. to focus on the balance sheet, not patient need.
They are free to set their own pay scales, and who knows when it might be financially prudent to slash your pay in a way which an NHS trust bound to national pay agreements would not be able to do?
FTs are also free to contract staff out to private companies - we have already seen this happening in non-clinical areas such as catering, cleaning, parking, etc. with disastrous results in terms of staff pay and conditions, as well as understaffing problems which have led to the rise in hospital infections.
Clearly it's cheaper not to provide enough staff to clean the hospital properly, and that way more profits can line the pockets of parasitical shareholders.
FTs threaten to extend this contracting out to private corporations further, clinical areas included. If you don't want to see yourself and your job sold to the highest bidder like chattel, then foundation trusts are something to be

opposed!
Even if your job is not outsourced the clear incentives to the directors to run the trust like a business rather than as a public service will place similar commercial pressures on employees.
They will want more done for less, which will more than likely mean that your workplace is understaffed and you are overworked.
If you work in a less 'profitable' area of healthcare - such as 'chronic' long term conditions, various kinds of rehabilitation, elderly care, mental health, etc. - your job may disappear completely.
This kind of healthcare is not easily run in the kind of conveyor belt way which sees a steady throughput of patients bringing in the cash, but is rather more complicated, long-term and to put it bluntly, bad for business.
It is no coincidence that mental health and elderly care have been, and continue to be, among the areas hardest hit by NHS cuts in recent years.
Whilst this is clearly a bad thing in terms of our job security, it also surely needs to be opposed by the vast majority of NHS workers who care about the people we treat - we want to work in a service that takes care of everyone who needs us, regardless of how 'profitable' they are.

A picket during a one-day NHS workers' strike in Sheffield. Picture: Indymedia Sheffield

The Future

The government has stated that its target is for all NHS trusts to become foundation trusts by 2008. This includes Primary Care Trusts which purchase healthcare from hospitals - the complicated workings of the (now renamed, but unfortunately still going strong) NHS 'internal market' is for a future article.
It has also stated that private healthcare providers will be eligible for foundation status.
The future mapped out for healthcare provision in this country, therefore, is one of private and privatised foundation trusts competing with each other for 'customers' under the supervision of the independent 'Monitor' - in other words wholesale privatisation of the NHS.
Transition to foundation trust status is an integral part of this process.

Prospects for resistance

Unfortunately, but rather predictably, the main criteria by which the government assesses a hospital's application for foundation status is financial.
Despite the usual lip service to accountability, in practice they don't really need to demonstrate any level of public or staff support for these drastic changes, or even to explain properly what is happening.
To date, no campaign to prevent a hospital becoming a foundation trust has been successful, largely perhaps because the whole process of NHS privatisation is so well disguised behind government lies and propaganda.
However, it's important that NHS workers and users know what is going on because at some point we're going to have to turn things around if we want to live and work with a healthcare service worthy of the name.
With the leadership of the main health worker unions irrevocably tied to the Labour Party it's clear that the massive opposition needed to reverse these changes is not going to be organised for us - we'll have to do it ourselves.
As anarcho-syndicalists we already know that self-managed collective struggles employing direct action tactics are the only weapons we have which can really get the goods in this or any other sector - it's high time we got organised and got angry.

Stuff Your Boss: info on page 31

Iraq, the War on Terror and the health of the state

Where now for the troubled country? Will the US continue with its current strategy regarding war and terror?

The state is not politically neutral; it is not merely a tool to be commanded at will by whichever group happens to be in power. It is a living entity made up of powerful groups whose interests are best served by constantly seeking to extend the state and their own power.

To maintain and extend the power of the state an external threat is needed, for without a perceived enemy there is little point in maintaining the vast military structures that lie at the heart of the state.

As such, it has been, and always will be, in the

interests of those working within the state to ensure there is an external threat, real or otherwise, to justify the state's and their own existence.

For much of the 20th century, in the now defunct communist bloc, the justification for vast military expenditure and inhuman internal repression came in the form of the capitalist west, which was constantly held up as a threat to the socialist fatherland.

In the west, the mirror image was the demonisation of 'communism'. Externally, it was portrayed as a powerful military force ready to invade at any moment, while at home communism was the sinister force behind workers' militancy and just about every dissident group from CND to striking miners to community efforts to get a street crossing installed.

This explains why the collapse of the Soviet Union came as a bit of a shock to many employed at the killing end of state activities. The worrying question became how to justify large amounts of military spending with no real enemy to frighten the folks at home with.

This problem was especially acute in the USA where the massive military budget props up a declining economy and is the source of America's status as the world's only super power.

The vast military industrial complex built up during the cold war has become a drug to the US, a drug whose habit is hard to kick.

Cuts in military expenditure threatened the whole American Empire, for without it the US could not impose its will through brute force on the rest of the world.

Iraqi workers, dealing with the US-friendly international media

The fear in the higher reaches of the vast state apparatus was that the war had been won against the old enemy Russia, but the peace could be lost. It became crucial that this vast military spending was maintained, and for that an external enemy needed to be found.

