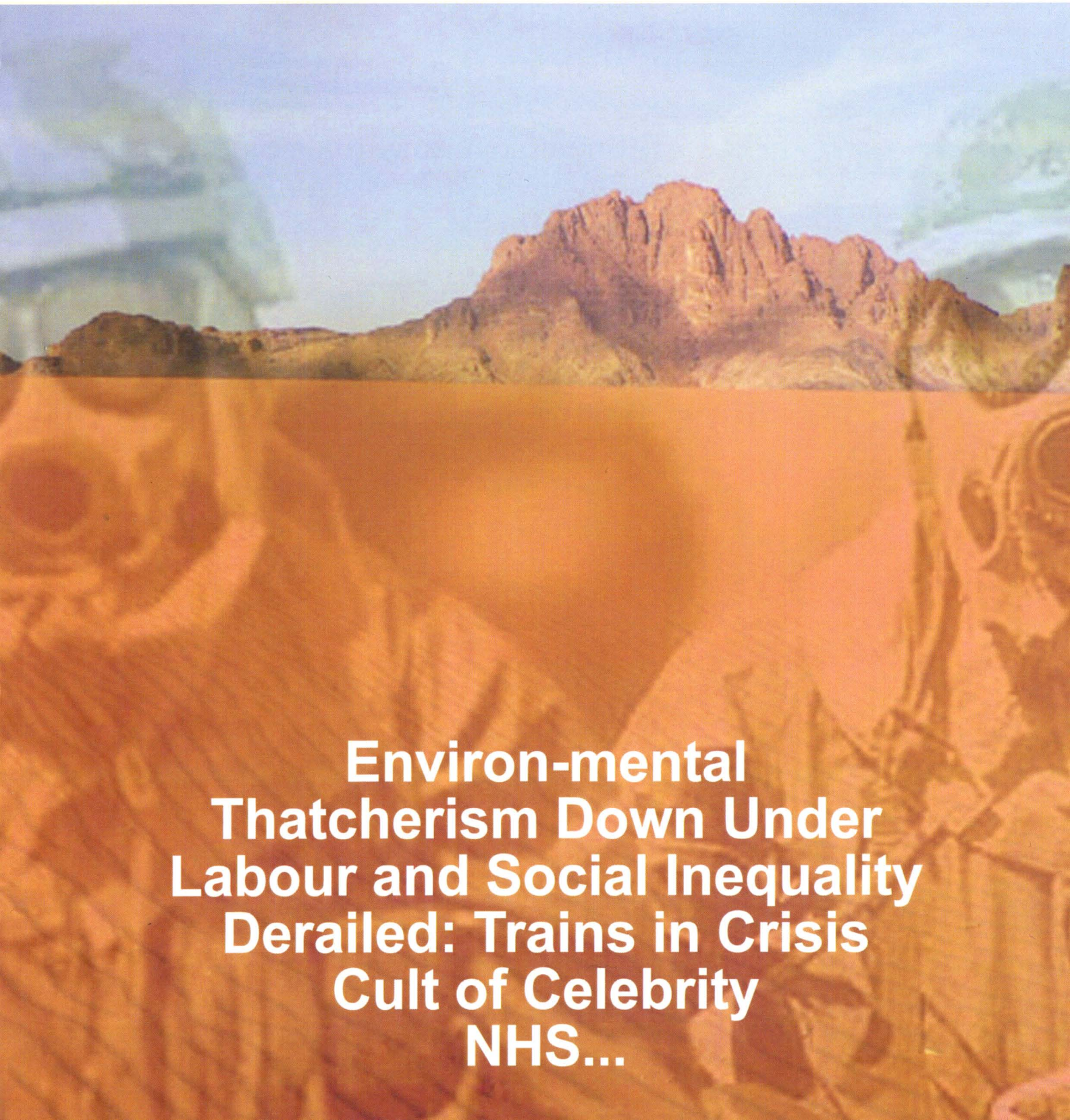
Direct Action

issue 39
summer 2007
£1.50



Environ-mental
Thatcherism Down Under
Labour and Social Inequality
Derailed: Trains in Crisis
Cult of Celebrity
NHS...

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 We do not publish contributors' names.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.

Subscribe (For 4 issues):
Supporters – £10
Basic – £5
(Europe – £10; rest of the world – £15).
Cheques payable to 'Direct Action' – return form to:
DA, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW

Contribute
If you would like to help out or contribute articles or photos, work is entirely voluntary. We welcome articles of between 500-1,500 words on industrial, social/community and international issues; on working class history; and on anarchist/anarchosyndicalist theory and history.

Articles may be sent as hard copy, on a disk or by email, and can only be returned if accompanied by a request (and SAE if appropriate).

Contact us
DA Collective, PO Box 29, South West PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW
079 84 67 52 81
da@direct-action.org.uk
Bulk Orders
AK Distribution, PO Box 12766, Edinburgh, EH8 9YE, Scotland
0131 555 5165
ak@akedin.demon.co.uk
www.akuk.com, or direct from the DA Collective

ISSN 0261-8753

Inside this issue:

Page 4: Happy 50th Birthday EU
Page 6: Why does the scum always rise to the top?
Page 9: The problem with Hedge Funds
Page 10: Labouring under Delusions
Page 13: No to the Labour Levy
Page 14: Derailed: trains in crisis
Page 18: Environmental
Page 20: Labour REACH new depths
Page 21: SolFed conference report
Page 22: NHS: Rationing by Stealth
Page 25: 57 Varieties: all unfit for consumption
Page 28: Thatcherism Down Under
Page 30: IWA solidarity with Colombian workers
Page 31: Review
Page 33: The cult of celebrity...
Page 35: Contact Directory

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.

Labour: an anti-working class party

So exit Blair and enter Brown; a change of leader, but Labour will carry on doing what it's become so good at - looking after the rich, and sod the working class.

Here at Direct Action this is no shock, but even yet there are so-called 'old Labour' diehards hoping and praying that Brown will bring a change in direction. A long wait that'll be.

It takes hardly any brain cells to work out that this Labour government has continued with the vicious free market policies first introduced by Thatcher and developed by later Tory regimes.

Labour's trick has been to repackage these ideas, giving them a gloss of caring concern. Unfortunately for the diehards Labour is now so awash with bright young things who actually see Thatcher as some kind of hero, that Thatcherite policies are set to be the order of the day for some time to come - and Brown isn't about to change that. After all, he hasn't spent these years just pretending to run the Treasury. He and his circle of favourites have been at the very heart of it all, planning and promoting many of the free market initiatives that continue to eat at the quality of working class life bringing never-ending attacks on benefits, the ever-creeping advance of privatisation and the all-pervasive effects of casualisation which has now spread into almost all sectors of the economy.

Inside this issue...

One of the Blair-Brown regime's proudest claims is to have significantly slashed the number of children living in poverty. But behind this boast, the massaged statistics hide a much starker truth, a true measure of Labour as an anti-working class party - the rich are still getting richer, and the poor are still getting poorer (see Labour under Delusions, p10).

We look too at Labour's performance with privatisation, focusing on two industries - the railways and the NHS. One of the last big ideological privatisations pushed through by the Tories in the mid-1990s was that of British Rail.

The whole process was mismanaged back then and surprise, surprise Labour continues to mismanage the resulting problems (see Derailed: Trains in Crisis, p14). So much for the effects of the past on the present; in the health service it's a case of the present and its effects on the future.

Following on from DA38 which covered 'Foundation Trusts', this issue looks at creeping privatisation and the kind of healthcare system, based on who can afford what, that Labour plans for us (see Rationing by Stealth, p22).

One more ideological attack on the working class, and one that Brown, who brought in the PFI (private finance initiative) system to fund new hospitals, will certainly have no qualms in driving forward.

Maybe it is this that will come to be the once-much-talked-about Blair legacy. However, more likely is that the complete mess he and Bush have made of Iraq will be the one abiding memory of his time in office.

So the Blair name won't endure, unlike Thatcher, whose name lives on a decade and a half later as a by-word for anything to do with 'hammering the working class'.

And of course the same type of policies live on too, copied by would-be Thatchers the world over, as Australian workers have witnessed this last ten years (see Thatcherism Down Under, p28).

Where next? Well, the recently elected Sarkozy is itching for a fight across the channel, but here's hoping that French workers will show their traditional stomach for a fight.

Readers with long memories will recall a time when that same reputation belonged to British workers. Since then we have seen the level of class consciousness sink so low that at times it seems like many people can only live their lives through a media fuelled haze of gossip about the rich and famous (see Cult of Celebrity..., p33). But this is only a symptom, not a cause. The reasons for this rolling back of consciousness are undoubtedly many and varied but, from our viewpoint, among the foremost causes is the very form of organisation adopted by trade unions - namely their hierarchical structure (see Why does the Scum always Rise to the Top?, p6).

That, together with the pro-capitalist politics of most union leaderships, ensured that when capitalism took the offensive a proper working class fightback was impossible.

Don't be fooled again

There is another idea at play here; that politics and economics are somehow separate. Mere economic

issues are the concern of unions, which should leave politics for political parties.

Well, time and again the working class has been betrayed by parties, even those calling themselves revolutionary (see 57 Varieties, all Unfit for Consumption, p25).

Since the earliest 'socialist' MPs, most representatives elected by the working class have been quickly drawn into supporting the status quo.

True socialism rejects electoral politics in favour of direct action as the means by which the working class can control their own struggle and confront capitalism directly.

Instead of placing faith in politicians and governments, we seek to build a mass movement - a revolutionary union - that would use boycotts, various forms of strikes, and other forms of direct action not only for the day to day economic struggle but also as part of the wider political struggle against capitalism.

As Labour transforms into the Tories, various parties want to occupy the place once occupied by Labour. We should not be fooled; the whole history of electoral politics is that once in power political parties soon ditch any thoughts of destroying capitalism and become part of the elite ruling over us in the same old way.

These and other ideas are explored more fully in these pages. We begin with an alternative review of the first fifty years of that bureaucrats' paradise in Brussels - Happy 50th Birthday EU - now there's somewhere Blair could be put out to grass.

Happy 50th Birthday EU

The 'other state' celebrates half a century of bureaucracy and screwing the European working class over

It's been 50 glorious years since the European Union was born. The idea behind it was to stop the parasites of France and Germany from scrapping over iron and steel.

However, the growth of a 'common market' around Europe has brought loads of benefits to all of us - young and old, rich and poor, and those in between too.

You don't believe this, do you? Well, just think.

The Romans brought us bogs and baths (the bastards) but since the Treaty of Rome in 1957 we've been brought tomatoes, wine, lager, pizzas, bistros, and even continental groundbait!

We can sup binges for 24 hours a day, call in at sophisticated pavement cafés on the way home and eat croissants with fetid cheese and have a swig of latte coffee - all proper foreign stuff too.

We can drive black Volkswagens at 150 miles an hour in the fast lane with a line of coke on the dash and a mobile phone stuck to our lugs.

But what about the riff-raff, I hear you say?. Well, they've got plastic cards so they don't have to queue at the post office for their dole which they can spend on dirt-cheap lager washed down by mayonnaise on chips.

What a wonderful world the 'common market' has brought to the 'common man' - and the common woman too, what with French knickers and Prada shopping bags.

Also - a very continental word is also - just as in any true democracy the benefits don't just go to us.

The poor downtrodden bureaucrats also get a bit for a change: houses in the various European towns where they direct operations from; safe jobs and pensions they can pass on to their kids; they get to make up different rules each day and sit around in meetings with headphones listening to

UKIP, one of the main beneficiaries of anti-EU sentiment

Europop.

And there's another thing - the Eurovision Song Contest - where would we be without that?

Politicians too - just spare a thought for them MEPs. When they've finished their hard work representing the 'common people' all over Europe, normally they'd be put out to grass, to gracefully grow old, write their heroic memoirs and become 'elder statesmen'.

But now they can carry on defending our cause and fighting for us somewhere in Europe.

They get a nice house to get a proper kip in after a hard day's graft; they can sup red wine 'til it comes out of their ears - though they'd have to take the headphones off or get electrocuted, and the Europop would be a bit muffled.

But what about the really rich and the powerful business typhoons, I hear you sympathetically murmur?

Don't worry, the 'common market' looks after them also, even though they're not so common as you or me.

They've always bypassed borders and things, and got round inconvenient laws, but now they can sleep soundly in their beds knowing they can stash their hard earned money anywhere, legally. They have more choices over where to invest.

They know if there's a racket in Belgium that's making a mint, their racket over here can buy it out. Now that there's 27 countries 'things can only get better'.

Some of them don't like it though. They only have the interests of the 'common people' at heart and reckon all these rules being made every day are 'inhibiting entrepreneurial zeal'.

They want 'Big Toe' as European President, now he's been put out to pasture, then he can get a bit of the good old fashioned 'really free' market, Anglo Saxon labour laws as standard right across the continent.

Some of these Europeans, see, have daft ideas about job security, maximum working hours and all that.

But it doesn't benefit the 'common man', says 'Big Toe' and his mates, because it stops the wonderful, wealth creating, entrepreneurs taking on labour.

So you get more unemployment in places like France and Italy than we get over here. And we all know that if you let free market capitalism rip, the 'trickle down effect' does its magic.

If you are 'benefiting' from this magic and have one of the wonderful jobs in the 'new economy' where you have to be 'flexible' enough to work stupid shifts, maybe on the minimum wage, maybe 'on call', hired by the day and all that, just think how lucky you are.

In France you could be stuck on a putrid high rise estate, miles out of town and no prospect of a job 'cos you'd expect proper wages and conditions. And there's your choice - shit jobs or no jobs.

Except we don't get a choice. The bureaucrats, politicians and typhoons make the choice for us, and all over Europe they're pushing for the 'Anglo Saxon model', the 'flexible labour market'.

It's called reform and when the state - and now we've got two of them shoving us around - pushes for reform it's usually to benefit the people who it acts on behalf of.

And that's not the 'common people'.

What we really need is a proper European Union, one run by and for the 'common people' from all over the planet, never mind Europe.

Then we can enjoy our mayonnaise and chips, we could even have a tomato with them and a bottle of red wine, safe in the knowledge that all that the parasites are going to have reformed is their heads.

Happy birthday.

Why does the scum always rise to the top?

How society produces those that keep us in our place - and how revolutionaries can avoid reproducing the same kind of organisation

Those who most closely identify with the way our society is organised, and who seek to gain either individual power or maintain the power of the ruling class are the ones who become most 'successful' in society and reach the top.

Those seeking power quickly recognise the way society works and the most successful are those who can use the system to the best advantage for themselves.

This can often mean being ruthless and single-minded in their approach and actions so every decision is made on the basis of how much advantage, in terms of money, power or influence (often all three), they will gain.

Even those who may start out with some altruistic intentions find themselves coerced and seduced by the trappings of power and rapidly lose sight of their original intentions and rationalise their compromises. How does this happen, and why?

Hierarchy

We live in a hierarchical society. We have all grown up in social structures - class, race, gender, sexuality, and so on - that are hierarchical in nature.

These social hierarchies are multi-tiered, pyramid-like structures that have as an apex the centralisation of power.

Everyday institutions such as businesses, churches, armies, many voluntary and community organisations and most political movements, are structured hierarchically where the few in the top position have more power than the many at the base.

The best expressions of this are capitalism and the state.

At the root of these hierarchical structures is the question of power. Those

who hold the power in any social relationship dominate.

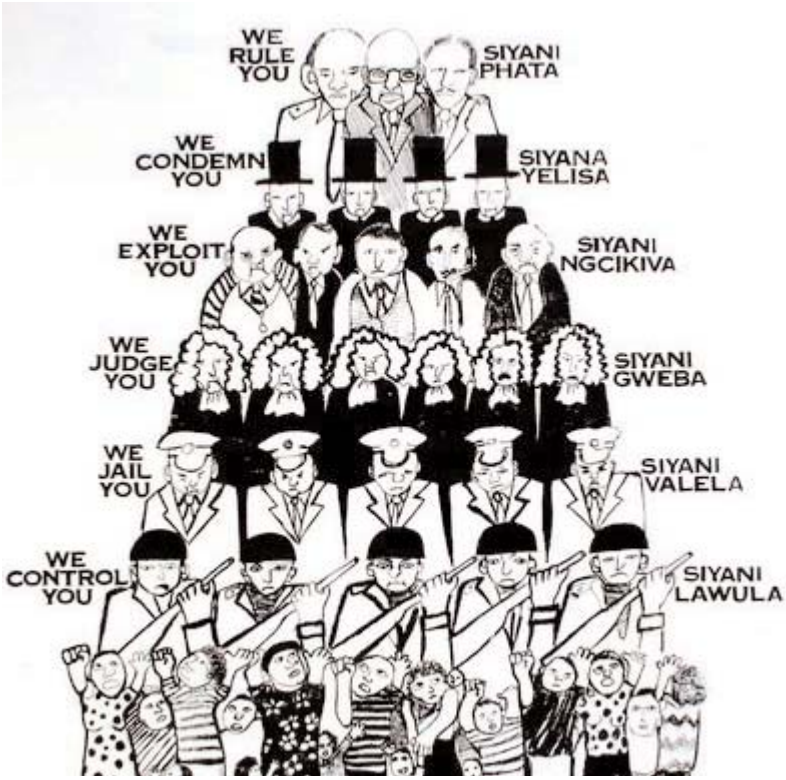
In a capitalist democracy there is the myth that power belongs to the people because they are able to exercise control through voting in their representatives.

Yet this assumes that everyone has equal access to, and ability to circulate, information.

In reality, control of the media and other opinion-forming structures, such as the judiciary, religious institutions and the state bureaucracy, means that there persists a dominant ideology.

Control is maintained, not only through political and economic coercion, but also culturally and ideologically.

The values of the ruling class become the 'common sense' values of all, and a consensus is developed whereby the working class identify their own interests with the interests of those in power, thus helping to maintain the status quo.



A South African cartoon on how a capitalist hierarchy works picture: labourhistory.co.za

'The norm'

These organisational forms and dominant ideology are accepted as the norm and rarely questioned, because everyone grows up with them.

When they are disputed, those in power will seem to give way and accept some form of accountability but often put structures in place that effectively thwart any challenge to their authority, or absorb such challenges and dissipate their effectiveness.

This can be seen in the unions, where nominally decision-making lies with the membership but the structure of the union is such that the real power is with the union leadership and bureaucracy.

It can look like the only way to change this power relationship is to take part in those same structures and gain that same power.

Unfortunately this process inevitably leads to corruption and compromise of the original ideals and often of the individuals who gain power, as their interests become divorced from those who supported them in the first place.

Power can also be hidden and more indirect. In some situations, decisions are reached in a non-hierarchical manner but are prevented from being implemented by those who control the purse strings.

This often happens in voluntary and community groups that are brought into the decision-making process by governmental and statutory bodies only to find that their options are limited by financial constraints.

It may look like decisions are being made at the grass roots level but in reality there are limitations and constraints imposed at the outset that severely restrict the process.

The whole structure of society is such that even those who seek to change it find themselves organising in the same way as those in control.

Political parties are formed whose purpose is to gain power and control of the state and inevitably, even though they claim to represent the interests of the working class, they become dominated by intellectuals and professional politicians.

Alternatives

Alternatives are sought. Some anarchists argue for organising in affinity groups as a basis for change.

An affinity group is a small group of activists who work together on direct action; it is organized in a non-hierarchical manner, usually using consensus decision making, and is often made up of trusted friends or other like-minded people.

They can be based on a common ideology such as anarchism and may have

Anarchists in the Republic of Ireland, showing an alternative to hierarchical ideologies Picture: indymedia.ie

either open or closed membership.

The use of affinity groups dates back to 19th century Spain, where they were called tertulias or grupos de afinidad by Spanish anarchists.

The Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI), formed in 1927, based its organisation on autonomous affinity groups.

Small affinity groups can be very effective when planning direct action. However, some claim that they are a way of promoting wide-scale change in society. There are problems with this.

When affinity groups federate together they maintain their own independence. However, this autonomy comes at the expense of solidarity and coherence that is needed to confront the authoritarian structures around us.

Another major problem is that while affinity groups are in theory libertarian they can often become dominated by aggressive individuals within them.

Because of their lack of a formal structure, decisions are forced through by dominant personalities who become mouthpieces for the group and effectively take the decisions as to the group's direction.

Autonomy

That is why anarcho-syndicalists put forward the idea of the revolutionary union, an autonomous organisation of the working class that rejects involvement with and interference from the state.

It is not concerned with intellectual musing and obscure philosophising but in changing society. Its means and its ends are closely linked so it is organised non-hierarchically and controlled by its members.

Anarcho-syndicalist unions do not back any political parties or any other group that seeks to act on behalf of the working class.

They advocate a separation of the working class politically, economically, socially and culturally and emphasise that the interests of the state and capitalism are diametrically opposed to those who actually produce the wealth.

They do not take part in structures set up by the state to control opposition and undermine resistance, they do not accept any accommodation with the state and they certainly do not accept state money directly or indirectly.

What they aim for is to establish an alternative structure inside the present one, based on a different kind of organisation: equal, free and truly democratic, so the dominant social norms can be challenged and the methods of working in a future society can be discovered and developed in the present one.

This can mean an uphill struggle to establish and then maintain and expand anarcho-syndicalist unions but to compromise the basic principles of separation from the state and the ruling class to obtain short-term growth has severe connotations for the integrity of such a union and inevitably affects its ability to confront the state.

For more about our ideas, visit www.selfed.org.uk, which includes ideas about how an anarchist society would operate

Hedging their bets

Why hedge funds have no actual use

John Arnold, the 33 year old founder of Centaurus Energy, earned £1billion last year, heading the worldwide list of the top one hundred earners in the financial sector.

Some 27 of the top hundred are to be found in London, earning an average of £120million each, compared with only £55million in 2002; five of them took home over £500million.

Of the top hundred, 93 are managers of hedge funds, the publicity shy unregulated sector of the financial industry which makes money by a sophisticated form of betting.

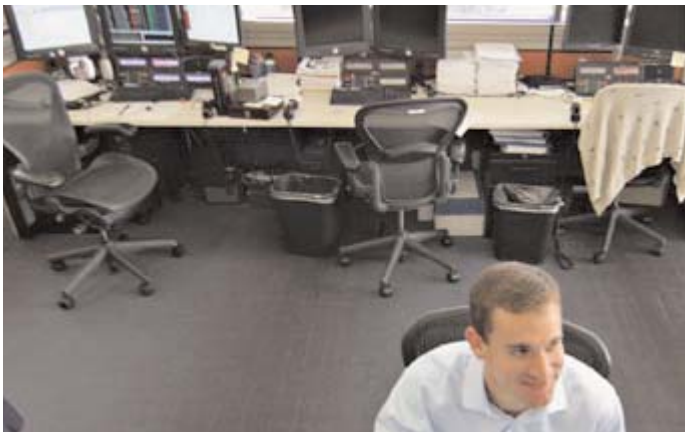
Mr Arnold made much of his £1billion by betting correctly that the price of gas would fall last summer.

However, before dashing out and investing your dole cheque in a hedge fund, just remember that it's only for the rich and powerful.

The minimum investment in hedge funds is generally around £10million, which just about counts out most ordinary mortals.

When the rich and powerful gather there's always the stink of corruption, and hedge funds are no exception.

Before founding Centaurus, Mr Arnold was an investment manager at Enron, now a symbol of corporate fraud and corruption in the USA.



A worker at Centaurus Energy

He only left when the company went bankrupt. Fifth in the top hundred is Steve Cohen, who faced a lawsuit last year alleging that his company SAC made up faulty research to drive down the stock of another company.

In Britain the top 'hedgies' for the second year running were Noam Gottesman and Pierre Lagrange, joint founders of GLG Partners, which was involved in controversy last year when its star trader was fined for market abuse.

Not that these hints of corruption are anything shocking - after all it's what the rich do best and is only to be expected.

What is truly immoral is that these people make fortunes from producing nothing of any value to society.

The only thing that hedge funds make is more money.

They form part of the funds amounting to trillions of dollars that constantly move round the globe in search of higher returns, often leaving economic havoc in their wake.

Free market theory argues that hedge funds, along with currency speculation, private equity firms and the other obscene money making machines, are somehow vital to the running of the economy.

The argument goes that such funds provide the money that companies use for long term investment leading to the creation of goods, services and jobs.

This idea may look good in economic text books but has little relation to reality. The whole point of these funds is that they are fluid, allowing them to be invested and then sold on for profit within a very short time period.

This is what happened on 'Black Wednesday' (16 September 1992) when the Tories' attempt to shore up sterling allowed currency speculators to walk away with an estimated £15billion of tax payers' money in just 24 hours.

The idea that hedge funds and their ilk are somehow vital to economic prosperity is a joke.

They contribute nothing to the real economy and are merely a means by which the super rich get even richer.

Real economic wealth is created by the working class who actually go out to work and create the goods and services that are vital to society's well being.