New enemies to slay were quickly sought. Somewhat lamely, the idea of the 'war on drugs' was floated, as if the battle against South American drug cartels could justify the nuclear deterrent.

Then came the bloodbath of September 11th and the US state seized the moment to manufacture a new enemy and the 'war on terror' was born. The idea of a 'war on terror', however, was not without its problems, most notably the absence of a real enemy.

Al-Qaeda consisted of a few small groups that commanded little support within the Muslim world.

Not to worry, a new enemy was soon found in the shape of Iraq, a militarily enfeebled state that would soon collapse in the face of US military might.

There was the slight problem that Saddam and co had traditionally favoured secularism and opposed any form of Muslim fundamentalism, seeing it as a danger to themselves.

But that was not deemed too much of a problem once the threat posed by 'weapons of mass destruction' had been invented to whip up anti-Iraqi hysteria.

It was thought it would be easy enough to convince people that Saddam and Bin Laden were one and the same enemy in this 'war on terror'. After all, 9/11 had to be revenged and Iraq was the perfect place to do it, providing a quick military victory to reinforce US power in the region.

At the same time it

A demonstration in the US, supporting Iraqi workers

established a tangible enemy to bolster the 'war on terror' campaign, with the added bonus of securing the world's second largest oil field for exploitation by US capitalism.

Unfortunately the military walk in the park did not quite go as planned and the war is proving a disaster for the Bush administration.

As a result, the neoconservative idea of slimmed down, highly mobile armed forces, whose vast technological advantage would be enough to defeat any potential enemy and thus guarantee the US continued status as the world's only superpower, is in tatters.

Barring a military miracle, some form of face saving tactical retreat by the US looks increasingly certain in Iraq. But before we start counting our chickens and begin to celebrate a US defeat, perhaps we should stay focused on the political realities.

Sure, an American withdrawal would be a massive blow to US credibility and it would spell the end of the neoconservatives' hold on US policy.

It would however not bring an end to US imperialism.

Whoever replaces Bush will simply revert to the more tried and trusted methods of pursuing US interests through economic and diplomatic pressure, underpinned by the military threat.

Nor should we think that the failures in Iraq have somehow diminished the US ability to use military force. The blood bath in Iraq has not yet ended and already a new reality is being created.

In the US a new consensus is emerging that the war in Iraq is a mistake, but a new unity is now needed in order to defeat the real enemy, Muslim fundamentalism. This is a war that may take decades to win and, unlike Iraq, it has the full support of America's European allies.

At this stage there may not be a great deal of support for military action but this situation can soon change. The blood bath in Iraq has led to the radicalisation of whole swathes of the Muslim world that now see the west as a legitimate target, making further attacks almost inevitable.

Coupled to that is the poisoned atmosphere that already exists in the west where a daily diet of anti-Muslim rhetoric is stoking up fear, hatred and near hysteria.

Against this background western opinion will not be hard to manipulate, making military attacks on 'rogue' states that will not toe the western line only a matter of time.

The horrifying thing in all this is just how easily the state, aided by the press, can manufacture enemies to meet its needs.

Not so many years ago the cold war had been won, helped by the Muslim resistance in Afghanistan. For a brief moment it was thought that we could look forward to a bright future of peace and prosperity. There was even talk of the new enemy being world poverty. But such moments never last.

The state - all states - have at their core military machines staffed by people whose whole existence is geared to fighting the enemy. Without some form of threat they become obsolete.

Well, the generals can sleep safe now that a new enemy has been found and the world has once again been divided between good and evil. True, the Muslim world poses no real threat to the west; there is no Muslim super state that threatens western supremacy; but as enemies go they will do for now.

After all, waiting in the wings is the rising super power, China - now that's a real enemy for our military geniuses to get their teeth into.

Spanish workers show the way against privatisation

A familiar process of out-sourcing and privatisation of the public sector has been taking place in Spain over the last few years.

Conservative and Socialist governments alike have either encouraged the process or done little to halt it. Recently, however, in opposition to the privatisation of hospitals and health care in the Madrid autonomous region, under the control of the Conservatives, workers have banded together across union divides on a 'rank and file' platform.

The new platform, the CAS, is opposed to the public-private partnerships of the Madrid local government and the sub-contracting of services within hospitals to private firms.

This will mean that firms created with public money will be able to opt out of agreed frameworks for existing public sector workers - exactly the kind of move brought in in the UK under the Tories and continued with zeal by Labour.

Our sister union, the

CNT-IWA, has formed part of the opposition movement together with unions such as CGT and Solidaridad Obrera and has denounced the connivance of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) in voting for these changes.

The CNT is opposed to the stance taken by the official unions, UGT and CCOO, who have signed away workers' rights over the last years, having agreed with the Conservative PP not to rock the boat.

Other sectors have also shown promising signs of independent workers' action and 'assembleyist' type of organisation. Over the last year, a wave of workers' assemblies, outside of the structures of the official unions that sit on the Works Committees with their backs to the workers, has grown up in the Spanish postal services.