If the trillions of pounds currently chasing higher profits around the world were ever to be actually invested in the real economy it could wipe out world poverty at a stroke.

But that will never happen under capitalism which is all about making money and nothing to do with improving people's lives.

Labouring under delusions

The Labour Party claims it has successfully tackled child poverty. In this article Direct Action exposes the lie and the bankruptcy of the New Labour project for social equality, revealing the true legacy of Blair's premiership to be an even more unequal society than when New Labour came to power in May 1997.

Labour's claim that they remain the party for redistribution now rests solely on their boast to have significantly reduced child poverty. However, behind Gordon Brown's spin, are these so-called redistribution policies really the success story they would have us believe?

On the face of it, Labour has cut the proportion of children in poverty from 33.9% in 1996/97 to 28.5% in 2002/03. Sounds good?

What it means is that some 4 million children are still living in poverty in the UK - and in 2005/6, the numbers actually went up by 100,000.

In fact, we don't have to look far beyond the headlines to find that Labour's rather feeble attempts at wealth redistribution mask the true realities of life under Labour.

Facts of life under Labour

Child poverty may have fallen marginally, yet overall inequality has increased since Labour came to power.

Indeed - income inequality in Britain is still higher than at any time in the previous 18 years of Conservative rule - and probably for at least 20 years before that.

Under Labour, the top 1% has increased their share of national wealth from 20% to 23% and the top 10% of the population's share of the wealth has increased from 47% to 54%.

Meanwhile the wealth of the poorest 50% of the population shrank from 10% in the Thatcher years, down to 7% in 1996 and now sits at just 5%.

Under Labour, the biggest movers have been the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.

Neither has Labour done anything about racial and women's inequality.

Women are still paid 42% less than men and make up the bulk of the

cheap labour workforce, with 45% of working women being employed on a part-time basis.

Black and Asian people remain amongst the poorest sections of society and suffer more than double the average unemployment rate.

The move towards the 24/7 society has seen a dramatic increase in the number of people in low paid employment having to work longer and more antisocial hours.

The ever-increasing casualisation of the workforce has continued apace under Labour, making the most vulnerable of working people even easier for bosses to hire and fire at will.

One in ten of us are now on temporary contracts, with two in five men unable to find permanent jobs.

Shift premiums and weekend enhancements have been steadily eroded so that weekend and shift work is now increasingly being paid at the basic rate.

Growing inequality is having a catastrophic effect on the people who can least afford it.

While the super rich live in ever-more obscene luxury, the relatively poor suffer from poor mental and physical health, inferior housing, increased crime, high levels of drug and alcohol addiction, low self-esteem and are virtually excluded from a decent education.

This disgusting inequality exists at a time when, as a nation, we have never been so wealthy. Here lies the true legacy of Labour rule.

The Seacroft estate in Leeds, one of the poorest areas in the UK

Left-over solutions

As the social failures of the New Labour project have become increasingly clear, the left have typically argued either for 'winning back' the Labour Party to socialism, or trying to create a new socialist party to replace it.

Frankly, either course of action is a complete waste of time. Time and again history has shown us that it does not matter how socialist a party may start out, once they enter parliamentary politics they are soon absorbed into the system.

Real change will only come from working class organisations who reject the parliamentary 'wet-up' in favour of fundamental, direct democracy.

Working class power is not measured in how many MPs get elected, but in the ability of working class people to organise and directly confront capitalism.

Lasting change

The power of the working class has and always will rest in their ability to use their economic power to challenge capitalism by putting profits at risk.

Capitalists fear working class organisation because it is the only power that threatens their profits in the short term - and the whole existence of capitalism in the long term.

It is only when challenged by the working class that capitalism makes concessions and wealth becomes marginally more equally distributed.

It is only when faced with a well organised working class that capitalism turns to politicians, even so-called socialists, to bring forward limited reforms as a means of channelling working class anger into the dead-end of parliamentary politics.

When working class power is expressed through organisation, the government of the day allows crumbs to fall from the table in the expectation that we will be satisfied and go back to work.

The history of British capitalism amply demonstrates this.

Early on, capitalism made vast profits at the expense of the working class who were forced to exist in the appalling conditions of the industrial revolution.

As a response, the organised working class emerged, giving workers the hope and confidence to challenge capitalism.

In the early 20th Century, strikes and other action led capitalism to sit up and take notice - and the situation improved.

Through working class struggle, capitalism was forced to hand over an increased share of the wealth made by the workers.

Why we need more action

In 1911, it was estimated that the wealthiest 1% of the population held around 70% of the UK's wealth.

By 1936-38, this proportion had fallen to 56%, and it fell again after world war two to reach 42% in 1960.

The share of the wealthiest 1% continued to fall through the 1970s to a low of 17%.

However, the trend towards greater equality came to an abrupt end with Thatcher's defeat of the organised working class.

Since that time, capitalism has been on the offensive. In the nineties, this led to rising profits and rapidly increased personal wealth for the super rich.

In the noughties, with industrial action at an all-time low, workers have been left to rely on Labour to challenge capitalism - with disastrous results.

Instead of curbing growing inequality, Labour has encouraged it, using the tired and bankrupt idea that allowing the rich to get ever richer will benefit us all.

In so doing, Labour has supported the 'trickle down' theory; that wealth trickles down from the rich, enriching society as a whole.

The reality is; the rich get richer, allowing them to piss on the poor from an ever-increasing height.

Labour has supported the 'trickle down' theory; that wealth trickles down from the rich, enriching society as a whole.

The reality is; the rich get richer, allowing them to piss on the poor from an ever-increasing height.

Labour: robbing the poor

The nonsense of 'trickle down' is reflected in the fact that it is fiscal policy which determines any redistribution - not the rich.

Under Labour, this fiscal policy has been staggeringly biased in its direction.

As a result, it is not the rich who have paid for any alleviation of poverty through changes in taxation; it is those just above the poverty line who have borne the brunt of increased taxes.

Between 1997 and 2002, the maximum means-tested benefit and tax credit award for a single person aged 25 or over rose by just 1% in real terms, with extra money being diverted to help fund the rise in benefits for lone parents.

Labour was at it again in their last budget, with the scrapping of the ten pence tax allowance, hitting the income of low paid childless adults - a group who have already suffered throughout Labour's reign.

Quite sickeningly, rather than the rich paying for the little wealth redistribution that has been attempted, Labour has resorted to robbing the poor.

Getting the goods?

So, where to from here? Firstly, the 20th Century trend towards more equality ground to a halt under Thatcher and has continued to reverse under Labour, as we apparently head back towards the early 19th Century.

Even worse, Labour's pitiful record has been made during a prolonged economic boom. Given capitalism's record of boom and bust, it won't be long before recession hits.

As recession and global climate change bite, capitalism will take advantage of unemployment by protecting its profits and driving down the standard of living.

Large numbers of us, currently living on debt underpinned by rising house prices, will be plunged further into poverty.

Labour failed to do anything significant for workers in the boom times; come the bust, inequality will erupt in a mushroom cloud of poverty.

As a society we are set to become increasingly unequal, with ever larger numbers suffering the effects.

The answer does not lie in casting around for a more radical version of labour.

It is not politicians that Capitalism fears - it is working class action.

Instead of putting our faith in political leaders, we have to rebuild a labour movement based on self- organisation, direct democracy and direct action.

Deeds and methods affect the doers. By organising ourselves and taking mass action to confront capitalism, we will also realise our strength once again.

We will build our confidence, hope and sense of purpose, as well as our common purpose and community spirit.

This is both the antidote to an increasingly alienated and demoralised working class - and the ultimate antidote to poverty and inequality.

“Labour has supported the 'trickle down' theory; that wealth trickles down from the rich, enriching society as a whole.”

Lose the Levy (your union subs are keeping Labour afloat)

One of the Labour Party's main sources of funding is through trade union political funds.

Without it, they wouldn't have the same resources to pay for all their election publicity and day-to-day running costs.

With it, they and the fatcat union leaders betray the members by giving their subs to the very people who are taking away workers' rights.

At a time when Labour are still reeling over the 'cash for peerages' scandal, little attention is drawn to how, without members' consent, some of their hard-earned subscription money goes into the party's hands.

While members can opt out of contributing to the political fund, most unions seldom mention it. Ever since its creation, the Labour party has called on the trade union movement for financial support.

This has declined proportionally over recent years but still constitutes around a third of Labour's income.

There are, however, growing signs that trade unionists are increasingly angry at handing over their money to such an openly anti-working class party as Labour.

In a number of unions, campaigns have been launched aimed at breaking the link with Labour. However, left groups such as Respect, the Scottish Socialist Party and Socialist Party (ex-Militant) try to hijack these campaigns, and argue that the money should instead go to them.

These arguments should be ignored. Workers are quite capable of organisaing campaigns for their own political aims without interference from Leninists and careerist social democrats who only use union work for their own personal gains.

The idea that economic and political struggle can somehow be artificially split is rooted in the intellectual and patronising snobbery of most Marxist organisations.

The working class has only ever achieved success through self-organisation and direct action. This is where our money should be directed, not towards undemocratic political parties that claim to speak on our behalf.

200 more Years of Slavery

200 years after Britain outlawed slavery there are still some 27 million slaves worldwide. Slavery takes different forms – bonded labour, human trafficking, forced marriage, commercial sexual exploitation as well as 'traditional' (chattel) slavery. Slaves are commodities, bought and sold, controlled and dehumanised, and forced to work by physical or mental threats, and outright violence.

Millions of children, mainly girls, work long hours as domestic servants with no access to education or recreation. Each year hundreds of children are kidnapped, sold by parents, or taken by deception, and trafficked from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sudan to the United Arab Emirates as camel jockeys. Camel racing is big business in which children, often deprived of food and water, get injured and killed.

The International Labour Organisation estimates that 179 million children aged 5 to 17 years are in work harmful to their physical and psychological wellbeing.

There is slavery in Britain too – servants, prisoners, bonded labourers and sex industry workers. Trafficking of women and children as prostitutes is best known, but there is also trafficking of labourers for sweatshops, agriculture and industry.

You might ask:if it's so bad why don't they escape? Well it's hard to when you're locked up and beaten up; gang bosses tell workers they'll get jailed, tortured, and sent home; their English is generally very poor; and many have to pay off debts and travel costs.

Capitalism exploits everyone who works. Wage slavery may not be as oppressive as chattel slavery or bonded labour. While slaves are robbed of the full value of their labour, paid workers receive part of that value as wages.

A complete end to slavery is part and parcel of the fight for a socialist society.

Cut out this form and send to your Union HQ

Political Fund Exemption Notice

I hereby give notice that I object to contributing to the Political Fund of the union and am in consequence exempt, in the manner provided by Chapter 6 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (consolidation) Act 1992, from contributing to that fund.

Name: _____

Membership number: _____

Payroll No: _____

Address: _____

_____

Union and branch: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Derailed: how the trains are in deep crisis

Anybody who has tried to organise a strike knows just how draconian Britain's anti-union laws are.

First there is the nonsense of the compulsory postal ballot, conducted to a strict set of procedures to avoid a legal challenge.

Once the ballot is over there's still the possibility of a court injunction often granted for the flimsiest of reasons by some doddering judge.

Having cleared all legal obstacles there's nothing to stop the employers sacking striking workers by claiming breach of contract.

It appears, however, that these dictatorial laws don't apply when capitalists take industrial action.

Recently the rail regulator decided to investigate the £175million earned each year by the train leasing companies which supply train operating companies, like Virgin, with rolling stock.

The regulator argued that three companies, controlling 90% of the total market, were abusing their near monopoly position to 'prevent, restrict or distort competition' and referred the matter to the Competition Commission.

The three companies were outraged. After all, Britain's rail network has become such a source of profit for so many companies, why should they be singled out for such harsh treatment.

They immediately downed tools, refusing to fulfil a Virgin order for 106 carriages unless the government gave assurances that leasing rates will not be altered.

The biggest leasing company, Angel, also uttered dark threats about not guaranteeing new train leasing deals and the risk to future investment in rolling stock.

Hypocrisy

Now if this was workers taking action court orders would fly, funds would be sequestrated and the papers would be full of stories about mindless militants.

Well, we're not about to see headlines in the Mail about capitalist militants creating rail misery.

Nor are the government about to confront the leasing companies and force them to fulfil orders and reduce charges.

Especially not, given that we're talking about powerful concerns like the Royal Bank of Scotland, which owns one of these companies.

All of which leaves leasing companies in a powerful position.

As things stand, a chronic shortage of rolling stock already threatens to throw the industry into crisis. The leasing companies' action has only worsened the situation.

The shortage has forced the government to tell the bidders for the lucrative East Midlands and West Midlands franchises to cut planned services, with the Cross-Country and East Coast Mainline franchises, also due for renewal this year, likely to be similarly affected.

Free from government sanctions the leasing companies have the whip hand.

With passenger complaints about overcrowding hitting an all time high and passenger numbers expected to rise 30%

over the next few years, the government cannot afford further cuts to capacity.

So a government climbdown is in the air with hints that any investigation into train leasing companies would take at least take two years and would in no way be binding on the government.

The signs are that the threat to disrupt the supply of rolling stock has succeeded and leasing companies will be allowed to get on with making a healthy return on their investments.

However, this dispute goes beyond the excess profits of three train leasing companies to the very heart of the problem - rail privatisation.

The leasing companies are so powerful position because they hold a monopoly. To break that monopoly the government would have to not only confront these companies but also find alternative providers of rolling stock.

And given the vast sums of money needed - leasing companies have invested some £5billion - the only realistic alternative provider would be the train operating companies who could purchase their own rolling stock instead of leasing them.

This would create numerous problems. The leasing companies would be up in arms and the train operating companies would no doubt demand greater subsidies; but it doesn't end there.

The operating companies would also demand that the period they hold franchises be considerably extended to justify the investment in trains.

However, handing routes to companies to operate for decades would give them a monopoly with which they would certainly force higher state subsidies and ticket prices - precisely the practice the train leasing system was introduced to stop in the first place.

Monopoly

That this has only led to a leasing company monopoly is no surprise. The simple truth is that the railways, by their very nature, cannot be run according to free market principles.

No matter how you try to inject competition into the railways you always get monopolies using their position to extract ever larger amounts of government money.

The sensible solution would be to accept that the railways, like health and education (but for different reasons), are better run by the state than the private sector, and take the system back into public ownership.

This, however, would mean Labour dropping its ideological commitment to the all conquering market forces and confronting the companies currently running the system.

This Labour is loath to do. Instead it continues pouring in public money to pay private companies to run a system that isn't working.

This strategy was inherited from the Tories who privatised the railways purely on ideological grounds without any real idea of how it was going to work.

In fact, this lack of a joined up strategy for how a privatised railway would work held the

Tories back from privatisation for many years.

Had the rail unions posed a threat there is little doubt that privatisation would have come far earlier.

It should be remembered that privatisation for the Tories was as much about breaking the organised working class as it was about setting the public sector free of the 'dead hand of the state'.

Thatcher had already, by the mid 1980s, inflicted a number of defeats, severely undermined union organisation on the railways.

She had been able to shut the train manufacturing arm of British Rail (BR) with over 100,000 job losses, helping to halve rail union membership within a few years.

Had she not been ousted as Tory leader, there would certainly have been more cuts and more jobs losses.

Some Tories wanted to reduce the network to just the West and East Coast Mainlines and the south-east commuter lines.

But with the menace of the organised working class out of the way, privatising the railways on ideological grounds without a clear idea of how it could work made even Thatcher hesitate.

It took John Major to go where the 'Iron Lady' feared and privatisation went ahead in 1993 with the first privatised train entering service in 1996.

The proud Tory boast was that, once privatised, the railways would no longer need public subsidy.

This was little more than ideological pig-headedness based on a simplistic belief that market forces had some magical power to somehow make the railways highly profitable and much more efficient.

As privatisation went forward it often seemed the Tories were making it up as they went along; with disastrous results.

Soon the government was forced to throw large sums of money at the railways trying to get the ill-conceived plans to work.

In the first 18 months of privatisation the state subsidy rose from £1bn to £2bn. This was not for investment but to bribe BR managers into setting up companies or acting as consultants to create alternative structures to BR.

These first years saw an obscene feeding frenzy as managers rushed to cash in. To hide any failings, an army of slick marketing people were drafted in to bang on about re-branding and customer care in a reorganisation exercise based on gloss over substance.

The hope seemed to be that making staff walk about with fixed smiles, dressed in a clown's outfit of a uniform, would fool passengers into accepting deteriorating services.

This was a transitional period, however. As the profit potential became obvious big companies began buying out the small time ex-BR management companies.

As the size of the companies running the railways grew so did their profits, as they extorted more and more money from the state.

The state subsidy rocketed to £4bn by 2005 while efficiency and safety standards plummeted. A string of high profile crashes was the downfall of Railtrack, but far less publicised was the abysmal performance of the operating companies.

On the East Coast Mainline, profitable under BR, the GNER soon demanded a subsidy of £400million a year just to keep the service going. In 1992, the year before privatisation, BR got 90% of arrivals on time; by 2004 this had dropped to 80%.

Naive theory

Naive free market theories that market forces would make the railways more cost effective simply don't work.

On average, costs have doubled under privatisation compared to nationalisation. Some costs have rocketed even higher. Modernising the West Coast Mainline costs £16.68million per mile, compared with only £1.8million per mile, in today's prices, for the East Coast Mainline under nationalisation.

The multinational construction companies which have taken over from BR are making money hand over fist. Just how much can be judged from the fact that it only cost the French state run railways £10.84million per mile to build a brand new high speed line.

'Iron law'

The 'iron law' of supply and demand that the Tories appealed to when arguing that a more efficient railway would

"It should be remembered that privatisation for the Tories was as much about breaking the organised working class as it was about setting the public sector free of the 'dead hand of the state'"

increase demand and allow subsidies to be slashed, has not worked either.

Someone obviously forgot to explain the theory to the operating companies. As revenue from increased passenger use has risen costs, and demands for more subsidies, have mysteriously rocketed, which shouldn't happen according to my economics text book.

In the 1980s fares covered 76% of costs while today they cover less than 42%. The more cynical might be forgiven for thinking that train operating companies are ripping off both public money and passengers alike.

Given the total mess the railway system is now in, it might have been a good idea for Labour to blame it on privatisation and return to the sanity of a state run railway as quickly as possible.

Sadly Blair, and now Brown, are stricken with the same ideological blindness as the Tories. Rather than blame privatisation they have consistently blamed the way the Tories went about it and have spent the last ten years trying to get it to work.

Thus far there have been three restructurings which have failed miserably. The reality is that Labour have no more idea of how to make a privatised railway work than the Tories.

Their long term strategy is the same - keep throwing money at private companies based on a touching faith that in the end the private sector somehow delivers.

A British Rail train, pre-privatisation

No doubt the government will get over its latest problem with the train leasing companies. But the storm clouds are gathering.

Even the more conservative estimates predict that rail costs will rise between 15% and 28% in the next few years. With passengers already sick to death of high prices and overcrowded unsafe trains, unrest can only grow.

Revolt

There is every chance of more passenger protests like the fares strikes that have already occurred.

Further, the RMT, though now numbering only 60,000 members compared to 240,000 before the Tory butchery, is a potentially powerful force as it has retained high levels of workplace organisation.

It's not beyond possibility that rail workers will join forces with passenger groups to attack government polices.

Lastly, and tragically, the replacement of Railtrack by Network Rail has done nothing to improve safety and the system remains an accident waiting to happen.

So it's quite possible that this or a future government will be forced to drop the free market dogma and renationalise the railways.

This would be welcome, not least because it would further loosen the ideological stranglehold that free market policies have on so much of British society.

An integrated state run railway would also deliver a better cheaper and safer service as well as bring much needed job security to a workforce which has suffered so much since privatisation.

For anarcho-syndicalists, while we support renationalisation, it can never be an end in itself. It would improve working conditions but it would never end worker exploitation.

Further, the railways are central for an alternative transport system to the car. And if the catastrophic effects of global warming are to be avoided we require a far more radical shake up of the transport system than the state is capable of.

New vision

It will take a new vision of transport that can only come through imaginative economic planning of the sort that can be achieved under workers control.

As part of that vision the railways will be run to benefit society as a whole, and not for the individual gain of a handful of capitalists.

Environ-mental

Why capitalism is destroying the planet

Direct Action explains why the bosses' system is at fault for the acceleration of global warming, and how they have no real solutions for tackling the problem

You can't open a newspaper these days without some scare story about global warming or the impending environmental catastrophe.

The body of evidence to confirm the reality of global warming is compelling, with many people experiencing first hand the resulting extreme weather conditions.

There's no doubt that the planet is under severe threat, as the recent UN Climate Change Panel Report confirmed. Years of ravaging natural resources combined with wanton pollution have taken their toll, with no sign of things improving.

Unsustainable economic growth driven by competition and the pursuit of profit is clearly the root of the problem, with 80% of the world's industrial output now controlled by 1000 corporations (Shared Vision, 2003).

"75% of the world's pollution comes from 25% of the world's population" (Guardian Weekly, 2002)

Even the pillars of society seem concerned, with Al Gore's 'An Inconvenient Truth' and papers like The Independent presenting a series of alarming statistics and emotive headlines.

That growth is unsustainable is no accident. It's part of the capitalist system, which serves the short term interests of the few and pays no regard to the long term survival of the many.

Half the world's population survives on less than US $2 a day. The wealthiest 20% of the world's population consume 86% of the world's resources. (Guardian Weekly, 2002)

75% of the world's pollution comes from 25% of the population. (Guardian Weekly, 2002)

Under capitalism, production is targeted not at those in need, but at those with the ability to pay.

Overconsumption is a massive problem in the western world, with estimates confirming that if patterns in Britain were replicated, we would require 3 planet earths. Behind this lies a litany of deforestisation, intensive farming and pollution.

Globally, the poor are far more likely to be victims of environmental injustice.

In the UK, economically deprived areas are more likely to suffer the effects of industrial and traffic pollution.

Workers the world over are exposed to hazardous materials and unsafe practices, especially in areas where union activity is weak or repressed.

In the last decade of the 20th Century, 99 out of every 100 people killed in climate related disasters lived in poorer countries, and three quarters of greenhouse gases come from the rich industrialised world. (Friends of the Earth, 2006)

Organisations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund finance projects such as oil pipelines, mines and dams which threaten livelihoods, local resources and homes, particularly in poorer countries.

Under World Trade Organisation rules, smaller countries and businesses are punished for 'obstructing' free trade. These unelected bodies all promote the global capitalist (and corporate) agenda.

Conflict and the greed-fuelled pursuit of profit are the order of the day in the clamour for control of dwindling oil, water and other natural resources.

In addition to raping the natural world and increasing instability, global capitalism has also widened the chasm between the rich and poor; with some 24,000 people a day now dying of hunger, or hunger-related diseases.

The gap between the incomes of the richest and poorest countries was about 3 to 1 in 1820, 35 to 1 in 1950, 44 to 1 in 1973, and 72 to 1 in 1992. (United Nations Development Report, 1999)

Jonathon Porritt of Friends of the Earth wrote an essay published in The Independent in 2006 entitled 'How Capitalism can Save the Planet'.

Other 'liberal' capitalists call for curbs and controls on corporations to persuade them to be more socially responsible.

Some hare-brained individuals think that all we need to do to save the planet is use energy-saving light bulbs, drive less and recycle our waste.

We harbour no such illusions, neither are we fooled by these reformist smoke screens.

Since the Kyoto Protocol, the production of greenhouse gases continues to rise unabated.

Economic development in India, China and across the industrial world is placing ever greater demands on already-depleted resources and further escalating pollution levels. Time is running out.

Put simply, there's enough for all our need, not all the bosses' greed. Corporations, governments and market forces are the root cause of global warming, poverty and warfare.

We support grassroots solidarity with all those who stand against them.

The future we fight for has a system of production and exchange driven not by short-sighted profit, but by collective need and the full participation of workers and communities in deciding what gets

made and how.

Unsustainable lifestyle choices which damage the environment may need to be rejected and dispensed with.

Decisions will have to be made collectively involving interconnected local communities on how best to manage scarce resources responsibly.

Extensive use of recycling, renewables and energy conservation will be required. Collective and individual ownership of resources will mean a reduction in consumption levels and in the damaging intensive production and farming methods of today.

In the last decade of the 20th Century, 99 out of every 100 people killed in climate related disasters lived in poorer countries, and three quarters of greenhouse gases come from the rich industrialised world. (Friends of the Earth, 2006)

To achieve this requires something more, and something other, than tinkering at the edges to create a 'greener' capitalism.

It is only through ditching the bosses and building a world based on solidarity, not greed, that the future of our planet can be assured.

New Labour REACHes new depths

The medical journal, *The Lancet*, has called for the EU's draft regulation 'Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals' (REACH) to include protection for unborn children against brain-development disorders caused by industrial chemicals.

REACH proposes that chemical manufacturers and importers produce health and safety tests for around 30,000 of the 100,000 chemicals currently used in Europe.