A demonstration last November gathered 2,000 workers from different parts of the country to protest against privatisation and down-grading of contracts and services.

Again, after years of inactivity and conniving with management on the part of the CCOO and UGT unions, all the assemblies' activity are mobilised outside of these unions.

Workers have created an on-line blog (www.correosenlucha.spaces.live.com) to help in their organisation.

Movements such as these in the health and postal sectors are heartening and deserve support for going beyond the official unions' strangle-hold over workplaces which results so often in worsening conditions for workers and their families.

As a passing note, it is dismaying but not surprising to hear that both CCOO and UGT have agreed with the Spanish government that the 'wave' of immigration from Romania must be regulated and that it can't be a free-for-all.

Instead of seeking to unite workers across international divides these unions are doing the government's dirty work and sucking up to capitalists. Our only hope is workers' internationalism and independent unionism controlled by us, the workers.

APPO come back strong in Oaxaca

Despite repeated attacks by the national government, the workers' movement in the Mexican state is coming out fighting

Section 22 of the National Education Workers Union (SNTE) decided that the truce asked for by the state governor was without value and took over the government office of the Secretary General (Segob, as it is referred to) in the city of Oaxaca on February 21, along with thirty-two other offices statewide.

The popular assembly movement has regrouped and caught its breath. It's now in a new phase of the struggle for Oaxaca, which I call the 2007 pre-electoral phase.

How the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO, in its Spanish initials) has been able to recapture its former strength has three answers; the teachers, the indigenous peoples and civil society.

The internal union housecleaning involved displacing the former secretary of Section 22 of SNTE, Enrique Rueda Pacheco, who is regarded as a sell-out. Rueda's formal status appears to be irrelevant at this moment; he no longer has major input into union decisions.

Section 22's strength has rebounded despite the fracture caused by the collaboration of Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz (URO) and national SNTE president, PRI member Elba Esther Gordillo.

Between the two of them, they split off Section 59 of SNTE, a group of between 2,000-4,000 teachers out of the 70,000 Section 22 membership. Along with Section 59, the Central Council for Struggle (CCL) set up by Ruiz has been holding 200 schools, locking out the Section 22 teachers who were on strike for more than five months.

The substitute teachers, along with parents in sympathy with the governor, refused to permit Section 22 teachers to return to their classrooms. The post November 25 struggle has been violent, with state police coming into classes to arrest teachers who are APPO supporters and with the two union factions coming to blows outside schools in some areas such as Juchitán.

Near Oaxaca, in the sub-

urb of Viguera, according to one teacher who lives there but who teaches in another town, round-the-clock guards (called topiles in the usos y costumbres vernacular) patrol to forestall invasion, capture or shooting of Viguera residents.

Segob (the federal secretary of government's department) negotiated a pause in the struggle but did not honor its promise to hand back the schools to Section 22. In retaliation for this failure, about 7,000 members of Section 22 - not classroom teachers -aided by members and sympathizers of the APPO carried out a takeover of the thirty-two state offices following the decision of the APPO state council.

This reconnection of the APPO and the education workers union brings back much of the lost strength of the APPO, which called for protests (the ninth megamarch on February 4) that demonstrated that the APPO is recovering from the fear induced during the weeks following the brutal and indiscriminate November 25 attack by the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) and the subsequent hunt-down of APPO supporters.

In addition to the APPO and the teachers, there is now the resolution of the indigenous population in play. This segment of the population - indeed, the largest segment in Oaxaca - has stepped forward for the popular movement.

The debate among the indigenous towns with respect to self-organizing for best protection from centuries of oppression has now surfaced. It reflects two different options. One, as espoused in the Juchitán area headed by the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) senator Othón Cuevas, seeks to form a strong regional alliance.

The other proposition, long espoused by the generation of men like Jaime Martinz Luna of Guelatao, was for maintaining each community independently, in virtual isolation, and letting the external PRI do what it chose in exchange for internal safety.

The force of caciquismo was so intense, and the people so poor, that they were highly dependent on the hand-outs the caciques brought, of cement or food staples. Martinez had good reasons; there's a paid advertisement photo in Noticias on February 22 showing URO handing out nine million pesos in "education works."

Perhaps Guelatao has lost some part of its integrity even while the process of linking communities of the Sierra Norte is taking place, including the push for community radio which may link town to town and aid APPO participation. Local organizations have been the norm, and these hundreds of organizations at the indigenous base still exist.

A message in support of the APPO

Furthermore, indigenous families who migrated to the urban areas for jobs brought with them their ideas of collective action and mutual support. That is why the city of Oaxaca's embattled neighborhoods had as central actors the poor on the barricades and women bringing food. The youth participated as marchers, barricaders and communication workers.

Civil organizations are stepping into visible lead roles again, and although a certain number of APPO supporters are still in hiding, some meet clandestinely.

From February 23 to March 25 a group comprised of five civil organizations is sponsoring the "National Meeting for Communication and

A banner expressing support for APPO at a demonstration against state violence

Society" which has attracted participants from Latin America and Mexico, as well as from Oaxaca.