The screening process would start with those produced in the highest volumes.

Foetal and early childhood exposure to industrial chemicals can damage the developing brain leading to neurodevelopmental disorders like autism, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and mental retardation.

It is thought that this causes disorders in as many as one in six children. Working class communities living alongside incinerators or industrial plants emitting large quantities of chemicals are especially at risk.

And, as community organisations opposing such plants are only too aware, little research has been done to identify the chemicals causing these brain injuries.

Preventative measures are restricted by the high level of proof demanded by the chemical industry before they look for safer alternatives.

Of the most common chemicals in use in industry fewer than half have been subjected to a laboratory test.

While politicians would have us believe they protect us from terrorism, crime and environmental dangers, we should pay more attention to what they do rather than what they say.

The British government originally supported REACH, but after intense lobbying by the Bush administration, fearing damage to US exports, it began denouncing it as 'dangerously wrong' and succeeded in sabotaging control of toxic chemicals.

The European Parliament initially supported the measure but British pressure brought about a final document so watered down as to be almost useless.

Threats to our health and safety are not only a question for workers and workplace organisations; they also concern the community, the environment and a whole generation of children.

Some critics of anarcho-syndicalism suggest that we are obsessed with industry to the exclusion of everything else, but problems like the effects of toxic chemicals refute this.

The threat is a serious one; it must be fought by both workers in the industry and the community at large; and it reflects how society itself is one huge factory in which we are all affected by all aspects of production.

SolFed conference: where we're heading

At the end of April Solidarity Federation held its annual national conference, which was very well organised by South London SF.

Proposals and other contributions dealt with both 'home' and international issues.

The first real business of the conference, however, was to welcome the recently formed Brighton group into SolFed.

This newest local group underlines the point made in the National Secretary's report that SF, although still a small organisation, has nevertheless seen steady growth over the previous year.

On the home front we considered, among others issues, the campaign against casualisation; an SF national weekend school and the production of more SF literature and other means of getting our message across.

In terms of our anti-casualisation work, the conference agreed that a web site would be set up as an additional means of spreading information.

Part of this will be an email service geared towards providing tips on organising and practical solidarity.

The discussions around casualisation also included issues around claimants and disabled workers; the campaign against Starbucks (see page ?); as well as locals' preparations for the IWA week of action against casualisation in the run up to May Day (again, see page ?).

The conference also resolved that SF will organise a national 'Weekend School' later this year. An associated web page will be set up and tickets to the event will be available in the coming weeks and months. More details will appear in the autumn issue of DA.

Meanwhile, anyone interested in finding out more can do so via the SF website or the SF national contact point.

As far as new literature is concerned, it was agreed to produce a 'handbook' for new and existing members; an introductory pamphlet for wider circulation; as well as other basic propaganda like new and reissued SF stickers; leaflets, both introductory and on a range of topics; as well as flyers, postcards and bookmarks (advertising SF, DA, Catalyst, the anti-casualisation campaign, and so on).

Issues related to our industrial strategy also featured. This included our participation, nationally and locally, within the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), a grouping of trade union activists launched in London last October with the aim of establishing a wider 'rank and file' type movement.

SF's participation is to be geared towards assistance in building the NSSN, and in defending it against union officialdom and opportunist left parties.

Alongside the conference, there were get-togethers for SF members in education, and in health & social care. The Education Workers Network, revived during the previous 12-15 months, had brought out an issue of Education Worker in time for distribution at the conference (this is downloadable via the EWN website, or obtainable by contacting EWN direct - see inside back cover).

Future plans include an EWN introductory pamphlet; another issue of EW for September/October; and a national meeting in early October.

Workers in Health and Social Care also met and agreed an initiative with a view to launching a Health & Social Care network in the future.

Readers interested in this development can make contact via Northampton SF (see inside back cover).

On the international front, the conference accepted a request from the IWA Secretariat, now based in Serbia, that SF take on the treasurer role within the Secretariat due to potential political instability and its effects on the Serbian banking system. In addition two SF members were mandated to take part in an IWA electronic relations commission.

There was also discussion of a day of action, called by the Colombian Friends of the IWA, on Colombian Independence Day, 20th July. This is to highlight the dire situation faced by Colombian workers, especially active trade unionists.

South London SF and North & East London SF will coordinate this (see article on page ?). Finally, the Spanish CNT, through its observers, passed on a message of thanks for solidarity actions carried out in support of its members.

Rationing by stealth

How market forces in the NHS attack our social wage

Following last issue's article about Foundation Trust hospitals, we further the NHS structure and the changes are occurring within it. This is to more fully explain the true driving forces behind the current stream of attacks on NHS workers and users.

The argument is essentially that the current 'privatisation' and 'pro-market' reforms are in essence a disguised form of rationing through which jobs, pay, conditions and health cover for the working class are all being cut.

The NHS, from when it was set up in 1948 until the Tory reforms of the early 1990s operated as a fairly coordinated single national system run, in theory at least, according to three basic principles: universality (available to all); comprehensiveness (including all services); and being free (not involving payment at the point of delivery).

Different areas were, again in theory if not always in practice, provided with resources in a planned way according to the needs of the local population, with different service providers all working together as a unified service.

Of course it was never the idealistic, egalitarian organisation it is sometimes made out to be and, just as with any other capitalist institution, the ruling class has always exercised ultimate control.

One manifestation of this was the consistently greater resources which went to well off areas, particularly in and around London, in comparison to lack of both hospital and GP services in working class areas - clearly the NHS has always been a capitalist (or state-capitalist) organisation run and resourced accordingly.

However, its creation did represent a significant improvement in the 'social wage', one brought about by significant real or threatened class struggle over much of the first half of the twentieth century.

And there was also the need to keep the working class healthy enough to work and fight - 48% of potential soldiers had been unfit to fight in the Boer war.

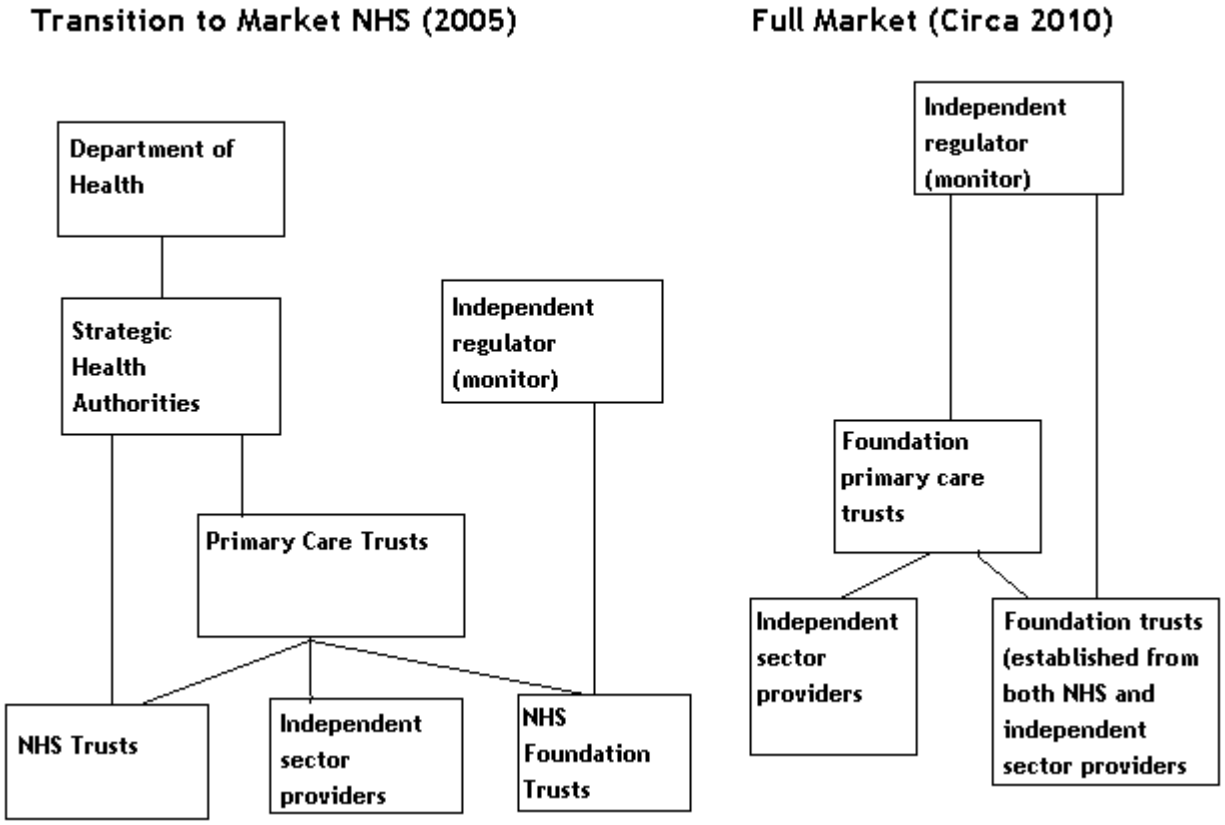
That improvement essentially extended National Health Insurance to the entire population - the 'freedom from fear' promised by Aneurin Bevan.

Working class people, previously unable to afford healthcare or health insurance, now knew that if the worst happened they would at least be looked after; and new jobs were created as health workers were needed to fulfil this pledge.

Many changes and restructurings followed but government responsibility to provide planned healthcare to the entire population remained intact.

Fast forward to 1990 and the 'NHS and Community Care Act' which introduced the NHS 'internal market'.

A Tory policy, like so many others, adopted wholeheartedly by New Labour, this has been



A chart, explaining how the NHS will look if the current trend of marketisation continues

rebranded as the 'Purchaser-Provider split'.

This act completely altered the planned nature of the NHS by splitting it into purchasers (health authorities, some GPs, and more recently Primary Care Trusts) who are given money to buy services on behalf of patients from providers (hospitals).

Hospitals became independent 'NHS Trusts', with their own managements and balance sheets, essentially competing against each other for 'purchasers'' money.

This new 'marketised' nature has been strengthened by subsequent Tory and Labour governments in various ways.

For example, 'purchasers' are now encouraged to purchase services from both NHS trusts and private providers, meaning that much of the money we are constantly told is being 'pumped' into the NHS now goes straight into the pockets of private shareholders.

Adding to this waste are the PFI (private finance initiative) schemes and the huge accounting costs which go with the NHS being forced to buy its services from different parts of itself.

Further marketisation is found in the switch to 'foundation' status, as described in DA38, in which the obligations that individual NHS trusts had to the wider health service and the population as a whole are being dismantled in favour of outright privatisation.

The plan is for all hospitals, NHS or otherwise, to eventually become foundation trusts, operating as individual financial entities competing with one another under the supervision of 'Monitor', an independent regulator like those which oversee other privatised industries (see diagram). (Note that the 'purchaser-provider split' has been reversed in Scotland, where the NHS is run once again as a single, planned entity.

How long this will last is anyone's guess, and Scottish readers should note what is happening south of the border as an indication of the attacks on healthcare which are likely to be coming their way.)

Whilst, for social democrats, the privatisation of a nationalised industry is self-evidently bad, libertarian communists may ask 'who cares who provides these services and how 'privatised' they are?'

History shows that state-capitalists are no better than private ones.

Nevertheless, the reason we should oppose these changes is not because nationalised industries are inherently good, but because the government is using marketisation as a smokescreen to attack the social wage and health workers' jobs by eroding the basic principles of universality and comprehensiveness.

Within an integrated NHS the government can

be clearly held responsible and blamed if services are not provided for people who need them.

Any attempt to attack the social wage by rationing NHS care can be clearly identified and vehemently opposed.

However, once you split the NHS into lots of little parts, each with their own budget, all forced to compete with and buy services from each other, then rationing can be safely introduced without central government taking the blame.

"The reason we should oppose these changes is not because nationalised industries are inherently good, but because the government is using marketisation as a smokescreen to attack the social wage and health workers' jobs by eroding the basic principles of universality and comprehensiveness"

Any shortfalls are purely down to 'market forces', not deliberate policy. By leaving the market (which becomes less and less 'internal' by the day) to decide priorities for healthcare provision the government has essentially abandoned the original NHS principles of universality, comprehensiveness and free care at the point of use.

The government, though still responsible for allocating funds to Primary Care Trusts, is now free to blame the market when this money becomes insufficient.

At this point it is too confusing for all but the most dedicated to follow exactly who is at fault for our lack of care, as hospitals (with separate finances from their PCT) pay staff to do nothing following orders to maintain 'minimum waiting lists' because the PCT has run out of money to pay for services.