The indigenous assembly, as well as the state APPO assembly, calls for promotion of community radio. Print, Internet, photography and other media will be discussed in the light of countering repression and disseminating accurate information.

Another example of the increased role of civil society is the continuing forum "Dialogue for Peace and Justice," which meets this month.

The local and national human rights organizations have been working since the November attacks, both to free the prisoners and to hold counseling sessions for the victims of torture.

The tenth megamarch is called for March 8, in observance of International Women's Day, to demand the freeing of the political prisoners and to also honor the women of the struggle. The expectations for this next march are that it will bring out the full strength of the movement.

Once again the inept government of Ruiz shot itself in the foot, because the repression was so vicious and so senseless that there is scarcely a Oaxaqueño left who does not say URO must go.

From time to time I speak with someone whom I know to have been against the APPO and the popular movement, and they agree.

One such person, a thirty-something woman who lives in a nice suburb and works in a city office, nodded, "We can see after that (departure) what will be possible."

From now until the August 5 Oaxaca state elections, and then on to the October 7 municipal elections, URO will try to maintain an appearance of normalcy. He attends a few very public events, more or less surreptitiously until he pops up in a town and just as surreptitiously vanishes after cutting a ribbon.

As an interesting insight into popular sentiment the state legislators (who may yet hope for re-election) already declared a failure of powers in the municipality of Zaachila.

Mayor José Coronel was put aside (and promptly reappointed by URO to another government post) in favor of a man chosen by the APPO-sympathetic local assembly during the height of the first phase of the struggle.

The APPO decided to not run any candidates and to maintain its own position as an independent entity. It voted in its state assembly that those who want to run for office, for whatever party, must resign positions they hold on the APPO state council. A parallel decision was the calling of another "punishment vote," like that of July 2, 2006.

The big advantage of the electoral season is the obvious restraint it imposes on Governor Ruiz, which applies to the APPO in no way. The state troopers guarding access to the Zócalo are down to a few at each entrance. The APPO is out and about. As I pass through the center, a certain vibrancy and air of expectation has returned.

This article originally appeared on NarcoNews, written by Nancy Davies. More on Oaxaca can be found at narconews.com

Anger as Argentine unemployed workers come under increasing pressure

In Argentina in February a hired assassin attempted to murder José Pepino Fernandez a prominent member of the Mosconi Unemployed Workers Organisation (UTD).

Though the attempt failed, two members of Jose's family narrowly escaped with their lives. This attempt is just the latest attack in a ten year campaign by the Argentinean authorities to crush the UTD.

In the last five years 4 members of the UTD have been murdered and over 200 wounded by police and the National Guard.

The reason why workers in Mosconi, a town in the Argentinean province of Salta, are being treated so brutally is due to the prominent role it has played in the piquetero movement.

The UTD was the first to use the tactics of blocking the roads (piquete), a form of protest which quickly spread throughout Argentina.

Since that time the UTD has waged a high profile militant campaign against the neoliberal politics of the Argentinean local and national government which has made the organisation a symbol of hate for the ruling class.

The town of Mosconi is in a region rich in gas and oil which in the past has ensured a reasonable standard of living for the local population up until, that is, the nationalisation of the Argentinean oil company YPF in 1991.

After nationalisation the workforce was slashed resulting in 75% of the population being thrown out of work.

Coupled to this the savage cuts in public spending, forced on Argentina by the IMF and World Bank, led to the virtual collapse in the state provision of health, education, clean water and gas in the town.

It was against this background that the UTD was created. The UTD not only uses militant protest to campaign for the renationalisation of the oil industry and against the free market policies of the government, it has also stepped in to fill the gap left by the collapse of state provision.

The UTD formed a workers cooperative movement which established some 65 projects providing much needed basic health, education and housing provision for the local population. In doing so the cooperative has also helped to bring much needed jobs to the town.

As is the case across the developing world, the free market restructuring programmes imposed on Argentina by the governments of the developed world has proved disastrous for working class people.

The UTD is just one of many organisations in Argentina that has emerged from the struggles of daily life to challenge the power of international capitalism.

In doing so they have paid a heavy price, facing murder and imprisonment. Their struggle for basic human needs deserves the support of the international labour movement.

IWA Congress: alive and kicking

The IWA held its congress in Manchester from 8-10 December. The event was organised by the Solidarity Federation and saw the participation of delegates from over a dozen anarcho-syndicalist organisations.

Some of these organisations have histories stretching back nearly 100 years like the Spanish CNT and the Argentinean FORA, while others are much younger, such as the Slovakian Priama Akcia or the Serbian ASI-MUR.

It showed that the International Workers Association is still alive and kicking.

Discussions took place on a variety of topics including the continuing struggle against casualisation and the war in Iraq and joint actions by all the IWA were decided upon.

The permanent secretariat of the international passed from the Norwegian NSF to the Serbian ASI-MUR.

Workers Against Work
Michael Seidman
University of California (1991)
ISBN 0-520-06915-3

A few years ago I was handed a leaflet at the Anarchist Bookfair in London titled 'Workers Against Work in the Spanish Revolution'. Recently I managed to get hold of a copy of the above book, subtitled 'Labor in Paris and Barcelona During the Popular Fronts', upon which the leaflet was based.