Decisions about healthcare based on market forces also inevitably lead to cuts and closures of 'unprofitable' services which, in this context, generally means treatment of conditions which are complicated, chronic and generally not suited to a conveyor belt system whereby hospitals treat one patient, take the money, and move on to the next.

It is no surprise, then, that mental health and elderly services are among the hardest hit by the constant rounds of cuts over the last few years.

These cuts and closures are inevitably blamed, correctly, on mysterious 'market forces', but these forces have been deliberately unleashed upon the NHS by the government.

Clearly, when this 'invisible hand' is left to decide which services will and will not be available in any given area the much vaunted universality and comprehensiveness go out the window.

The well founded but slightly misleading reports of 'postcode lotteries' in NHS care are a result of this, as they essentially reflect variations in which services NHS purchasers and providers in different areas consider to be financially profitable or viable.

Of course, all services in any area of the country are provided in a 'universal' and 'comprehensive' way to the rich - which brings us to the betrayal of the third principle of the early NHS, its claim to be 'free at the point of use'.

The steady increase in 'pay beds' and other private services offered by NHS hospitals is reminiscent of the way 'voluntary hospitals' functioned before the NHS was formed - expensive and luxurious private wings attached to a hospital which provided the most basic healthcare free to the working class.

There are no 'postcode lotteries' for those who can afford it and NHS, as well as private hospitals, can take advantage of the fact that cuts to basic care mean that more and more of us are forced to either pay or go without.

This trend is already well advanced in dentistry and ophthalmology, as anyone who's tried to get on the books of an NHS dentist recently will be all too aware.

It seems, then, that the NHS is in danger of ceasing to exist as anything more than a logo attached to some of the private providers in the future healthcare market.

As the government increasingly uses 'market discipline' as a smokescreen to hide its attacks on the social wage of the working class we will see more and more services being available only to those able to pay.

This reduction in healthcare provision will affect not only people needing care but also the NHS workers whose services will no longer be funded - those who can afford comprehensive healthcare are considerably outnumbered by those who need it. So the workforce required to provide for them will shrink correspondingly.

It is important that we emphasise that our opposition is against the withdrawal of free healthcare from the working class, rather than being a social democratic defence of the NHS as some kind of socialist ideal.

We do not distance ourselves from the workers and users who grow increasingly angry at the constant cuts, closures and 'restructurings', who recognise what is worth defending in the 'universal, comprehensive and free' vision of the NHS as set out in 1948.

Ultimately these attacks are simply another reason for the British working class to hate a capitalist system which cannot or will not provide for our basic needs - and an incentive for us to get organised and do something about it.

57 Varieties

All unfit for consumption

Why all political parties have nothing to offer the working class

A decline in voter turnout; cash for honours; trade union members' subscription money going directly to a party that supports the same organisations who are currently attacking workers' rights, wages and working conditions: all signs of the increasing disillusionment with political parties.

So why is it happening, and why are anarcho-syndicalists against all political parties?

Many parties claim to act on behalf of the working class. Since its creation, the Labour Party has been perceived as the main party of the workers.

Three in the same bed

However, their widening authoritarian streak (ID cards, anti-terror legislation, tighter rules on immigration, to name but a few recent aspects of this), coupled with their continuing support for anti-union laws introduced by the Tories, has seen them all but lose this traditional label.

At the local level performance is as poor as ever.

When Labour-controlled councils aren't doing what the Tories did in the 1980's by privatising everything, the Tories and Lib Dems are doing it on a grander scale.

Many councillors simply ignore questions from the people.

One Lib Dem councillor in Lincoln even moved 30 miles out of the city to avoid questions, letters and phone calls.

And coalitions between the main parties are no different. Parties in coalitions can conveniently forget manifesto pledges.

Preferring to live it up on their massive salaries and pass any legislation that helps to sustain this, the mainstream politicians do little more than ease the way for the unbridled growth of capitalism.

Left behind

Having left a massive

George Galloway: another workshy politician

gap for a moderate-left group, many groups are scrambling to fill that hole.

The SWP's two attempts at broad-left electoral fronts (the Socialist Alliance and Respect); the Socialist Party of England and Wales (in areas where they try and cling onto past glories of the Militant Tendency); The Scottish Socialist Party and Tommy Sheridan's new personality cult have all tried and, for the most part, failed.

Wannabe Leninist politicians have a knack of hijacking community campaigns for their own benefit, especially if there's an election nearby.

Respect scored a major victory in the 2005 General Election when George Galloway won the supposedly safe Labour seat of Bethnal Green & Bow.

Due to disillusionment among working-class voters over the way that Labour have screwed them, they hoped for a new beginning.

However, since his election, all Galloway has done of note is appear in a catsuit on reality TV and go on a massive speaking tour.

His attendance record at the House of Commons is among the lowest of all MPs.

When he stands down at the next election, Respect look more than likely to lose the seat.

That aside, the left haven't really managed to capture the imagination of the mass of disillusioned ex-Labour voters.

Vote Nobody

There are two main problems with political parties: they all support capitalism, regardless of what they say in their manifestos; and are undemocratic, hierarchical structures populated by careerists who don't care about what the workers want.

More people in the UK are becoming aware of that. As a result, voter turnout has fallen, with as little as 30% of eligible voters turning out at local level.

An ever-increasing gap between the lifestyles of the fat-cat leaders and the working-class majority means that many are starting to question the current political climate. Even membership of political parties is stagnant.

Leftist groups like the SWP, SP and the SSP have seen a decline in membership, mainly because of splits, opportunism and reformism.

Some of those of a more revolutionary hue who leave the left are discovering alternatives to Leninism like anarcho-syndicalism.

As a result of the decline in support for political parties, groups like ourselves, the Anarchist Federation and Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) have recently seen significant growth.

Many people join organisations like SolFed because we actually have principles, such as direct democracy, direct action and maintenance of a non-hierarchical structure.

Such principles arose, in the early years of the 20th century, due to the disillusionment of workers with newly elected MPs. In country after country newly enfranchised (mainly male) workers elected socialists to office for the first time only to find that, once in office, they were quickly seduced by the trappings of power.

In a number of countries they were corrupted even to the extent of supporting the use of troops to put down strikes.

So revolutionary unions have adopted a firm anti-parliamentary line, rejecting electoral politics and taking up direct action methods of struggle to confront capitalism.

This experience is still relevant today. We must ensure that the working class is never fooled again into supporting a 'socialist' party, that once in power will soon ditch any thoughts of destroying capitalism and become part of the elite ruling over us in the same old way.

As the malaise with the state and capitalism, with parties and politicians (whether mainstream or left) continues to grow, interest in anarcho-syndicalism will also do so once again.

"People join organisations such as SolFed because we have principles such as direct democracy, direct action and the maintenance of a non-hierarchical structure"

IWA: Solidarity with Colombian workers

The International Workers Assocation Congress in Manchester last December agreed that sections should hold actions targeted at Colombian embassies/consulates and business interests coordinated for July 20th, Colombia's 'National Day'. At the request of the Colombian 'Friends of the IWA', the day of action was called to highlight the ongoing war waged by the Colombian state on trade unionists.

Among the world's most repressive states, the US-backed regime of Álvaro Uribe Vélez continues to allow transnationals (for instance Coca Cola and the banana multinational Chiquita Brands International) and home-grown business interests alike a virtually free hand to snuff out opposition. Indigenous tribespeople, the Afro-Colombian communities as well as human rights activitists have all been severely hit.

Likewise, for trade unionists death, direct threats and displacement are a daily reality.

As one of the sources of strongest opposition to neo-liberal economic policies, union activists are targeted by government security policies.

The Ministry for Social Protection is supposed to stimulate employment but in practice it monitors, hinders and restricts union activity, devoting its efforts to curbing union rights, to constantly trying to have strikes declared illegal, and to encouraging public authorities to harass organised workers and other protest movements.

Beyond this, paramilitary organisations regularly issue death threats and carry them out, often in collaboration with the Colombian military.

These paramilitary groups have been set up by politicians, businesses, drug traffickers, members of the rural and military elites and representatives from foreign transnationals to protect their vested interests from 'subversives'. For instance

According to the International Centre for Trade Union Rights (ICTUR - www.ictur.org), at least 72 members of trade unions were assassinated in Colombia during 2006, an increase on the previous year.

The Colombian government always denies responsibility despite its well-known connections with the paramilitary groupings which carry out these executions in the name of 'national security'.

Although the state has recently encouraged paramilitaries to demobilise, human rights groups and others have severely criticised this measure because they can escape without being charged for loads of their past crimes.

At its April national conference, the Solidarity Federation reconfirmed its support for the IWA's call for a day of action on July 20th.

SF's activities will be coordinated by South London SF (southlondonsf @solfed.org.uk) and North & East London SF (nelsf@solfed.org.uk) who may be contacted for further details.

Thatcherism Down Under

Over the past two years, PM John Howard has accelerated his attack on workers' rights in Australia, and with an election looming, he's showing no sign of slowing down

Australia has eight states and territories, all Labour-controlled, and one federal government, which is more Thatcherite than Thatcher herself in her heyday.

But this is federal election year which, after a decade of the Liberal Party's 'Mr Charisma', John Howard, seems like a golden opportunity for common sense to assert itself by kicking him out come November.

Two problems - the obvious isn't always the outcome; and will Aussies be any better off anyway?

The parallels between Howard and Thatcher are uncanny:

> An apparent 'knack' of delivering a 'well-managed economy' and balancing payments, lowering unemployment, etc;

> A total disregard for hard scientific evidence on environmental problems, with a preference for neo-liberal economists claiming to be expert climatologists and saying it's not really happening;

> A narrow-minded hatred of working people, combined with a careful rhetoric that 'champions the little guy' - patronising? You've heard nothing yet…

> A vicious personal vendetta against unions; etc.

Business is 'booming'

The economy is riding on the back of the mining boom - China wants to buy everything, and someone invaded Iraq, leading to healthy oil prices.

Spending on things like roads, health and education has plummeted while taxes have risen - result; a 'healthy' economy!

On environment, Howard rivals Bush's conviction that climate change is a fake commie plan of some sort, and God wouldn't approve of intervening.

This leaves the working class and the unions. After finally gaining control of both parliament and senate in 2005, Howard lost no time in following up previous attacks on workers with his 'final solution' - called Work Choices (without a hint of irony).

AWAsh with hatred

The main choice facing workers under this legislation seems to be 'casualise or piss off'. More specifically, Work Choices included the following:

> Removal of restrictions on bosses offering 'Australian Workplace Agreements' (individual contracts agreed outside union-enterprise bargaining agreements);

> Unfair dismissal protection was abolished for 90% of workers in private firms;

> 'Green fields' agreements (new companies can make up an agreement before employing any staff);

> Workers can lose rights gained through collective agreements a year after a business has been sold on.

Since March 2006, Work Choices has had a marked and measured impact on the wages and conditions of low-paid and non-unionised workers - so much so that the government has tried to silence its own commissioned reviews of the effects.

All AWAs under Work Choices have cut at least one previously protected working condition, and across all industries non-managerial workers on AWAs earn less than those on collective agreements.

Bosses can offer an AWA at any time, allowing

them to undercut collective agreements. And while workers are officially not supposed to be sacked for refusing to sign an AWA, the advantages for bosses are so great that they find a way to force the issue - and of course, it can be used as a condition for being offered a job in the first place, or for promotion or redeployment.

Work Choices also targets the legality of industrial action and has imposed secret ballots on unions that want to call strike action.

A breach of the law can land unions and individual workers with massive fines. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

The ballots must be run by the Australian Electoral Commission, with the union paying 20% of the cost.

In contrast, employers can stage a lockout at any time, on three days' notice. Also the Industrial Relations Commission can terminate or suspend any bargaining if it judges that either party is not negotiating in 'good faith'.

In other words, industrial action can be branded illegal. It prohibits unions attempting to achieve universal pay and conditions across an industry, and restricts union organisers' right of entry to workplaces.

Rudd-y hell

With the young 'third-way' hopeful Kevin Rudd - a geeky Blairite - Labour is convinced it finally has a real chance in Canberra.

It promises to replace Work Choices and restore rights to workers, including abolition of AWAs. It gets rather vague when you ask 'what with?'

Forward with Fairness, Labour's outline manifesto on workplace relations, promises to continue Howard's ban on all strikes outside secret ballots and agreed bargaining.

It also includes ten basic conditions, as opposed to Work Choices' five. It merely tweaks Howard's way, providing some marginal clarifications in workers' favour.

What is clear is that Labour won't improve working conditions that have been cut and will only partly restore unfair dismissal provisions.

While honouring its promise to abolish the ABCC (see box) it promises a new general workplace inspectorate with specialist divisions that can focus on persistent or unlawful behaviour in particular industries and sectors.

The first divisions established will be for the building and hospitality industries. The right wing lobby group, the Master Builders' Association, has approved the proposal - which says it all.

The only option

Basically, workers will be worse off under whoever gets in come November.

Labour promises a Blairite new 'partnership' between bosses and workers (and we know how that works), while Howard promises to be mates with the 'Aussie battlers' while he screws our pay, conditions and public services even further.

The only option for workers' organisation is to build solidarity networks and take on the bosses through direct action.

One thing about such draconian laws as Howard's is that it is hardly tempting to try playing it cool when you clearly have nothing to gain by complying.

The fact is, we have nothing to lose and everything to gain by ignoring the rules and organising using good old tried and tested direct action.

As for the election? Well, 'don't bother' could be an option but, as it's illegal not to vote in Australia, we have to be a bit more creative like writing a nice little message to the politician of your choice all over your ballot paper.

Case study: Howard and building workers

In Australia, construction workers have maintained a union structure and benefited as a result compared to those in the UK.

Unsurprisingly, Howard has directed a particularly malicious attack at these workers. Hence, a special act of parliament created a Building Construction Commission (ABCC) to 'police' union activity and workers' rights in building and construction.

ABCC staff have the power to interrogate any worker in secret about any matter. Workers are denied their right to silence and are prohibited from talking to anyone else about the questions asked.

Failing to attend makes the worker liable for a six-month jail term for contempt.

Unauthorised action like walkouts or strikes not agreed to in writing in advance by the employer leaves the workers involved individually liable to huge fines.

For example 107 workers on the Perth-Mandurah railway line who stuck last year face fines of $22,000 each ($1 = 42p). An additional 82 face a further $6,600 in fines under Work Choices.

Somehow, it manages to gets worse.

Last year's Independent Contractors Act means all workers deemed independent contractors are denied the support of a union, a blatant move to smash workplace organisation and encourage bosses to casualise and outsource at will.

May 1st 2007

May Day commemorates five anarchist workers put to death in Chicago in 1886 in the struggle for the 8-hour working day. This year's May Day statement by the IWA Secretariat* notes 'how this hard won right, as well as many others, is slipping away...as the capitalist machinery tries to "liberate" itself from obligations that we imposed on it through our struggles and direct action'. This global 'capitalist crusade...of coordinated attacks against workers rights' includes, among much else, the increasing casualisation of the workplace. To highlight the international nature of the attack, leading up to this May Day IWA sections have, once again, coordinated their anti-casualisation activities. Here we look back at some of these, and other May Day activities, in the UK, Spain and Poland.

*** For Freedom and Equality: Direct Action and Solidarity! - see: http://www.iwa-ait.org/**

Britain

In DA38 we covered some of SolFed's anti-casualisation activities. This May Day's activities included distribution of leaflets and the holding of information stalls to coincide with the IWA call.

Some SF groups have also been involved in a campaign around casualisation at Starbucks coffee shops. Below is an article detailing South London SF's involvement.

Starbucks Vs its workers

For almost 3 years workers in Starbucks have been organising in their franchises in the USA under the banner of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

Starbucks have responded by waging a war of intimidation against the unionising workers.

Already 5 employees have lost their jobs - Joseph Agins, Charles Fostrom, Evan Winterscheidt, Daniel Gross (Founder of the Starbucks Union) and Isis Saenz. This is a warning shot towards anyone attempting to improve work conditions.

However, Starbucks workers have fought back, winning 2 workers their jobs back and more than $2000 in lost earnings.

In New York City, workers have gained a 25% wage increase in just over 2 years, with similar raises in other areas they have organised.

After talking to various people, South London Solidarity Federation decided to do something to support these sacked workers.

While workers are sacked all the time for organising, it's not all the time that the company behaving this way has very public outlets that we can do an informational picket outside.

One of our members was involved in some high street solidarity during the 1980s, in a couple of disputes originating in Scotland: Ardbride, who supplied Laura Ashley, and Tricia Jennings, who worked for Burton.

From this, we learned that informational pickets can be instrumental in aiding workers in struggle, though they are not enough in themselves. In order to win, the workers need active solidarity from other workers, particularly in the same company or industry.

Since last year, we have been regularly picketing Starbucks stores across South London to highlight Starbuck's attacks on its workers and show solidarity with the five sacked workers.

We have been joined by IWW and AF members, and non-affiliated people wanting to show solidarity with the fired workers. SolFed members from other locals have also run pickets at their local franchises.

In this activity, we have tried to engage with the workers as well as talking to customers, pointing out some of the benefits (and risks!) of organising while finding out what their concerns are. Our next step is to set up a questionnaire for Starbucks workers.

Since we started this, there has been the news that the IWW in Leicester have started a Baristas United union for all coffee shop workers.

We support this effort and have been talking to the IWW so that we don't send out mixed messages. It should also be added that we think it's important to be honest to the workers in coffee shops - by joining Baristas United they are forming a new union, with all the hard work and reward that entails. We have also shown the Starbucks Union DVD produced by the IWW, hopefully to Starbucks workers.

Many of the Starbucks workers are casual - one of the prime initial demands made by the SWU in New York was for regularisation of working hours.

However, in our work around this, we reject the idea that casual workers

are somehow different to other workers (and form some sort of "precariat").

This is doing the bosses' job for them. In our work on casualisation, we seek to unite workers not divide them, and to do this in concrete terms by promoting organisation by workplace, not by type of contract.

Spain

The Spanish CNT held May Day actions in more than 30 cities. Besides increasing casualisation in Spain, the focus was also on worsening working conditions in general, including low pay, poverty, the situation of women, and the rising incidence of workplace accidents.

Spain has one of the highest rates of temporary employment in Europe, while casualisation is growing alarmingly in the public services. And new social security and labour market reforms are on the way that can only extend casualisation further, continuing a trend that goes back 20 years or more.

These reforms reflect a capitalist and neoliberal vision of work; they show up the almost indistinguishable position of the main union confederations compared with the employers associations; and they are proof yet again of the 'enormous gap between the interests of workers and those who would call themselves their "representatives"'.

Indeed, another theme for the CNT in the run up to May Day has been the electoral circus associated with the 'enterprise committees'. This from the CNT de León:

'Professional politicians and unionists…bombard us with all kinds of promises…to grab as many votes as possible. When they get them and are comfortably installed they forget your problems and their promises…. While we continue to suffer workplace accidents, unemployment, casualisation, sackings...the so-called union representatives only worry about getting more time to free themselves from the alienating work that the rest of us do.'

An example of this was described by the CNT union section at SEAT in Barcelona: 'the enterprise committees…[by] recycling trade unionists into politicians make the present union model one more institution of the system.

Organizations who now ask for the workers' votes are managing the lists in the 'negotiation' the redundancies of 660 fellow workers.'

Poland

ZSP (Zwiazek Syndykalistów Polski - Union of Syndicalists of Poland) is a relatively new organisation with strong links to the IWA.

Though founded as recently as the end of March ZSP helped to host the 'Ideas and Action' Conference and other May Day events in Warsaw.

These events included a number of pickets of temporary work agencies, part of an information

meant to highlight the issue of casualistaion and to encourage workers to organise themselves and take action.

Ideas & Action

On April 28-29, the Ideas and Action conference took place in Warsaw.

Besides ZSP, people from the Anarchist Federation and Workers Initiative, among others from Poland, were present while there were also visitors mostly from the IWA, including comrades from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Serbia.

The main debates and discussions focused around ideas on non-hierarchical, radical anti-capitalist workplace struggle and on networking people interested in both promoting these practices and engaging in ongoing and new campaigns.

There were some interesting discussions based on personal experiences around the possibilities for organising internationally within multinational companies and reacting as a small organisation in workplaces dominated by larger unions.

More concretely, grounds were establised for cooperation between comrades from Slovakia and Poland in both the IT and the car industries.

Some joint campaigns were preliminarily discussed with people planning to meet up in the summer to take things further.

The centre of the car industry will soon be in an industrial triangle made up of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia and people discussed ways of agitating and organising in the industry.

Dancin' in the Streets: Anarchists, IWWs, Surrealists, Situationists and Provos in the 1960s
Edited by Franklin Rosemont & Charles Radcliffe
Charles H Kerr Publishing Co
Paperback - ISBN: 0882863010 - £12.00

This is an engaging anthology of writings from the Rebel Worker (Chicago) and Heatwave (London).

In an era of less-than-inspiring New Leftism, the collective dreamers behind these magazines were at the forefront of radical praxis.

Professing a deep connection with surrealism and the pleasure principle, these zines went further than the ascetic demands of the traditional left by advocating (and attempting to live) a total revolution of everyday life - because revolution cannot be a chore, it must be part of life lived joyfully and rebelliously.

These ideas are rooted in the wide-eyed, poetic and rebellious tradition of surrealism which preceded, and in a sense inspired, the Situationist International.

What the Rebel Worker and Heatwave contributed to this tradition was an effective integration of other diverse strains of radical thought; the political ideologies of anarchism and libertarian marxism, along with the radical unionism of the Industrial Workers of the World, were shown to have numerous fruitful intersections with surrealism.

What is most amazing is their reconciling of an anti-work perspective with membership in (and praise for) the IWW.

Such a seemingly ridiculous synthesis works because they emphasise the most liberatory aspects of the IWW, such as its longstanding connection to train hopping hobos and the rural unemployed (people just as wildly rebellious towards all social norms and impositions as anyone Crimethinc. writes about) and its support for wildcat strikes.

It is in relation to their IWW organizing that the Rebel Worker group was able to define themselves as 'workers against work'. Among the most interesting pieces are the introductions by Rosemont and Radcliffe, who were involved with the Rebel Worker and Heatwave, respectively.

Their separate introductions put the anthology in historical perspective. Rosemont begins with his days as a young high school dropout turned card-carrying wobbly.

He writes of his involvement in a free speech fight at Roosevelt University supported by high-profile radicals such as Paul Goodman; he reflects fondly of traveling to France with his partner Penelope and meeting surrealist Andre Breton and Guy Debord of the Situationist International; he recalls helping organize striking Michigan farm workers and rejuvenating a dying wobbly tradition; he tells of his role at the Solidarity Bookshop, a radical bookstore at the heart of the anti-capitalist milieu of 60s Chicago; he ends with the proud proclamation that after 'the passage of many years not one of the characters in The Rebel Worker Story has defected to the side of Capital and the State'.

Radcliffe's story of Heatwave, the sister journal of the Rebel Worker, is of great interest as well. Heatwave grew out of the anti-nuclear, anarcho-pacifism of British radical circles in the early 60s. Radcliffe and Diana Shelley, his partner and comrade, were involved with the anti-nuclear protests of the Committee of 100.

Radcliffe, Shelley and Paul Garon were inspired to begin work on Heatwave after meeting the Rosemonts, and after Radcliffe and Rosemont edited an issue of Rebel Worker that was sold in Hyde Park on May Day 1966.

From the beginning, Heatwave was closely linked to other radical groups such as London Solidarity and Freedom Press. Radcliffe himself holds the distinction of being the only member of the Situationist International to quit in disgust (as opposed to being expelled in dismay).

Just like the Rebel Worker, Heatwave's link to diverse radical groups gave the journal surprisingly deep critiques and analyses for a small mimeographed zine produced by young twenty-something-year-olds.

The content of these journals ranged from madly revolutionary poetry to dense yet readable marxist theory; from wide-eyed utopian short stories to anarchist critiques of bureaucracy, capitalism, and the state; they featured provocative surrealist artwork and some of the earliest pieces from the Situationists to appear in the U.S.

A common interest present in all of the issues is music, especially as it pertains to radical countercultures (blues is held in especially high regard).

One issue even included a science fiction story written by a little kid. This motley assortment is a little bewildering, but makes for quite a remarkable read.

The cult of celebrity and the poverty of everyday life

Margaret Thatcher, former Tory Prime Minister, once famously remarked that there is no longer such thing as society, only individuals.

Whilst traditional radical beliefs focus on the fact that most are oppressed economically by class, contemporary society transcends this material poverty with more complex forms of social alienation.

Modern capitalism has effectively overseen the destruction of natural community and systems of social interaction by a number of means.

One of the ways it has done this is through the mass media and its cult of celebrity. Now before we get too abstract and sociological, let's look at the practicalities of this.

"We live in a spectacular society. That is our whole life is surrounded by an immense accumulation of spectacles. Things which were once directly lived are now lived by proxy.