Although unfortunately currently out of print, it may be ordered through public libraries or obtained second hand. In his book Seidman makes some criticisms of anarcho-syndicalist practice that it is vital for anarcho-syndicalists to address.

In a thoroughly-researched narrative focusing on workers lived experience, Seidman examines and compares the events of the Spanish Revolution in Barcelona and the Popular Front in Paris, with particular emphasis on wage earners' acceptance of and resistance to work.

For the purposes of this review I am concerned primarily with his account of revolutionary Barcelona.

Seidman claims that the CNT's vision of workers control failed because CNT members themselves were not, in many instances, sufficiently engaged with or convinced of it.

They may have joined simply because the CNT was the best union to defend their interests. This perennial problem for anarcho-syndicalism was exacerbated in July 1936, when thousands of Barcelona's workers joined the CNT.

Many workers joined the unions not for ideological reasons but because life in revolutionary Barcelona was quite difficult without a union card.

To eat a meal in a collective kitchen, to acquire welfare aid, to find or keep a job, to attend a technical training center, to obtain housing, to be admitted to a clinic or hospital, to travel outside of Barcelona, and so forth, a union card was often desirable, if not necessary.

Helmut Rudiger, a German IWA delegate in Barcelona, wrote in June 1937 that prior to the Revolution the CNT had 150,000 to 175,000 members in Catalonia, which jumped to nearly a million in the months after July 1936; of which 80% were therefore new people.

A large part of this 80% could not be considered revolutionaries. Rudiger concluded that the CNT could not be an 'organic democracy'.

Seidman writes that many workers were reluctant to attend union meetings or pay union dues during the Revolution, and that apathy and indifference on the part of non-class conscious workers contributed to the disintegration of workers democracy and the reappearance of a managerial elite.

However, the CNT-FAI 'in power' had many shortcomings (including joining both the Generalitat [Catalan regional government] and the central government of Largo Caballero, of course) which must have demoralised its revolutionary members.

Seidman cites CNT nationalism (Solidaridad Obrera declared in May 1937, 'Spain for the Spanish', and 'Our Revolution Must Be Spanish'), a tactic which Rudiger, amongst others, judged had greatly harmed the Spanish libertarian movement.

Seidman also points to the existence of CNT labour camps (Garcia Oliver of CNT-FAI was Minister of Justice in the central government; CNT members were recruited as camp guards).

Understandable resentment against a bourgeoisie, a clergy, and a military whom workers considered unproductive and parasitic crystallized into a demand to reform these groups through productive labor.

Anarchosyndicalists endowed work with great moral value; the bourgeoisie, the military, and the clergy were immoral precisely because they did not produce. Thus penal reform meant forcing these classes to labor, to rid them of their sins through work.

Seidman ascribes a productivist morality and work ethic to the CNT and explains opposition to the State and Capital in these terms, rather than in terms of their oppressive and regressive functions in society and as examples of hierarchical, non-egalitarian institutions, which is how anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists traditionally see them.

The thorny problem of how to deal with members of the class enemy in revolutionary periods remains, of course.

Taylorism and scientific management were promoted by the industrially-modernising CNT (and UGT); and piece work, abolished early in the Revolution, was later re-introduced in many cases (eg Casa Girona), as a response to a decline in productivity.

Once again the lack of class-consciousness of many workers (and therefore many CNT members) 'who refused to produce without a monetary incentive' was a significant factor, according to a commission of the administrative board of the CNT Metallurgical Union.

On the other hand, Seidman argues convincingly that Union activists were asking workers to endorse enthusiastically their role as workers.

In effect, given the content of the militants' project for the development and rationalization of the means of production, workers were being pressured to participate willingly in their own bondage as wage earners.

It is hardly surprising that many of them were reluctant to take part in the developmental democracy of the Spanish Revolution, and it is little wonder that union militants often lamented the unattended factory assemblies and unpaid union dues.

As well as continuing to fight doggedly for better pay and conditions at work (sometimes playing the rival CNT and UGT off against one another to do so), workers also resisted/evaded work through lateness, absenteeism, feigned illness, leaving early (Seidman).

Criticisms of the actions of the CNT in the Spanish Revolution must be placed in context. The Spanish Revolution was an attempt to create a libertarian society and a momentous event, both for anarcho-syndicalism and in the history of the international working class.

However, we must strive to identify past errors, and avoid repeating them. Anarcho-syndicalists recognise the importance of organising in the workplace in revolutionary syndicates as a tactic for achieving an anarchist (libertarian communist) society, but this is not the same as worshipping work.

As a living theory advocating the self-liberation of the oppressed, and as a working class movement, anarcho-syndicalism reflects the desire of our class to be free of work; some jobs/workplaces it is necessary to socialise, but others (judiciary, financial services, law enforcement, civil service, prisons, sales and marketing, personnel, luxury pet food factories, 90% of consumer durable manufacturers etc., etc.) may most usefully be disposed of altogether.

The work required to be done by a free society should be equitably spread about the working population, and should bear as little resemblance to wage labour as experienced by most workers today as possible.

The Past Tense publishing project, in collaboration with the South London Radical History Group have produced yet more highly readable pamphlets exploring London's subversive past:

The Burning of the Albion Mills tells the story of the Albion steam-powered mills, the first great factory in London that stood on Blackfriars.

In 1791 they burned to the ground. Arson was strongly suspected. They were widely resented by millers and workers, and crowds gathered to celebrate the Mill's destruction; ballads were written and sung on the spot; who knows?

Last orders for the Local?: Inspired by the destruction of most of the best pubs in our locality and the increasing difficulty in finding a pub with a bearable atmosphere to enjoy a drink in, this pamphlet casts a critical eye over recent changes to pub environments and the emergence of 'theming' as a marketing factor in various fields of leisure and consumption.

It also ponders how this connects to the balance of class forces and changes in the way we relate to history and memory.

The Communist Club was originally a political social club formed by German émigrés and played an important role in the radical politics of London and Europe during the mid to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

It linked Chartism, utopian socialism, the First International, early anarchism and the first Marxist groups in Britain.

Set the People Free: Opposition to ID cards in North London, 1950/2006 is a timely reminder that some things do not change. During the Second World War the government introduced compulsory ID cards as part of their emergency measures.

It was not until seven years after the War that ID cards were finally withdrawn. Now the UK government is introducing ID cards again. What factors are the same, what are different and how can we learn from the past to resist their introduction now?

A Shabby London Suburb: A walk around the working class & radical history of Hammersmith tells of revolting peasants, heretics, civil war agitators, chartists, suffragettes, socialists, Irish republicans, anarchists, suffocated Tory MPs with satsumas in their mouths.

With the aid of this pamphlet you can wander the streets of one of West London's finest areas, delving into its proud and rebellious history.

> All the pamphlets are priced at a very reasonable £1.00 (except The Burning of the Albion Mills which is even better value at 50p!). For a price list and full details of how to order contact Past Tense, c/o 56a Info Shop, 56 Crampton Street, London SE17. More details and texts are available on line at past-tense.org.uk.

Defy T£$CO

How the retail behemoth is tightening its grip on society, and why we should resist it

Tesco, Britain's largest retailer, grabs £1 in every 8 spent on shopping. Whether Tesco is good value for shoppers is debatable, but they certainly are for shareholders - making £billion over the past few years.

Supermarkets wield immense power over what we grow, buy and eat. They claim to provide what the modern customer wants and, through loyalty cards, have supposedly built a precise picture of our habits and preferences.

The largest supermarkets are amongst the most influential companies on the face of this earth. Wal-Mart, for instance, has overtaken Exxon Mobil as the largest company in the world. Meanwhile Tesco is extending its tentacles all across Asia.

The Competition Commission's inquiry into supermarket power concluded that they didn't have a monopoly in grocery retailing.

However, considering how much is being spent in Tesco it's not hard to see how the market is being swamped. In several areas Tesco has cornered over 50 % of the market.

Tesco are on top and they intend to stay there. Much of their market dominance is credited to their knowledge of customers.

But how does Tesco get this knowledge? Well, their 'Clubcard' targets promotions at particular cardholders, but this isn't the only source.

A Tesco subsidiary has set up a database, 'Crucible', which collects information from anywhere and everywhere.

It trawls the electoral rolls, housing information, the Land Registry, the Office for National Statistics and elsewhere to generate a profile of where you live; it can even get hold of questionnaires you may have filled in.

Consequently they are constructing a file on you, whether you shop at Tesco or not. This may contain information on your personality, travel habits, shopping preferences and so on.

From this it could be possible to deduce which causes you support, your environmental concerns, even your political stance on many issues.

While Tesco sells access to the database to other large companies like Sky and Orange they are more than reluctant to let you and me see what personal data they hold on you.

Attempts by Guardian reporters to retrieve their own data under the Data Protection Act got nowhere.

Crucible has gone to great lengths to design its 'services' and class the information in such a way that it doesn't have to be disclosed under the Data Protection Act.

The Labour government is now pushing the ID cards through parliament. And although one MP has dubbed it 'the most illiberal piece of legislation…for half a century', and others are promising to make a stand, we cannot simply rely on politicians.

If the cards are introduced, the chips in them will hold vast amounts of information. Although the state is capable of collecting information itself, it will no doubt also use the extensive files held by the likes of Crucible.

Besides 'defying ID' the time has come to 'defy Tesco' and anyone else who want to play Big Brother.

Capitalism sucks

Poverty, a lack of workers' rights, divide and rule: how anarcho-syndicalism aims to counter these

Capitalism is the social/economic system that dominates the world today, supported and endorsed by all the major political parties.

Proponents of capitalism argue that it is the most logical and efficient way to organise and run society: In reality nothing could be further from the truth.

Corporations, political elites and market forces are the major cause of most of the ills which afflict the planet and its peoples today; namely poverty, war, militarism, environmental destruction, global warming and social oppression.

The role of the state: maintaining the status quo

Capitalism is a profit-driven system based on a fundamental conflict of interest. This conflict of interest exists between those who create the wealth (as producers and consumers) and those who reap its rewards (those who own and control large corporations and financial institutions).

Historically, the institutions of government came into being to forcibly protect the interests and privileges of monarchs and the rich from the landless poor. This is still the state's primary function today. However, the welfare state and parliamentary 'democracy' (both of which were concessions achieved only through workers' struggle) help to provide our rulers with a veneer of legitimacy.

The 225 richest people in the world have a combined wealth of more than $1 trillion, equal to the annual income of the poorest 47% of the earth's population, some 2.5 billion people.

Consent is manufactured through corporate-funded media and political parties that effectively exclude dissenting viewpoints which challenge the status quo.

The unequal power relationships and the ideology of capitalism (materialism, greed and self interest) are reflected in all society's dominant institutions. In the education system, for example, success is founded upon competition, grading and obedience to authority.

Advertising promotes the idea that we should consume as much as possible (designer labels etc.) and aspire to the extravagant lifestyles of celebrities who adorn the billboards and pages of glossy magazines. It is no surprise that the twin evils of corporate advertising and readily available credit have resulted in spiralling consumer debt amongst ordinary people in countries like the UK today.

Imperialism, militarism and war

The institutions of government also exist as a means to wage war, as the rich and powerful expand their empires by the conquest of cheap labour and raw materials.

The industrial revolution in western Europe was founded on the exploitation of slave labour and resources of countries in the south of the globe, a trend which continues today.

The recent invasion of Iraq, which was justified on the basis of the existence of weapons of mass

destruction (which, needless to say, failed to materialise), was really motivated by a desire to control a landmass with the world's third largest oil reserves.

As one commentator noted: "As much as oil is the lifeblood of the entire world economy, control over oil serves the profit and power interests of small elites among governments and corporations."

Competition for markets and increasingly dwindling resources promotes militarism, conflict and instability. However, the arms trade is, in itself, very good for business.

The money required to provide adequate food, water, education, health and housing for everyone in the world has been estimated at $17 billion a year. It is a huge sum of money…about as much as the world spends on arms every 2 weeks.

Globalisation, poverty and starvation

Capitalist organisations are required to remain profitable to survive, and are only able do so by exploiting labour, environmental resources and the global market with ever greater vigour. Add to this the fact that because the bottom line for corporations is their profit margin, enough is simply never enough.

Social justice and environmental concerns take the back seat in a world dominated by expansive market forces, where (according to the World Bank) transnational corporations now control an estimated 70% of world trade.

The ravaging of the poor south of the globe by multinationals (supported by 'democratically' elected governments and despotic dictatorships alike), and the catastrophic social inequalities that result, are unquestionably the biggest social injustices in the world today.

The process of privatisation of markets in the poorer countries (as part of the neo-liberal 'globalisation' agenda) is encouraged by organisations such as the G8, World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

In effect, this has enabled corporations to relocate production to countries often ruled by regimes with appalling human rights records, where workers endure pitiful wages and inhumane working conditions.

"For many of the world's poorest countries, living standards are lower than they were 30 years ago".

"Ten million people a year die from hunger or hunger related diseases"

"An estimated 80% of the world's hungry children live in countries with food surpluses".

"100 million children in the world are estimated to be living or working on the streets and 1.2 million women and girls under 18 are trafficked for prostitution each year".

Disturbing statistics such as these exemplify only too clearly how the profits of the global market take precedence over the needs of local people, and consign many to a life of poverty and misery.

Closer to home corporations and lackey politicians are at the forefront of moves to erode pay and conditions of workers through union-busting, casualisation (using poorly paid migrant workers on short-term contracts, for example) and 'downsizing' of the workforce.

Destroying the planet

Market forces not only perpetuate shameful social injustices; they also promote environmental destruction and global warming.

The endless cycle of production and consumption generated by capitalism is not simply unsustainable, it also threatens our very existence. Destruction of tropical rain forests, pollution and the degradation of the physical environment through excessive use of toxic chemicals by industry and agri-business have pushed the planet to the brink.

Irrefutable evidence of global warming such as sing sea levels, melting polar ice caps and catastrophic weather conditions paint a disturbing picture for future generations.

Furthermore, the entire world economy faces grave instability and uncertainty as dwindling oil reserves combined with spiralling demand (fuelled by economic growth and short-sighted policies) hit home.

"When a million species face extinction by 2050, 150,000 people die every year from the effects of climate change and thousands more become environmental refugees, it's time to take action".

"In a country of 200 million cars, President Bush announced that production of greenhouse gases will rise 43% by the year 2020".

Divide and rule

Unequal power relationships also exist on an interpersonal basis, and divisions between poorer members of society are fostered by the capitalist media to divide and rule.

Challenging negative stereotypes and being aware of how we oppress each other on an interpersonal basis (sexism, racism, homophobia etc.) is the first stage in taking back control from the powermongers. So is rejecting the divisive and reactionary ideologies of religious fundamentalism, which are used by fanatics as a justification for imperialism, and the slaughter of innocents.

57 Varieties: all unfit for consumption

Whilst many opponents of the present order would agree with much of the above, many have failed to learn the lessons of history or understand the insidious, corrupting nature of political power.

Each of a myriad of 'revolutionary' leftist cults claims to advocate the one 'correct' path to revolution (based on their own unique interpretation of

the dogma of Lenin, Trotsky et al.).

All, however, are united in their belief that the working class needs to be preached at, controlled and directed into social change by their (middle class dominated) party.

Yet history has shown us time and time again (Russia, Spain, France etc.) that once these self-proclaimed vanguards have established themselves in power, far from 'withering away' (as Marx predicted), a new bureaucratic authoritarian regime and system of privilege invariably becomes entrenched; quickly dispensing with any pretence of 'socialism' along the way.

"Nationalisation and the rule of the 'Party of the Working class' (whether of the eastern or western variety) have manifestly failed. They have not satisfied the hopes and expectations of ordinary people - or given them any real say in determining the conditions under which they live".

Likewise, those who seek to reform the system from within have also consistently 'sold out' and failed to effect significant changes to elitist and reactionary political systems and structures.

Only by creating non-hierarchical organisations controlled directly by the masses themselves will we have any chance of success.

We need a new world. This means seizing control back from the corporations, powermongers and politicians who run things for their own interests.

This means reorganising production so that long term sustainability and local needs take precedence over the profits and obscene wealth of a greedy few.

A world where we can live in harmony with the environment and one another based on the principles of mutual aid and voluntary co-operation.

A world where racism, sexism, war, imperialism and poverty are a thing of the past.

So how do we achieve this?

Anarcho-syndicalists reject the divisive and autocratic nature of modern day trade unions, where grassroots members have little or no influence.

Instead of management-complicit bureaucracies operating outside of the workplace, organisation among rank and file members is required; operating federally with mass assemblies and delegates subject to immediate recall.

Such organisations do not discriminate between workers in different trades (and indeed the unemployed), and through the process of struggle seek to establish a new society 'within the shell of the old' through the general strike and other forms of industrial direct action.

Our strength will be realised through the process of struggle and opposition to all attacks on our living standards by the ruling classes. Solidarity with others across national boundaries is crucial to achieving success.

In line with anarchist principles, the community must be seen as the focal point in organising ourselves, and any action which encourages self-determination and solidarity against organised capitalism must be seen as ultimately revolutionary.

"Anarchism is organisation, organisation and more organisation".

Our goal of a world without governments and capitalism may seem a far off pipe dream to many. However, during the Spanish Civil War (1936-9) large parts of the country operated effectively on this basis. More recently the Zapatistas have established an autonomous zone in the Chiapas region of Mexico.

Social anthropology also shows us that government is not a prerequisite for social order, and in the modern world many organisations and communities function effectively (consciously or not) with little or no state interference.

Human beings are not intrinsically selfish, greedy and materialistic; it is capitalism which fosters these attributes. Thus, there is every reason to believe that society can be organised and can function effectively on the principle of 'from each according to ability to each according to need' without degenerating into bureaucratic centralism.

As the tide of global capitalist injustice is exposed, anarcho-syndicalist ideas have never been more relevant.

Recent years have seen an upsurge in activity against global capitalism; from workers' organising themselves against the abuses of multinational corporations to environmentalists protesting at G8 summits.

It is only through forging links, identifying common causes and developing our collective strength that we will ultimately achieve our goals.

And, as solutions to the problems of the world appear increasingly fleeting and unattainable, anarcho-syndicalism provides a practical, achievable path to a more just and sane society.

We need a revolution.

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Education Workers Network:
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Public Service Workers Network :
c/o Solidarity 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

Catalyst
SolFed freesheet – issue 15 out now – for single copies or bundles see contact details above

The Stuff Your Boss does not want you to know - Leaflet: know your rights at work; updated version now available online – bundles from the SF contact point (see above) for free/donation.

Manchester SF discussion meetings:
7.30 pm, 1st Tues each month at the Basement, 24 Lever Street (off Piccadilly Gardens), Manchester - April 3rd, War & Resistance; May 1st, Stuff Your Boss on May Day

Friends & neighbours: contact us to get listed

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

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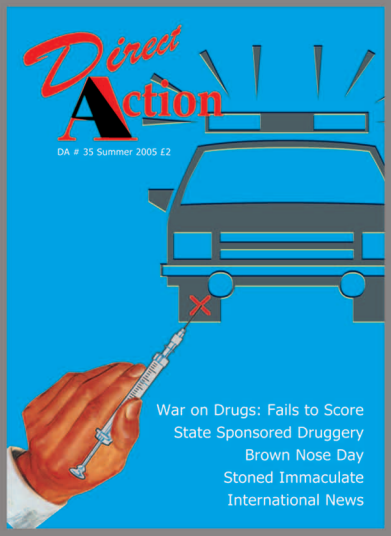

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