"Once an experience is taken out of the real world into the spectacular world it becomes a commodity. As a commodity the spectacular is developed to the detriment of the real. It becomes the substitute for the experience". (*Spectacular Times Images and Everyday Life*)

The mass media bombards us with a myriad of 'reality' TV shows, soap operas, Hollywood movies, tabloid newspapers, sport channels, music videos, celebrity gossip mags, advertisements, computer games and so on.

These provide a range of idealised images for us to aspire to, roles to play and virtual worlds to escape into.

Advertising specifically, cons us into thinking that by buying certain commodities or brand labels we can emulate the glamorous celebrities endorsing products or, alternatively, buy into the exiting lifestyles they depict.

Recent adverts for 4 X 4 cars present exciting images of off-road escapades into the world of desert, safari and swamp. The reality, however, is far removed from the façade presented to us.

Most 4 X 4 vehicles never go off road (with the middle classes clogging up the roads on the school run, churning out huge quantities of CO2 as they go).

The millionaire celebrity faces of designer labels belie a world of cheap sweatshop labour.

The impact of mass (airbrushed) images and size zero supermodels has correlated with unprecedented numbers suffering from eating disorders.

On the other hand, if we are feeling particularly crap about ourselves, we can buy a magazine, showing our erstwhile faultless celebrity role models looking less than glamorous; falling out of taxis inebriated at 3am (minus underwear), walking round the supermarket in their 'scruffs' without make-up (spots-and-all), lounging on the beach with paunches and cellulite ringed for all to see.

Well, maybe they are human after all!!

If that's not enough, the beleaguered celebs and their lives are further embedded in our collective consciousness by ongoing tabloid exposés of illicit affairs, past indiscretions, fall-outs and other scandals. The poor darlings.

On a more serious note, these all-pervasive media spectacles fulfil a number of functions designed to keep the fabric of a society based on exploitation and hierarchy very much

intact.

First, they are intended to make us feel inadequate and sell us products which we don't need and (judging by recent statistics on debt levels) can't afford.

Second, they serve as a cheap diversion to hide the truth of what's really going on (poverty, environmental destruction, war) and the causes (capitalism and transnational corporations).

Third, they serve to disempower us and feed us false hope that we too might one day win the Lotto, Fame Academy or Big Brother and enter the coveted world of celebrity - thus they preserve and legitimise a world where only the rich, famous and the corporate media moguls matter or can put their views across.

Fourth, and more generally, far from being neutral or apolitical they reinforce negative stereotypes and normalise the power relationships and selfish materialism of capitalism as the natural order of things.

The overriding subliminal message is work hard, consume, know your place and shut up. (And for those aspiring wannabe entrepreneurs, programmes such as 'The Apprentice' provide the ultimate guide to climbing the slippery pole of cut-throat capitalism).

The trend of celebrity performers taking up social causes such as world poverty and more recently global warming with the resultant mass concerts (Live 8, Live Earth etc.) serves to further reinforce our passivity as spectators of these events.

Charity and single-issue campaigns may, at best, alleviate some of the worst excesses of capitalism and raise some limited awareness.

But by viewing these issues in isolation, they fail to question or attack the systems or structures which cause them.

Live 8's call to 'drop the debt' and grandiose exhortations to change the world sucked in many well-intentioned individuals, but never sought to challenge global capitalism.

In fact, the whole approach of such campaigns invariably involves appealing to the very politicians responsible for creating these problems in the first place.

The obvious link and contradictions between the huge fortunes amassed by the megastars and the starving poor is patently obvious to anyone with an ounce of common sense.

Participation in such events and the positive publicity this brings is naturally good for their credibility, with increased merchandise and CD sales an obvious motivation.

In this carefully orchestrated charade, we are just required to turn up, sing along, cheer at the right time, and buy the wristband, DVD and T-shirt.

Then we can go home with our consciences well and truly salved, safe in the knowledge that our leaders cannot but fail to have been moved into taking robust action.

Meanwhile, in the real world, the poor still starve and the planet still smoulders.

Rejecting the cult of celebrity, confronting the banal rubbish which passes as entertainment and creating our own alternatives to these is a necessary part of the process of transforming social relationships.

For even those who escape physical poverty cannot escape the present emotional poverty of everyday life.

The sooner the politicians, bosses, and their pathetic media spectacles are consigned to the dustbin of history, the better.

Solfed/IWA internal contacts

National contact point:
PO Box 29, South West PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW; 07984675281; solfed@solfed.org.uk; www.solfed.org.uk

| locals

Solidarity Bristol: c/o SF contact point (above); solidaritybristol@solfed.org.uk
Bolton: c/o Manchester SolFed
Brighton SolFed: c/o SF National contact point
Coventry & West Midlands: c/o Northampton SolFed
Edinburgh SolFed: c/o 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh, EH7 5HA; 078 96 62 13 13; edinburghsf@solfed.org.uk
Ipswich: c/o N&E London SolFed
Lancaster: c/o Preston SolFed
Manchester SolFed: PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW; 079 84 67 52 81; manchestersf@solfed.org.uk; www.manchestersf.org.uk; mail list: manchestersf@lists.riseup.net
Merseyside: c/o Manchester SolFed
Northampton SolFed: c/o The Blackcurrent Centre, 24 St Michael Avenue, Northampton, NN1 4JQ; northamptonsf@solfed.org.uk
N & E London SolFed: PO Box 1681, London, N8 7LE; nelsf@solfed.org.uk
Preston SolFed: PO Box 469, Preston, PR1 8XF; 077 07 25 66 82; prestonsf@solfed.org.uk; prestonsolfed.mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk
Scarborough: c/o West Yorkshire SolFed
Sheffield: c/o West Yorkshire SolFed
South Herts SolFed:PO Box 493, St Albans, AL1 5TW
South London SolFed:PO Box 17773, London, SE8 4WX; southlondonsf@solfed.org.uk
South West Solidarity: c/o SF contact point (above); sws@solfed.org.uk
West Yorkshire SolFed: PO Box 75, Hebden Bridge, HX7 8WB; wysf@activistnetwork.org.uk

| other

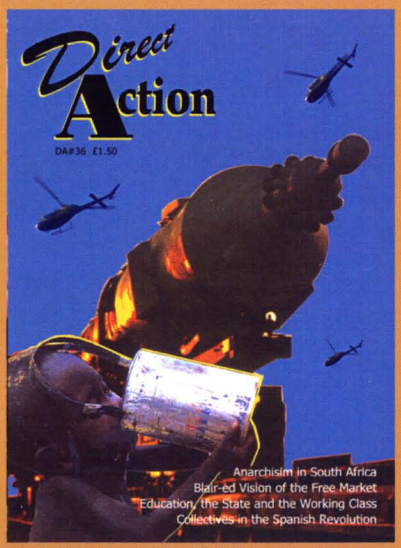
Catalyst (freesheet): c/o Preston SolFed, PO Box 469, Preston, PR1 8XF; 077 07 25 66 82; catalyst@solfed.org.uk
Catalyst: issue 17: out August 2007
Education Workers Network: c/o News From Nowhere, 96 Bold St, Liverpool, L1 4HY; ewn@ewn.org.uk; www.ewn.org.uk; email list: ewn@lists.riseup.net
SelfEd Collective: c/o Preston; selfed@selfed.org.uk; www.selfed.org.uk
'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 Hare and Hounds, Shude Hill, Manchester city centre – July 3rd, Anarchism & Socialism; August, no meeting; September 4th, title to be confirmed
'Education Worker 2007 issue 1' and **'Building a Revolutionary Union for Education Workers – an Introduction to the Education Workers Network':** contact above address to have it delivered

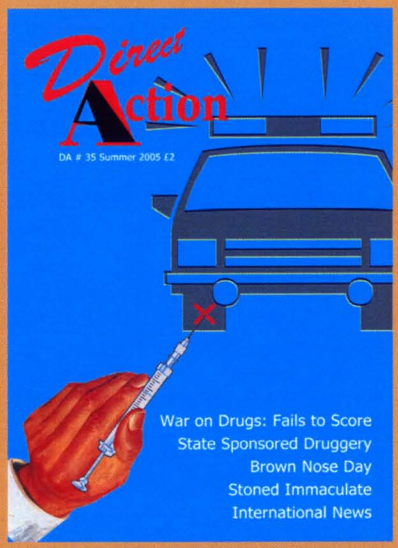
Friends & neighbours: contact us to get listed

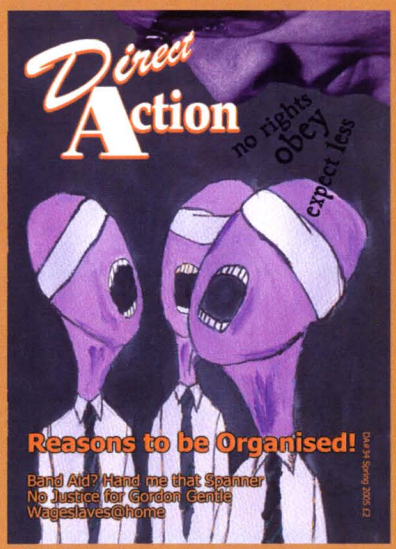
56a Infoshop
Bookshop, records, library, archive, social/meeting space; 56a Crampton St, London, SE17 3AE; open Thur 2-8, Fri 3-7, Sat 2-6.
AK Press
Anarcho books and merchandise of every description; PO Box 12766, Edinburgh, EH8 9YE; 0131 555 265; ak@akedin.demon.co.uk; www.akuk.com
Freedom
Anarchist fortnightly; 84b Whitechapel High St, London, E1 7QX; www.freedompress.org.uk
www.libcom.org
Online libertarian community and organising resource for activists in Britain
Organise!
Working Class Resistance freesheet/info; PO Box 505, Belfast, BT12 6BQ
Resistance
Anarchist Federation freesheet; c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London, E1 7QX; www.afed.org.uk
Stuff your Boss
Anti-casualisation campaign in NW England; stuffyourboss@lists.riseup.net; SYB, c/o PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW
ToxCat
Exposing polluters, pollution and cover-ups; £2 from PO Box 29, Ellesmere Port, CH66 3TX
Kate Sharpley Library
full catalogue: BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX; www.katesharpleylibrary.net
Radical Healthcare Workers:
http://radicalhealthcareworkers.wordpress.com/

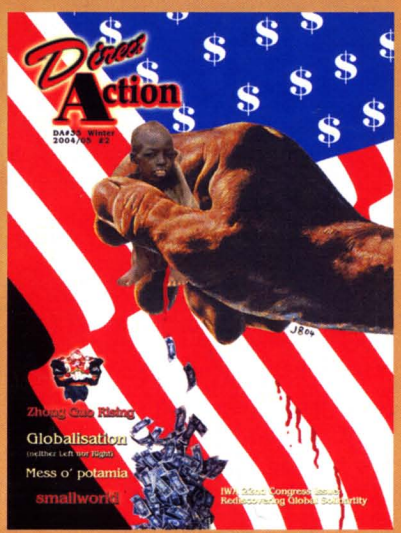
Subscribe

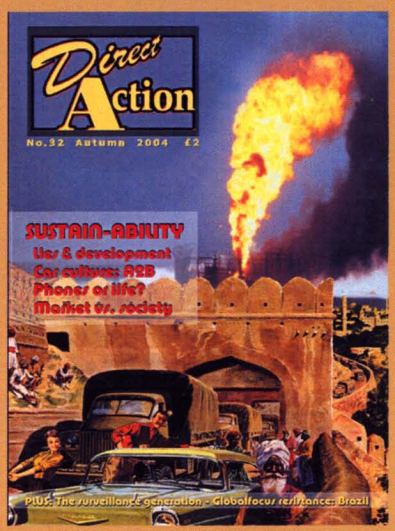
www.direct-action.org.uk ISSN 0261-8752











SF

Subscribe to Direct Action

- ❍ supporting subscriber (SO form/enclose £10)
- ❍ basic sub (enclose £5)
- ❍ rush me free information about DA and SolFed
- ❍ overseas - £10 Europe, £15 rest of the world

Name.....

Address.....

.....

.....

Standing Order Form

to .....Bank,

.....Branch

Address of Bank:

.....

.....

.....

Please Debit my/our account no.

.....,

Sort code no .....-.....-.....

Please pay Solidarity Federation – Direct Action, account no.: 98963732; NatWest, Leeds City, 8 Park Row, Leeds LS1 1QS; Sort code 60-60-05.

First payment of £..... to be made on ...../...../200... and subsequent payments of £..... on the same day of each month until further notice.

Name.....

Signed.....

cheques payable to 'Direct Action' – return form to: DA, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW