

Direct Action

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Magazine of Solidarity Federation

WE ARE WORKERS...



NOT CRIMINALS

Strikes, Class, Housing, Food, Anti-G8, Immigration.

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If you would like to help out or contribute articles or photos, work is entirely voluntary.

We welcome articles of between 250 and 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).

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Aims of the Solidarity Federation

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

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

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

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

Capitalism is Chaos

New Labour Gets on with the Job... of Shafting the Working Class

Despite years of worldwide economic growth we are further than ever from ending global poverty, starvation and inequality. Now, with capitalism's latest crisis, such problems are set to worsen with catastrophic results.

Warnings of famine in Ethiopia and elsewhere, food riots at various points around the globe, rapidly spiraling prices in 'emerging markets' like India and China, and fears of stagflation and mass unemployment throughout Europe all paint a depressing picture.

But not depressing for some...

The super-rich are insulated from the ravages of any recession and will continue to accumulate wealth because of it. Indeed these leeches have already made a killing from the unstable mountain of consumer debt that helped push the US housing market into crisis bringing about the present turmoil. Recessions, with their takeovers and mergers, their closures and redundancies, ultimately reinforce the positions of the capitalist elite.

And even now they continue to take money from our pockets. A good chunk

of the rapid rises in food and fuel prices are directly due to speculation on world markets. The usual supply and demand factors which have been put forward, like growth in India and China, increased production of biofuels, rising cost of oil and gas extraction and so on, undoubtedly contribute. But, in the case of oil, these should amount to crude prices in the area of \$35-40 a barrel. The remainder of the recent records of \$140+ is purely down to speculation. So the whole crisis, with its crippling debt, financial insecurity and plummeting living standards, is completely manufactured by the inherent

sion of rising living standards fuelled by seeming-



ly endless consumer credit, there are no prizes for guessing who New Labour wants to bear the brunt. Their recipe for economic management comes down once more to ensuring, whatever the cost, that the capitalist elite does not

suffer. So we get the farce of Brown lecturing us to 'waste not, want not' before sitting down to gorge himself on an 18-course banquet at the G8 summit in July. Out of touch or what...?

Even though working class pockets have already been disproportionately hit by the

effects of the credit crunch and speculator driven price rises, New Labour, cheered on by Tories, Lib Dems and capitalist media, want to turn

the heat up even more. Brown and Darling have

decreed that public sector pay settlements are to be held below 2%, with the private sector encouraged to follow suit.

This comes

at a time when even the official, doctored inflation figure, which bears no resemblance to the reality of everyday spending, is heading toward 4%. Other measures suggest that the true rate of cost of living rises is more like 9 or 10% when tax rises and household bills are factored into the equation, and for basic food stuffs 20% is much closer to the mark. Now, anyone can prove anything with statistics, but whatever way you look at it, the working class is expected to swallow real cuts in pay to shore up the super rich capitalist elite.

What this all goes to show is that the bottom line for capitalism is to make the rich richer. And in times of economic turmoil the role of the state, government and political parties is to ensure the distribution of wealth accordingly...

...But only if we let them, that is...



Oil tanker drivers drove through the government's pay ceiling due to effective organisation

chaos of capitalism itself. Not that Brown and co. will admit any of that.

Having strung us along for a decade with an illu-



Ruling on Religious Discrimination

Dear **DA**

In May this year an Employment Tribunal found in favour of a former employee of a Christian charity who was claiming constructive dismissal and discrimination on grounds of religion or belief.

Prospects, a Christian charity working with people with learning difficulties, had started recruiting only practicing Christians for all posts and told existing non-Christian staff they were not eligible for promotion. The tribunal found that this was illegal. While religious organisations are allowed to discriminate

in certain circumstances, by another of New Labour's mad laws, blanket discrimination is not allowed.

This ruling means there is now a legal case against any form of discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, including those who are atheist or agnostic.

This ruling is also a welcome setback for the government's plans to undermine public services by handing many of them to religious bodies, though sadly is unlikely to stop it.

Martin H,
South London

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www.stuffit.org/abookfair

Moving Forward on Climate

Dear **DA**,

These recent newspaper headlines tell the story:

Billions wasted on UN climate programme;

European Union's efforts to tackle climate change a failure;

UN effort to curtail emissions in turmoil;

Truth about Kyoto: huge profits, little carbon saved.

The world's dominant approach to dealing with the climate crisis – carbon trading, the centre-piece of the Kyoto Protocol and the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme – isn't working.

Yet, as if sleepwalking, international agencies and government authorities around the world continue to squander millions of taxpayer dollars trying to build or repair carbon markets.

As country after country undertakes its own complicated efforts to partition the world's carbon cycling capacity into saleable commodities, and entrepreneurs flood news media with unverifiable claims that they

are increasing that capacity, fossil-fuelled industries are getting a new lease on life.

As speculators seek quick profits in a fast-growing 'wild west' marketplace, the need to find reliable ways to promote the structural change that would allow fossil fuels to be kept in the ground is being ignored or forgotten.

Why is this happening? What lies behind the belief that carbon markets can somehow be 'fixed' or 'regulated'? What can be done to move climate politics onto a saner path?

The Corner House has recently posted nearly a dozen new items on its website that shed light on these and related questions. We hope you find them useful and informative.

Best wishes from all at
The Corner House

For a full listing of climate-related documents, go to:

www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/subject/climate.

Back issues of *Direct Action* are still available:

1 to 2 issues £1 each; 3 to 5 issues 90p each;
6 to 9 issues 75p each; 10 or more issues 60p each
incl. postage - cheques etc., pay 'Direct Action'

Want to comment on anything you've read in DA?

Want to bring anything to DA readers' attention?

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We aim to keep **Direct Action**
at £1.50, to keep the basic
subscription at £5.00 and wish
to thank our donors and supporters for helping to make the magazine good value for money

Demand for Yarl's Wood Investigation

Dear DA,

In a letter received in June, five pregnant women from Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre describe systematic neglect and an institutionalised failure to provide the vital resources and healthcare which expectant mothers are entitled to, and which SERCO, the multinational running Yarl's Wood, have a duty to provide. At least five other women have suffered similar appalling treatment:

– All were denied urgent antenatal healthcare and their supplementary dietary needs.

– On 21 June, four of the women went to the healthcare centre in Yarl's Wood because they were suffering vaginal bleeding. Despite their symptoms, none were examined or given treatment. They were told to return to their rooms. One woman, who continued to bleed, had to be taken to hospital later that evening. She had a miscarriage and her premature baby was stillborn. Two other women subsequently collapsed. The authorities tried to deport one woman despite the fact that she was still in pain and clearly unfit to travel.

The women demand an *“urgent investigation by an independent body about sinister situations that are happening to avoid future unexplained miscarriages and inhuman treatment.”*

When we urgently tried to contact women we could not get through on the phone. This is scandalously not unusual despite SERCO's claims that communication is extremely impor-

tant to the “residents” under their “care”. Every week we are told women *“are not coming to the phone or answering their pagers”*. We eventually reached women on their mobiles and they confirmed that three of them do not have pagers, and that *“you can't hear the tannoy system if you are in your room”*.

Communication with people outside is made more difficult by the cost of phone calls – £5 for phone cards which last three minutes and mobiles which have poor reception.

Many women in Yarl's Wood are vulnerable and need urgent help with their legal cases and access to other support. It is completely unaccept-

able that SERCO and others are profiteering by overcharging for phone services. Some may be facing removal and because solicitors and specialist organisations such as ourselves are unable to speak to them and provide essential information about their rights, they may be removed without being able to get this help.

Black Women's Rape Action Project

Further details, contact:

Black Women's Rape Action Project
bwrap@dircon.co.uk

Legal Action for Women
law@crossroadswomen.net

020 7482 2496 or 07980 659 831

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Public Sector Strikes Coming

It's not often these days that education workers strike together across sectors, and it is a sign of the growing militancy in the classroom and lecture theatre that we saw one of the biggest turnouts in recent memory earlier this year on 24th April. Moreover, the strike was joined by other public service workers in local government and even the coastguard. In fact, it is over twenty years since teachers took to the picket lines like this in their hundreds of thousands, leading to the closure of many schools up and down the country, and resulting in rallies in 50 towns and cities in England and Wales. Even the French would have been impressed.

The action was condemned by all the major parties in an act of unanimity that speaks volumes about their attitudes towards education workers and the public service in general. The unions were protesting about the failure of the government to cede any pay offer over 2% and their outright rejection of the (NUT) National Union of Teacher's demand for a 4.1% pay rise.

extra hours and stress

A teacher's starting salary in England and Wales is £20,000 a year, that's £10,000 below the national average wage, and ignores the multitude of extra-school hours that teachers have to put into marking and preparation time alone. On top of this there are the stress levels that education workers have to put up with, which are among the highest in

the public sector, and the woefully inept support mechanisms that exist. The response of Brown and every other political party has been not only to reject the demands of the teachers and other public service workers, but to withdraw in many cases from collective bargaining altogether, circle the wagons and, as has just

years). The main teaching union there, the EIS (Educational Institute of Scotland) is traditionally conservative and yet accepted a 2001 deal linked to a larger funding package for teachers that delivered 21.5% over three years with 10% in the first year (2001-02). This time the union leaders clearly got out in front of the



recently been announced, give themselves a pay rise to the £100,000 average they say that MPs deserve. Meanwhile, a report commissioned last week in May by the state broadcaster, the BBC, said conservative estimates of fuel, food and utility bill rises meant that the average household is already paying an extra £2,000 a year.

The picture is slightly different in Scotland where a deal was struck in December 2007 and came in this April whereby the 2.25% offer will deliver 7% over three years (interestingly nurses, midwives and other health workers have recently refused 8% over three

rank and file, who they praised for being 'pragmatic', and embraced a deal that is worth less now than this time last year, and by 2010 will most likely be worth even less again.

Brown's government and, of course, the other parties (and the politicians in Scotland and Wales, not to mention Northern Ireland) are all on the same page with regard to ensuring that public service workers in general get nothing above the rate of inflation, with the government's massaged figure currently above 3% (and the true figure being in excess of 4%). Most economists are in agreement, however, that

your Way

this is likely to rise further in the course of the next year. The naked speculation that has led to rocketing utilities bills and struck the working class with fuel poverty on a scale never seen before in the history of the state was caused by the same bastards gambling with our money that now tell us we have to tighten our belts for the hard times they created out of rampant profiteering.

collective action

The response of education workers will be resistance, and the European-wide campaign by governments to scythe down the public service can only be met with any efficacy through cross-sectoral collective action. Teachers have led the way, nurses and midwives are coming to a street near you this summer, and workers in higher education and local government are also likely to strike in the near future.

Solidarity Federation Sf

Sf **Industrial Strategy**

Solidarity Federation's ultimate aim is a self-managed, stateless society based on the principle of "from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs". It is a society where we are no longer just used as a means to an end by bosses wanting to make money from our labour.

for free copies or bundles contact:

Solidarity Federation, PO Box 29,
South West D.O., Manchester,
M15 5HW;

07 984 675 281;

solfed@solfed.org.uk

Unison Witch Hunt

At last year's Unison National Conference, one third of motions were ruled out of order. Four Unison branches – Bromley, Greenwich, Hackney and Housing Associations – all with officers who are members of the Socialist Party, put out a leaflet at the 2007

Unison local government conference challenging the stitching up of the agenda. They pointed out that the motions ruled out of order

included those on industrial action, the election of union officials and Labour's attacks on public services. The Socialist Party is particularly concerned with debating the political fund, as union funding is crucial to their political project of a new "workers' party".

The leaflet made use of the Buddhist "Hear No Evil, See No Evil, Speak No Evil" monkeys. The Unison leadership's response was to start disciplinary proceedings against four officers of the branches involved, on the grounds that using the three monkeys graphic was racist.

There were 3 days of hearings at the Hilton Hotel in London in May for Glenn Kelly, Bromley Branch Secretary and the first to face a hearing. It was then adjourned till after Unison's conference. The panel now also accepts that there was no racist intent, but are continuing with the process because the leaflet "questioned the decisions of the

standing orders committee". So much for union democracy!

The "Defend the Four" Campaign has made it quite clear they intend to fight these ridiculous charges and have support way beyond the Socialist Party.



While we in Solidarity Federation do not support the formation of a new "workers party", or the use of political funds to support parties, the crucial issue here is one of democracy – and on that the Four are right. The Unison leadership are so entwined with the Labour Party that they are prepared to trample any internal democracy in the union just to keep this contentious relationship out of the spotlight. As one Greenwich member observed, "it's the union trying to get rid of a left-wing troublemaker, but they've realised there's enough support for Kaz [Onay Kasab, one of the 5] that they can't get away with it".

Unison members, especially in local government, have suffered from Labour's love affair with the market – the last thing we should do is reward them for it!

More info at:
www.stopthewitchhunt.org.uk/

Pensions under Attack

With many private sector pension schemes already wound up or severely restricted, those in the public sector are increasingly under attack. Despite local government workers coming out in defence of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) on so-called 'Red Tuesday' in March last year, the government brought in changes to the scheme in April this year. The following is a look back at this campaign and some of its implications.



Unison hailed the campaign as having "paid dividends". More than a million public sector workers came out on strike to defend the 85 Year Rule, which allowed LGPS members with 25 years of pension scheme membership to retire at 60 without any reduction in pension.

Initially Unison appeared strong on this but ultimately agreed to a pensions deal abolishing the 85 Year Rule after April 2020, effectively forcing the rest of us to work on until we are at least 65.

Unison members were urged to vote "yes" to the new LGPS scheme by their union, which announced a 97.1% vote in favour of acceptance. However, the consultative ballot saw less than one fifth of the 1 million public sector members cast votes – and there is also evidence that many eligible Unison members received no ballot papers at all.

But this is not surprising in a union where, for example, a tiny handful of un-mandated stewards constitutes a Regional Higher Education Service Group which expresses the supposed views of members, without bothering to meet or ballot them beforehand.

The lack of involvement of the membership, the focus on parliamentary rather than industrial action and of course the endorsement of the new package by Unison officials, effectively quashed the combative spirit of the strikers.

The union also allowed its position to be undermined by inaccurate media coverage of allegedly over-generous public sector pension schemes, and the existence of new EU age discrimination legislation. The capitalist media reflects capitalist interests and is antagonistic to the unions and working class generally. We should not allow ourselves to be deflected from defending our own interests by the voice of capitalist self interest.

And any legislation which forces us to work until at least 65 in the name of *preventing age discrimination* is perverse and ridiculous and should be made unworkable.

Pensions are deferred wages. As such any reduction in pension

conditions like the scrapping of the 85 Year Rule is equivalent to a wage cut.

Despite making a show of opposition to government attacks, union bosses generally collaborate with the government to impose reforms (albeit with some minor changes, such as delaying the abolition of the 85 Year Rule from 2016 to 2020). Because they affect us at the end of our working lives, attacks on our pensions are not merely attacks on workers, they are attacks on the whole working class. Instead of selling us holidays and insurance, a union worthy of the name would fight tooth and nail to resist any such attack.



And it is this lesson that we need to begin putting into practice. That is, spreading the kind of effective workplace organising that can resist union officials conniving with the government and can begin to take direct control of our own struggles.

One thing is for sure; as holes continue to open up in public finances governments will continue to cast around desperately for areas of spending to cut.

Reclaim Higher Education

Higher Education faces significant changes in the coming years as universities move to a market based model. Tuition and top-up fees are perhaps the more visible signs of this but many institutions are now seeing changes which, among other things, significantly affect education workers' terms and conditions. Union responses so far have seen conferences like NUS's (National Union of Students) 'Reclaim the Campus' and UCU's (University and College Union) 'Challenging the Market in Education'.

Meanwhile, the more action-minded have been far from quiet. The Universities of Sussex and Manchester, for example, have both seen occupations, demonstrations and demands to end this commercialisation

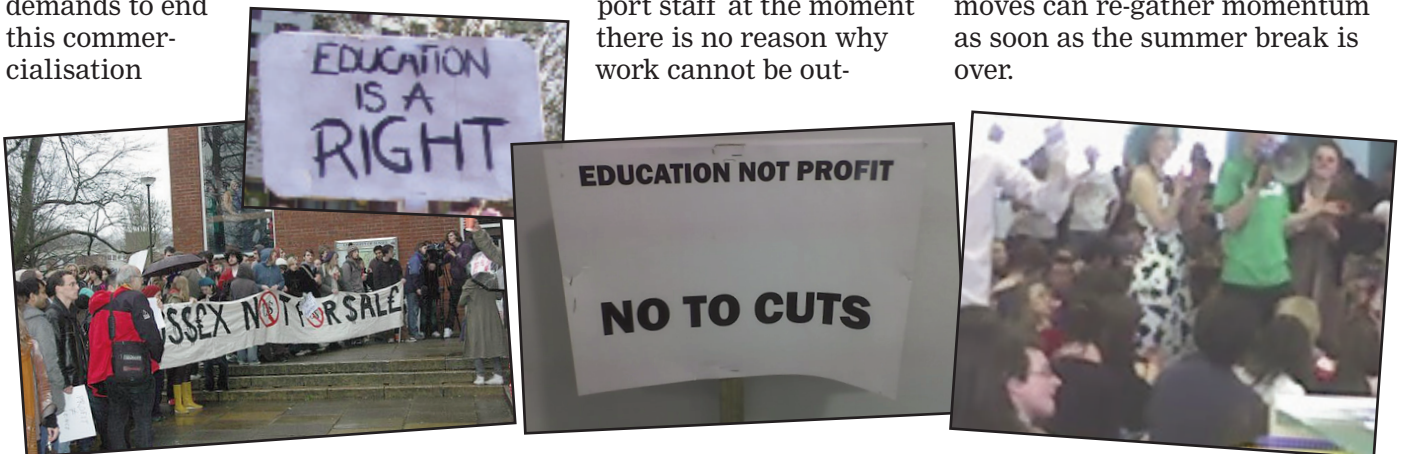
process. In both cases, while the impetus for action has come from student activists, university workers have also been involved. In Sussex, the 'Sussex not 4 Sale' campaign organised the largest rally in Brighton for 20 years.

In Manchester members of the SF's Education Workers' Network have been involved in the 'Reclaim the Uni' campaign which organised a march and occupation and put together a list of demands, several of which related to staff issues.

Meanwhile, commercialisation continues apace at Manchester. The introduction of an internal market is bringing about a situation where each building has devolved decision making. Though they use university support staff at the moment there is no reason why work cannot be out-

sourced and, in the case of one new building complex, private night time security staff are to be used. Also the no compulsory redundancy agreement runs out later this year. Although there has already been upwards of 800 voluntary redundancies, with the university still massively in debt because of its dash for 'world class university' status and with an expected squeeze on public spending there are growing concerns that compulsory redundancies are a distinct possibility.

While it has been encouraging to see university staff and students beginning to come together to oppose the current neoliberal climate in universities, it is going to require much more of the same to reverse the flow of change. It is to be hoped that these positive moves can re-gather momentum as soon as the summer break is over.



coming soon...

***Education Worker* issue 3;**
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***Antidote* issue 1 (bulletin of SF's
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No such thing as class?



After winning the 1959 election Harold Macmillan, a Tory Prime Minister, announced that "the class war is over" – and promptly formed a cabinet boasting four lords. Forty years later, Tony Blair, Labour Prime Minister, declared that "we are all middle class now" and politicians, academics and social commentators continue to tell us there is no longer such a thing as class in modern Britain. Notions of belonging to the working class are, we are told, outdated and belong to era of flat caps, factories, steel works and going down the pit. However, no matter how many times we are told this we seem determined not to believe it. In a Guardian/ICM poll in October 2007 most British people still feel bound by class; with a massive majority – 89 per cent – of those surveyed feeling their social standing determines the way they are judged by the rest of society.

Isn't it laughable how the chief beneficiaries of our divided nation devote such boundless amounts of time and energy in trying to convince us that we live in a classless society?

In **DA41**, we highlighted research demonstrating how the gap between the rich and poor is bigger now than it has been for 40 years; how most of Britain's ultra-rich pay no tax; and how top company executives are enjoying inflation-busting pay rises (while the rest of us are told to tighten our belts).

In the succinct words of Philip Beresford, compiler of the Sunday Times Rich List, "11 years of Labour Government have proved a boom for the super-rich, rarely

seen before in modern British history". But that isn't the half of it. The Government's own expert body, the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group, showed in March this year that 1 in 8 households can't afford to heat their homes, concluding that Brown and his cronies appear to have given up on targets to elim-



inate fuel poverty. In April, The Cass Business School revealed male life expectancy in Chelsea to be 8.2 years longer than in Glasgow, largely due to socio-economic factors. A further report by the Fawcett Society in May underlined the impact of gender, citing UK mothers as being at greater risk of poverty than their counterparts in other Western countries.

Research published as recently as May 2008, concluded that whilst taxes have risen in real terms by over 50% in the last 10 years, public services have been systematically slashed. (Funny, though, how the politicians can always find millions to bail out ailing banks and bankroll war when it suits.) So not only are we being taxed to the hilt, burdened with rising liv-

CLASSLESS SOCIETY? YOU'RE 'AVING A LARF!

ing costs, but also experiencing worsening public services, wages and working conditions.

Myth

With the myth of the 'classless' society well and truly outed, we can now expect the *Mail*, *Express* and *Telegraph* to fully focus their attentions on their other well-worn ploys – like blaming the victims for their own poverty, scape-goating minority groups or castigating workers for daring to ask for pay rises somewhere approximating inflation.

The truth of the matter of course, is the same old tale of the rich getting richer, and the poor getting poorer: a story which is as tired, predictable and age-old as capitalism itself.

Privileged background

We're told we live in a democracy and everyone is equal and has the same chance in life, yet somehow those who rule over us tend to be from a privileged background. A coincidence? Or could it be those of a higher social class have much greater educational, economic and socialisation advantages which they pass on to their children? They know how to play the system and have the background, money and influence to work the system to their advantage.

Now that Boris Johnson has been elected as Mayor of London it means that there are two men with remarkably similar histories at



the top of the Tory party: both he David Cameron and Old Etonians who went to Oxford and were members of the same exclusive all-male drinking club.

In truth the Conservatives are just reflecting modern Britain, a nation that is much less equal than a generation ago and getting less equal all the time.

Class politics in Crewe

In May's Crewe and Nantwich by-election the Labour Party attempted to crudely play the class politics card and the tactic

backfired, big time.

While social mobility in Britain is in decline and class divisions are not only still with us, but actually hardening, it was hardly surprising that the people of Crewe and Nantwich saw through the ploy. After all the Labour Party have, for the past decade or more, been denying class was still important or even existed at all.

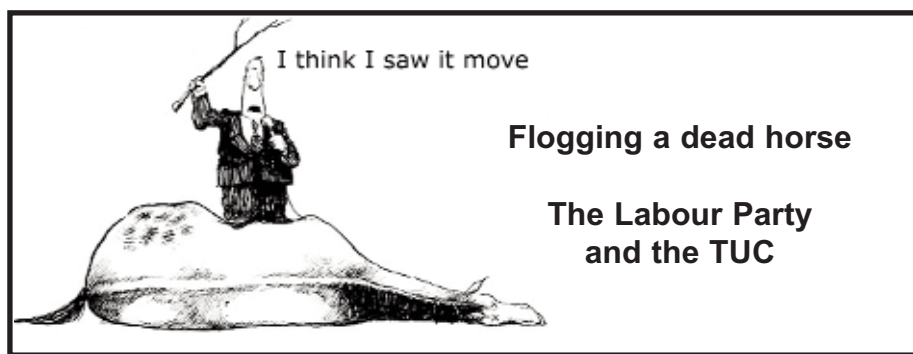
A Labour Party, in which the privately educated are over-represented among the higher echelons, has a bit of a credibility problem in trying to pull this sort of stuff off any more, it's just that little bit

too late to be playing the working class hero card especially when their candidate, Tamsin Dunwoody was the offspring of the former MP.

There have been some other surreal aspects to this. One is that a Labour Party member who dressed up as a “toff” to mock the Tories was in fact a former pupil of Manchester Grammar School, one of the top private schools in the north west of England. And of course Tamsin Dunwoody’s grandmother was in the House of Lords. These days, most mainstream party candidates are, one way or another, drawn exclusively from the privileged elite so for one side to make such a ludicrous claim is just plain stupid, yet somehow those in charge of Labour’s by-election efforts in Crewe and



Nantwich got young supporters into dressing up in top hat and tails. Such behaviour is just embarrassing; some New Labour idiot decided to patronise northern working class voters. Perhaps they should have gone the whole hog and got Dunwoody to pose wearing a shell suit while clutching a 24 pack of Royals instead, in a bid to move with the times. They did publicise her as a ‘single mum of five’ after all.



2m trapped in low-paid, insecure jobs

Two million workers are trapped in low-paid insecure jobs where abuse and mistreatment is the norm and where employment practices seen as exploitative in the 19th century are still common today.

Although many poor families may now have an earner it has not got them out of poverty and the number of poor children living in working households is 1.4 million – exactly the same figure as it was in 1997. The number of poor working households with children has actually increased by 200,000. Labour promised it would “make work pay”. It hasn’t.

Low pay is not just a problem of an extreme underclass or of migrants; it is widespread across the country. One in seven of all working households are poor; one fifth of all workers, 5.3 million people, are paid less than £6.67 an hour the worst low-pay rate anywhere in Europe. In some regions, the proportion of low-paid is well over 25%, while in some of the poorest areas it is well over 40%.

Here regulations about the minimum wage, holiday pay and employment rights are rarely seen; the chance of an employer being inspected on the minimum wage is once every 330 years. Given such odds employers take the risk.

Labour has made much of bringing in the minimum wage and the working time directive but the reality is that there is little progress in tackling Britain’s chronic problem with low-paid, insecure work. Increases in the minimum wage are not keeping pace with average earnings, and it is set at a considerably lower rate than in other countries.

Tony Blair boasted that Britain was the “most lightly regulated labour market in the world”. Now Britain is second only to the US for the lowest levels of employment protection in the developed world.

Shock news - TUC toothless!

So what does the TUC do about this? Try to organise within these most exploited sections of the workforce to give them some muscle for the fight? Of course not. What they do is set up a Commission on Vulnerable Employment, which expressed “shock” at the number of vulnerable workers and the amount of poor treatment regarded as perfectly legal.

According to its website the 16 Commission members are drawn from “employer, academic, trade union and civil society backgrounds, bringing with them a wealth of different experiences and perspectives”. What this means is that it will be made acceptable, just another part of the government/employer/union consensus and ultimately have no teeth at all.

Hostel Residents Fight Back

Many hostels for the homeless are grim places, with the disadvantaged residents expected to put up with appalling conditions. Residents at Alexandra Court 'temporary' hostel in Hackney had a particularly grim lot to contend with, including cockroaches, bedbugs, mice and rats, used syringes, dirty corridors used by addicts and prostitutes. The heating and hot water was faulty, the main gate had no lock and there were flimsy ones on the individual rooms. The cost of this was up to £350 per week! The council and management promise change, but never deliver.

The block has 10 storeys and the lift is frequently out of order – this has led to children being late for school and threats from social services.

Residents contacted the London Coalition Against Poverty and organised a march from the hostel to Hackney Town Hall in April. They were tired of having changes promised but never delivered.

The march was a lively affair with around 50 residents and supporters marching. Some of the children dressed up as mice and residents spoke movingly at the Town Hall of the problems they faced.

After the march, the council agreed to meet the residents and have since installed a new gate and entry-phone system, repaired the heating system and pledged to keep the area clean. In turn residents have pledged to make sure they do and LCAP will be supporting them in this.

This has been the first significant collective action that LCAP has been involved in and it is good that it has been successful. For a short video clip of the campaign go to:

<http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=2cZS6ZVnWhI>

or via the 'films' link at:

www.lcap.org.uk

See **DA42** for more on LCAP and 'direct action casework'.

Academy Site Occupied

Since March 2007 the proposed site of Wembley Park City Academy in Brent, London has been occupied by local people opposed to the loss of a community amenity. Wembley Park Sports Ground has hosted a 'tent city' with up to 30 tents.



The campaign cites other reasons for their opposition:

- failure of academies to improve education despite the massive amounts of money thrown at them;
- broken promises by the ruling Liberal Democrats in Brent not to build on the site;
- the Academy would cost £30 million of public money yet would be privately run;
- the area already has 3 successful schools while other areas of the borough desperately need more school places;
- an Academy can choose its own curriculum and is not obliged to offer a broad, balanced education.

At the time of writing Brent Council has an eviction order granted in mid-July but not yet enforced. More details at: www.tentcityoccupation.co.uk

For more on academy schools see **DA40**



Gentrification, class and social policy: A Housing Timebomb?

With even the professional classes struggling to get onto the property ladder these days, future generations may never be able to afford to leave the family home at all. But rising house prices are no joke, with a record 45,000 repossessions predicted this year. Many more of us are now being priced out of the 'desirable' locations where we grew up by the second-home market, or finding our areas gentrified by a plague of parasitic property developers. The unfolding housing situation is a further indication of our polarised nation, with a complete dearth of affordable housing now becoming the norm.

A housing crisis has been predicted for some time, with future demand set to outstrip supply.

This has prompted a huge building programme, with even green belt areas becoming rapidly absorbed into the congested urban sprawl. Investment in building has concentrated (as might be expected) on the most profitable, *en vogue* corner of the market. Our city centres and urban dockland areas have borne witness to a huge upsurge in new-build, bland but expensive, 'yuppie prisons'. The process of gentrification that inevitably follows, completely alters the complexion and character of local areas, as pricey wine-bars, restaurants and delis move in to service the refined tastes of the new influx of residents. But often barely a stones-throw away from these plush developments, exist boarded-up ghettos bearing all the hallmarks of urban decay and social deprivation.

Areas like the Lake District, Snowdonia, London, Devon and Cornwall have seen properties bought up as second homes by the wealthy. This in turn has led to skyrocketing house prices. With the second-home market having doubled in the past 6 years, the UK now hosts some 206,000 such properties, worth a cool £40 billion. But this has inevitably priced local people out of their areas of origin, and turned communities into out-of-season ghost towns.

Due to fluctuations in the housing market, and with a predicted downturn in the economy, trends point to a growing number defaulting on rents and mortgages and, as a result, becoming homeless. At the same time, we are seeing an alarming nosedive in the availability of affordable housing,

secret millionaire

To make matters even worse, some of these areas have also been blighted with a particularly obnoxious breed of parasite, the 'secret millionaire'. These incognito entrepreneurs move in for a while and, before returning to the high-powered world of the boardroom, deliver a few crumbs of their huge fortunes to a handful of carefully-selected 'deserving' causes. These hugely generous, charitable acts are then captured meticulously on celluloid for our collective enjoyment, to show us what nice, down-to earth people the rich really are.

Propaganda to normalise a system which exalts competition, greed and selfish fortune-building whilst at the same time grossly devaluing those who altruistically sacrifice themselves for their local communities?

You decide!





Lambeth Flats or Highgate Mansion?

with much local authority housing stock being hived off under Private Finance Initiatives. PFIs are profit-driven and so have had a disastrous track record in the public sector. Even the National Audit Office concluded that claims of PFIs offering value for money are based on “errors, irrelevant or unrealistic analysis and pseudo-scientific mumbo jumbo”.

Suggestions that tenants of schemes will be contractually obliged to be actively seeking employment are also being widely muted by Government officials in a bid to seamlessly combine privatisation with social control.

The 2002 UK Homelessness Act does little to reassure those unfortunate enough to be faced with homelessness. It deems those households without dependent children as being not in priority need, and therefore not entitled to accommodation.

Whether we are crowded into sub-standard urban high-rise blocks or suburban overspill estates, our living environments are often starved of decent facilities and resources. Promoting healthy, strong communities seems to be beyond politicians and planners. Rather, meeting Government-led economic and commercial objectives has been of far more pressing importance.

At the other end of the social scale, we see the ultra-rich hiding

themselves away in sumptuous mansions with vast estates patrolled by security guards and protected by a multitude of high-tech security devices. That many of us spend large chunks of our lives ensnared in mortgages or paying exorbitant rents to banks and landlords respectively (hence their mansions and second homes), pays further testimony to our enslavement by capitalism. A decent home should be a right not a luxury, but under capitalism a home is just another commodity to be bought and sold to create profit.

So just how did this state of affairs come about?

From pre-feudal times onwards, lands which were commonly-owned have been stolen from the people by a combination of the church, royals, landed gentry and their henchmen. Laws gave landowners exclusive rights to use this land as they saw fit. Despite the best efforts of groups like the Diggers, Ranters and Levellers in the 17th Century to restore equity, this state of affairs persisted into the industrial era. Even today, these iniquitous property relations continue essentially along the same lines, even if the mechanisms of urbanisation have obscured this somewhat. Some aristocrats still own huge tracts of land from which they exact enormous incomes. Prince Charles’ Duchy of Cornwall is perhaps the best example. When the anarchist

Pierre Joseph Proudhon declared in 1840 that “All property is theft”, he affirmed a view which reverberates throughout the revolutionary movement to this day; a view which is shared by indigenous peoples and urban proletarians the world over in their fight against the misappropriation of their homes and land.

The Fightback Continues

Opposition to this theft manifests itself in squatting, rent strikes, housing cooperatives and other forms of mass direct action. In Brazil, the Landless Workers’ Movement have been actively expropriating lands stolen from them. When these forms of community resistance are combined with workplace-based militancy, maximum impact is realised. Forging links internationally, and recognising common interests, gives us a fighting chance of achieving our goals.

Faced with a burgeoning homeless problem, and overpriced or sub-standard housing, the future may indeed appear bleak. But solidarity can be our saving grace. Building a strong grass roots community of resistance – autonomous of political parties – is vital to us resisting these attacks, building confidence and eventually realising the long-term changes to society needed to overturn the endemic injustice and uncertainty of today. It’s our world, let’s take it back.

Food for Thought...

why rising food prices, starvation and obesity are all symptoms of the same global disease

Gandhi once described poverty as the worst form of violence, and judging by the statistics, we live in a very violent world. That such vast numbers go without food on a daily basis is not primarily the product of famine, drought and other natural disasters, but the direct result of 'free' trade, misguided policy making and market economics.

Inventories of world food resources verify that there is more than enough produced to feed everyone on the planet. There is also the technological know-how to ensure the safe and equitable distribution of the same. But still millions go hungry. Michael Albert, in 2004, cited the cause thus: "Starvation the world over has the same root cause; to feed the poor sufficiently is not as profitable as overfeeding the rich".

"Every day 34,000 children under five die of hunger or preventable diseases resulting from hunger"
(National Association for the Prevention of Starvation, 2003)

Much land in the less developed countries of the world is now given over to the production of

cash crops for export, essentially to service debts to rich countries and to line the coffers of crooked regimes and transnational corporations. The impact of years of colonisation has been to destroy previously diversified indigenous economies, and to transform them into highly-dependent satellites of the rich nations. Whole economies are now devoted to the cultivation of a small number of cash crops — produced ostensibly to create profits for the market, not to feed local people.

Free trade, as conceived and implemented by, among others, the G8, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organisation, has enabled patchy economic development, but greatly exacerbated poverty across the globe. Subsidies paid by western governments to their farmers have only worsened matters.

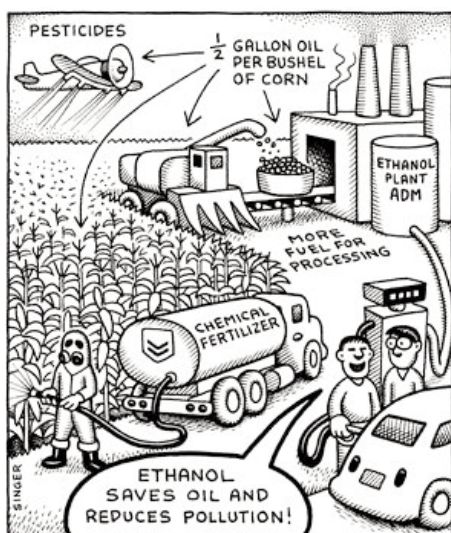
It has been well-documented elsewhere how patent laws have been used to preserve corporate profits, but denied millions access to life-saving HIV combination therapies. However, moves are also underway to afford corporations exclusive rights to staple foods such as basmati rice, further underlining their ownership and control of common resources. This is yet another example of global capitalism's 'privatise everything' mantra.

Of late, the foibles and fluctuations of the world market have forced food prices up, with devastating consequences. In spite of the fact that record amounts of grain are being harvested, demand has meant wheat prices have more than doubled in the last year. This demand has emanated from the growing Chinese and Indian middle classes' taste for meat. As people become more affluent, their demand for meat mops up grain supplies. Some 8lbs of cereals are required to produce 1lb of beef. Global meat consumption has increased fivefold in the past 50 years and is growing steadily.

"European and Western governments subsidise their farmers by \$350 million per year (more than 6 times what they spend on aid to poor countries). This allows western farmers to flood food cheaply into poor countries, depress prices and undermine local farming."
(Guardian Weekly, 2002)

This trend also has serious environmental consequences; cattle-ranching is the largest cause of deforestation in the Amazonian regions. The second biggest bene-

ficiary is soya production primarily for animal feed. Deforestation is responsible for 17% of human greenhouse gas emissions and animal agriculture for a further 14%. With fewer trees to absorb CO₂, and with methane trapping 21 times more heat than CO₂, human-induced global warming is predicted by climatologists to result in big crop reductions in the poorest equatorial regions.



The final issue in the perfect storm of combined factors giving rise to the world food crisis is the decision of the US and other states to pursue the cultivation of corn for biofuels, in theory to offset the dependence on fossil fuels. To date, 20 million acres in the US have been allocated for this purpose, taking up farmland which would otherwise have been used for other food crops. The consequence has been a dramatic reduction in cereal production, resulting in rising prices for soya, wheat and other crops.

The net result of global warming, meat consumption and biofuel production then is more hungry people. These factors severely compound poverty long-established by imperialism and free market economics. We would be hard-pressed to find a more compelling argument for capitalism's

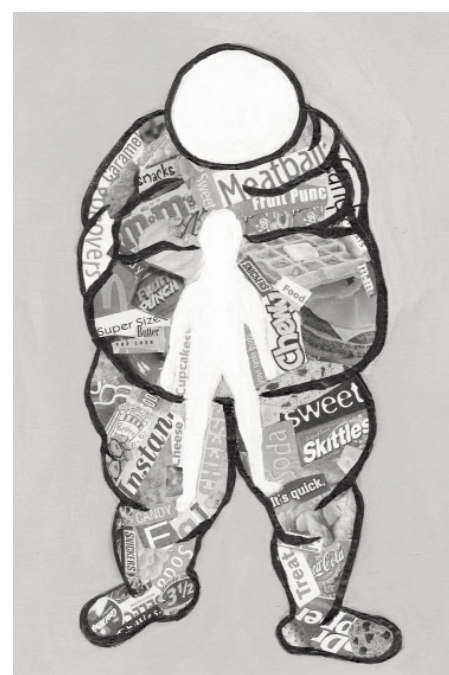
inhumanity. Or for that matter, a more conspicuous contrast between the haves and the have-nots. The calorific intake from an average El Salvadoran meal has fallen by half in less than 2 years and waves of food riots have been witnessed from Mauritania to Mexico.

In the rich world, on the other hand, fuelled by concerted junk food marketing, obesity, diabetes and heart disease have all reached epidemic levels. Foods which are laced with additives, pesticide residues, salt, sugar and fat populate the supermarket shelves. So even if you are lucky enough to eat on a regular basis, the quality of the food you are likely to be consuming leaves a great deal to be desired. Intensive farming – a routinely used and grossly inhumane method of rearing livestock – is designed to maximise profit yields, but has no place in a civilised society. Going organic and free range is an option, but a prohibitive one for anyone on a lower income (and let us not forget that the use of casual, low-paid labour is also commonplace in the food picking and packing industries).

“80% of the world’s hungry children live in countries with food surpluses”
(Worldwatch Institute, 2000)

In a sensible world, food would be produced and distributed from each according to ability, to each according to need. Starvation need not occur if resources, communication systems and technologies were used as they should be, for the benefit of all. We don’t want, or need, food which has been genetically or chemically modified or laden with salt, sugar and fat. The common denominators underlying all the problems described, and conspiring firmly against the world’s poor, are the global financial system, transnational corporations and the state apparatus which preserves them. It should be apparent that the only practical solution therefore, is their complete, overthrow.

Food for thought, indeed.



September 10th marks the 50th anniversary of the death of Rudolf Rocker, an occasion which prompted the Argentinian anarchist journal, *La Protesta*, to write: ‘With the passing of the old and dearly loved master the cycle of a brilliant generation of anarchist thinkers and militants is closed.’ Here we look at some of Rocker’s contributions to the working class movement

The Early Years

1873: Johan Rudolf Rocker is born March 25th in Mainz, Germany

early 1880s: put into an orphanage

1887: apprenticed as a bookbinder

late 1880s: under the influence of an uncle, becomes active in the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany / *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*)

1890: increasingly disillusioned with bureaucracy, intolerance and chauvinism within the SPD, becomes active in the youth wing, *die Jungen*

1891: attends the International Socialist Congress in Brussels, converting to anarchism due largely to the refusal by the Congress to denounce militarism; *die Jungen* expelled from the SPD

1891-2: involved in the smuggling of anarchist and other clandestine literature into Germany from Belgium and the Netherlands

1892: leaves for Paris, escaping conscription and police attention due to smuggling activities and increasing influence in the Mainz labour movement

1893: first encounters with Jewish anarchists, whose Yiddish language he takes as ‘a German dialect which I couldn’t follow’; also comes into contact with anarcho-syndicalist ideas via the CGT (General Confederation of Labour / *Confédération Générale du Travail*)

1895: leaves Paris for London due to a wave in anti-anarchist sentiment

The Workers’ Friend

Rudolf Rocker and the *Arbeter Fraint* Jewish anarchist group in the East End of London

The origins of the Yiddish speaking anarchist and labour movements working among the East European Jewish immigrants in London’s East End can be traced back the establishment of the area’s first Jewish Socialist grouping the mid 1870s. The lot of these immigrants was to escape from persecution in their homelands only to find themselves exploited in the sweatshop conditions of the capital’s textile industry.

It was against this background that *Der Arbeter Fraint* (The Worker’s Friend), the Yiddish language anarchist paper, started out in 1885, initially representing all strands of socialist opinion. The following year the paper began its association with the International Workers Educational Club in Berner Street and soon moved to weekly publication.

clerical sabotage

Der Arbeter Fraint was instrumental in the development of an independent Jewish labour movement which, due to the TUC’s support for immigration control, was somewhat of a necessity. However, its radical and anti-religious thrust alarmed the Anglo-Jewish clerical and lay leadership who, through bribery, managed to sabotage publication in May 1887. This prompted the Club to gather the funds for its own printing press allowing *Der Arbeter Fraint* to resume publication three months later.

The anarchists became the

largest and most active grouping around *Der Arbeter Fraint* during and following the international campaign for the five Chicago anarchists judicially murdered in November 1887 for the ‘Haymarket Affair’. By early 1891, anarchists and social democrats had gone their separate ways but, although *Der Arbeter Fraint* and the Club remained in anarchist hands, the funds were severely reduced. By the end of 1892 the Berner Street premises were abandoned, while *Der Arbeter Fraint* was suspended from July 1894 until April 1895.

Such was the situation when Rudolf Rocker joined the *Arbeter Fraint* group in 1895. He quickly became a regular speaker at the group’s meetings, where he met his lifelong companion Milly Witkop. Milly was a Ukrainian Jew who had come to London a year earlier. By 1896 Rocker was writing regularly for *Der Arbeter Fraint* which, however, stopped publication once more in March 1897.

And there Rocker’s time in London might have ended. Rudolf and Milly decided to emigrate to New York but were not admitted as they were not legally married. Refusing to formalise their relationship, they hit the front



above: advert from *Der Arbeter Fraint* for a meeting by Emma Goldman in London 1899; right: *Germinal*

pages in the US press. Nevertheless they were deported on the same ship they had arrived on.

Unable to find work upon return, they moved to Liverpool where Rocker collaborated in editing *Dos Freie Wort* (The Free Word) which led, at the end of 1898, to Rocker being offered the editorship of a relaunched *Der Arbeter Fraint*. He accepted, and remained editor until 1914.

Rocker was especially concerned with combating the influence of Marxism in London’s Jewish labour movement and *Der Arbeter Fraint* published twenty five of his essays on the topic. The paper’s unsound financial footing forced yet another break in publication in early 1900. To fill the propaganda gap Rocker founded the more theoretical fortnightly *Germinal*, which continued for the next three years.

A conference of Jewish anarchists held in Whitechapel in December 1902 decided to re-launch *Der Arbeter Fraint* as the ‘organ of the Yiddish speaking anarchist groups in Great Britain and Paris’ with Rocker as editor. The first



issue appeared in March 1903 and the paper went on to appear continuously, edited by Rocker, until 1914. In 1905 *Germinal* also resumed publication going on to gain a circulation of 2,500, while *Der Arbeter Fraint* reached a peak of 5,000 copies.

the Workers’ Friend club

In 1906, the *Arbeter Fraint* group realised a long time goal by establishing The Workers’ Friend Club at Jubilee Street in Whitechapel. Rocker, by now a very eloquent and influential speaker, spoke regularly. The club had an educational programme including English classes and lectures in history, literature, and sociology. Throughout his life Rocker insisted on the need for education in the workers movement. Workers who could think for themselves could evaluate the claims of political parties, which in Rocker’s view exploited the ignorance and apathy of the masses. In the following years the Workers’ Friend Club, along with the Yiddish anarchist papers, achieved popularity well beyond the Jewish anarchist scene.

During June 1906 the *Arbeter Fraint*

group was involved in a garment workers’ strike. Wages and working conditions in the East End clothing industry were much lower than in the rest of London. Rocker and two other *Arbeter Fraint*ers were co-opted by the union leading the strike on to the strike committee. However, the strike failed because strike funds ran out.

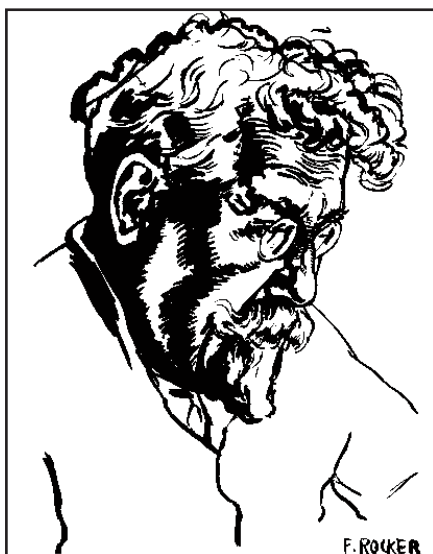
The period between 1910 and 1914 saw an upsurge in the class struggle throughout Britain, which is often referred to as the ‘Syndicalist Revolt’. Many strikes were unofficial and marked by civil unrest, with some posing a direct threat to the state. Outright defiance of police, magistrates and the military became a way of life for many workers. In the East End the Jewish garment workers once more took on the sweating system, this time successfully, and once again Rocker was an important figure in the strike.

beating the sweatshops

In May 1912 between 7 and 8,000 West End tailors, more skilled and better paid than those in the East End, came out on strike. Since much of their work was being transferred to the East End the Tailors’ Union there, under the influence of the *Arbeter Fraint* group, decided to support the strike. Although more than 70% of East End tailors were not engaged in work linked to the West End strike, nevertheless 13,000 East End immigrant garment workers went on strike following a May 8th assembly at which Rocker spoke. On the strike committee Rocker was responsible for collecting money and other necessities for the striking workers. He also published *Der Arbeter Fraint* on a daily basis to spread news about the strike and spoke at the workers’ assemblies and demonstrations. On May 24th a mass meeting was held to discuss whether to settle on a compromise proposed by the employers. A speech by Rocker convinced the workers to continue the strike and by the next morning all of the workers’ demands were met.



Rudolf Rocker seated behind Milly Witkop (front left)



Meanwhile, a dock strike was dragging on in east London with the dockers' families facing starvation. *Der Arbeter Fraint* called on the Jewish tailors to rally to their aid and a committee was set up and offers of accommodation and gifts poured in from Jewish workers who very often struggled to feed themselves. Rudolf and Milly personally collected children from the docks, and in all over 300 were taken into Jewish homes.

During his years in London Rocker devoted himself to the Jewish anarchist movement becoming a much loved and deeply respected figure in the wider Jewish community. Besides his involvement with the Workers' Friend Club, he was instrumental in forming other clubs where the East End working class could

meet, discuss, borrow books and buy cheap food.

Unsurprisingly, the British state did not share the enthusiasm for Rocker and his activities, especially after the outbreak of World War I. Rocker opposed both sides on internationalist grounds. Although many people expected a short war, Rocker predicted "a period of mass murder such as the world has never known before" and attacked the 2nd International for not opposing the conflict.

internment

Arbeter Fraint featured a debate between Kropotkin, who supported the Allies, and Rocker in which Rocker described the war as "the contradiction of everything we had fought for". Shortly after this, on December 2nd, Rocker was arrested and interned. Conditions were bad and his health suffered, but he also organised lectures which helped to keep up the prisoners' morale. Various attempts to secure his release came to nothing and only in March 1918, as part of a prisoner exchange, was Rocker deported to the Netherlands.

In the meantime *Der Arbeter Fraint* was continued by Milly and other members of the group, maintaining its anti-war stance, until July 1916 when it was finally suppressed by state. Milly was arrested and held without charge until the end of the war when she rejoined Rocker in the Netherlands.

Rocker and the International Workers' Association (IWA)

1918: returns to Germany joining anarcho-syndicalist influenced FVdG (Free Association of German Unions / *Freie Vereinigung deutscher Gewerkschaften*); Rocker writes for and helps to produce the FVdG weekly *der Syndikalist*

1918-19: short-lived German revolution suppressed by the *Freikorps* under SPD defence minister Noske

1919: FVdG renamed FAUD (Free Workers' Union of Germany / *Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands*) with an anarcho-syndicalist platform based on Rocker's 'Declaration of Syndicalist Principles' rejecting all support for political parties and the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'

1920: Rocker plays an influential role in FAUD's opposition to Moscow's moves to subordinate revolutionary syndicalism to the Bolshevik party; FAUD hosts international syndicalist conference which ultimately leads to rejection of RILU (see **DA41** for more details)

1921: writes 'The Bankruptcy of Russian State Communism' which denounces Bolshevik suppression of Russian anarchists and syndicalists; FAUD reaches a peak of 150,000 members and *der Syndikalist* attains a circulation of 100,000

1922: IWA founded in Berlin adopting an anarcho-syndicalist declaration of principles drafted by Rocker who also serves on the international's first secretariat

1926-30: becomes increasingly worried by the rise of fascism in Germany and begins work on *Nationalism and Culture*

1933: Nazi destruction of FAUD; Rocker and Milly Witkop escape to Switzerland in February, reaching London in May; Rocker attends extraordinary IWA meeting in Paris in July which decides to smuggle *Die Internationale* to Germany; Rocker and Witkop finally get to enter the US in August



Public Meeting

Immigrant Struggles &
Rudolf Rocker's
Relevance Today

Tuesday September 9th
7.30pm

at the Town Hall Tavern,
Tib Lane, off Cross
Street, central
Manchester

From Protest to Resistance

The protestors are winning. They are winning on the streets. Before too long they will be winning the arguments. Globalisation is fast becoming a cause without credible champions.

(Financial Times, 17th August 2001)

Advocates of market economics continually portray capitalism as the most efficient and effective means of distributing scarce resources by a free, competitive market. Every election time without fail, the politicians queue up trying to persuade us of the efficacy of *their* party's programme to stimulate growth and revive the flagging economy. There's an almost unquestioned assumption that both the market and power structures which protect it are innately good, and that there is **no** alternative. But is this really the case? The answer to this question, as millions across the world are finding to their enduring cost, must be a resounding 'no'.

In the aftermath of the recent G8 forum in Hokkaido, we examine why neo-liberalism has been an unmitigated global disaster and offer suggestions as to the way forward for the anti-capitalist movement.

Imperialism and inequality

Few could deny the impressive productive power of industrial capitalism, but the resulting outputs have been realised only at the cost of growing inequality, the perpetual threat of war, a dwindling and contaminated natural environment as well as mounting social problems.

The global market, which in the cur-

rent neo-liberal era has never been so powerful or unrestrained, has produced a wealth gap both domestically and internationally that has never been wider. The three richest people in the world now have assets exceeding the combined gross domestic product of the 48 least developed countries. The income of the one fifth of the

world population living in the wealthiest countries was 30 times more than the one fifth living in the poorest countries in 1960 – by 1995 it was 74 times higher.

The system we live under is one where necessities such as food, sanitation, medicines and clean water abound for those who can afford them, but those in greatest need go without. A tiny minority bask in untold riches, while thousands starve on a daily basis because it is simply not sufficiently profitable to feed them.

Recent trade liberalisation policies and treaties, implemented by organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation and G8, have accelerated the plunder of poor nations by corporations based in richer ones. This continues a trend set in motion at the start of the industrial revolution, and coincides with



the rising prominence of the corporations (in fact, 52 of the world's largest economies are now corporate economies).

Indigenous communities and cultures are being systematically devastated by economic imperialism, with stolen land and deforestation making way for corporate-friendly farming, mining, and logging enterprises.

Patent laws are another means of preserving corporate profits, but in doing so deny millions access to life-saving HIV combination therapies and other medicines. More recently, steps have been undertaken to afford corporations exclusive rights to water or staple foods such as basmati rice, as part of the wider globalisation agenda to privatise everything.

militarism and religion

A competitive economy pits nation against nation, stimulating conflict in the remorseless drive to feed the fortunes of the all powerful ruling elites. Total global military spending now equates to an amount of money less than half of which could comfortably alleviate world poverty and hunger. With western superpowers waging a 'war on terror' to conceal their true aspirations to acquire control of world oil supplies, marginalised groups turn to religious fundamentalism, and are provoked to commit horrific acts of terrorism. Without question, the 'war on terror', and the proliferation of nuclear, biological and conventional weaponry have made modern times very dangerous ones in which to live.

A strange oddity of the contemporary world perhaps, is the resurgence of retrogressive religious fundamentalism. Religion, largely discredited by science and philosophy, is founded upon a set of myths harking back to primitive times when superstition and irrationality ruled. Allied to tribalism, bigotry, intolerance, and hostile to free critical enquiry, religion is used as the pretext for politicians and suicide bombers alike to wage war on non-believers. But the much vaunted 'clash of civilisations' between the Western and the Islamic worlds is a myth which has been carefully contrived by an uncanny alliance of competing political and religious figure-

heads to strengthen their own positions, conveniently sidestepping the real (financial) forces underlying imperialism. The strong bond between the Saudi and US ruling powers illustrates precisely that religious differences matter little when massive profits are at stake.

Military might and economic power are inextricably linked. As the world's only superpower, the US has bombed 22 countries since World War 2, and destabilised countless more in Central America – with CIA-inspired coups – to advance its interests. Even the US's nemesis, Bin Laden, received covert backing during the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, as did Saddam Hussein during the Iran/Iraq war. Spending over \$1 billion per day on the military domestically, the US currently exports \$18.6 billion worth of arms per year, many of which go to poor countries. The British government has also excelled in arms dealing, supplying the Indonesian government

with weaponry used in their genocidal campaigns in East Timor and Papua. Exposures like the 'sweeteners' paid by BAE Systems to the Saudi Royal family to secure lucrative jet fighter contracts come as little surprise.

the environment

Market forces channel vast amounts of labour, technological and advertising resources into manufacturing artificial needs and then, in turn, supplying a multitude of products and services to satisfy these. But the cycle of (over-)production and consumption that results, is simply unsustainable. Combined with the short-sighted reliance of the world economy on fossil fuels, the melting polar ice caps, polluted stratosphere and shrinking rainforests attest the limits of a system which treats the natural world as an inexhaustible, expendable commodity.

Multinational treaties, allegedly



designed to curb the output of pollution-causing greenhouse gases, have proved to be spectacularly ineffective in restraining market forces. Rising global temperatures and sea levels have already created climate refugees in the Indian Ocean and further “catastrophic” consequences of climate change are predicted by the UN without prompt and robust action.

Capitalism is alienation. It cultivates consumerism through celebrity hype and brand-label worship. The increasing mediation of our leisure by commodities engenders a uniform and homogenised culture, eliminating diversity in the process. The corporate vision is a world in which each and every one of us aspires to the same false consumer dream, a dream enacted in shopping malls that differ little from Bristol to Bombay.

Capitalism propounds competition, exalts greed and worships opulence. It rewards selfishness, exhorts ruthlessness and delights in making us enemies of each other. It thrives on a carefully-contrived climate of fear, which state bodies exploit by scrutinising and spying on our every move. With endemic social problems becoming ever more acute, it deploys huge amounts of resources in a desperate bid to curb the very social ills it generates. As the prisons brim to overflowing, the rich flaunt their fortunes and the politicians their corruption with seeming impunity. Meanwhile the press and media that support them do everything in their power to convince us that there really is **no alternative**. Communism? Ha! If you think we're bad, just look at Russia, China, Vietnam and North Korea. (All of which are capitalist economies).

managing dissent

Dissent is managed not only by the mass media, but also via the ballot box, carefully-stewarded protest marches and compliant, defensive trade unions. When these methods fail, more overt and brutal forms of repression inevitably step in. This is especially

apparent where the transnationals realise their greatest profit margins. In these countries, puppet dictatorships flourish by crushing organised labour and denying basic human rights to workers; maintaining wages and manufacturing costs at the absolute minimum. Child labour and sweatshops thrive under conditions akin to slavery.

Even the benefits enjoyed by the populations of more affluent ‘democratic’ countries – such as the welfare state – have been conceded only through years of tireless workers’ struggle. But in times of crisis such as the present, even these redistributive mechanisms are under concerted attack from the twin evils of privatisation and disinvestment. The deadly hospital superbug epidemic – which is rarely out of the news – has occurred against a backdrop of outsourcing of cleaning services and major spending cuts.

Cutbacks in affordable housing, welfare benefits, and education have also been expedited. The ultra-rich have been allowed to escape taxation while a raft of anti-union and protest-curb-ing legislation has been introduced. That these legislative reforms have been proactively pursued by a Labour government demonstrates exactly where the balance of power truly resides. Corporate bodies that profit exclusively by ‘persuading’ workers not to join unions form a growing industry in the US, and are now plying their grubby trade in the UK.

divide and rule

The destruction of livelihoods and the concentration of wealth in privileged countries have seen workers uproot en masse in a bid to seek employment. Migrant workers are typically employed in precarious, illegal and casual working situations. As such, they are open to a higher degree of exploitation than the workforce of the host country. That their deployment serves capital by forcing general wage levels down, breeds resentment which racist right wing groups and politicians manipulate for their own ends. A classic case of blaming the victim, calculated to divide and rule and prevent solidarity between workers with similar interests.

Patriarchy and the subjugation of women remain all pervasive into the 21st Century. Honour killings and female genital mutilation are still commonplace in cultures subsumed by archaic religious beliefs, beliefs which also propound a repressive morality and the persecution of homosexuals. In parts of the world where organised religion's influence has waned, racism, sexism and homophobia still permeate society's powerful institutions. The commodification of women by the sex industry has simultaneously seen the trafficking of females into the seedy but profitable business of sex-slavery. Women are paid less than men, are more likely to be victims of domestic violence, and are socialised to fulfil clearly-defined, subservient roles. So whilst relation-



ships based on domination predate capitalism, these are still actively reinforced to maintain oppressive social relations and serve the needs of the economy.

an uncertain future

Finally, as if all the above wasn't enough, capitalism is also inherently unstable. The market system and its expansive forces are subject to calamitous fluctuations, often becoming the precursor for war. The current US 'credit crunch' has precipitated a major downturn in the world economy, exacerbated greatly by skyrocketing food and fuel prices. These factors in combination have resulted in mounting inflation, homelessness and poverty. As the poor go hungry, food riots spread like wildfire across the economically-polarised world. With global warming, drought and foreseeable conflicts over diminishing food, water and oil supplies, the future looks very grave indeed.

For all these reasons and more, the global capitalist system and the organisational structures which sustain it, must be seen for what they are – brutal, unjust, destructive and fundamentally untenable.

enough is enough

But the cracks in the system are getting ever bigger. Neo-liberalism, free trade and the corporatocracy aren't having things all their own way. The Zapatistas uprising in Mexico in 1994 against the North American Free Trade Agreement epitomised a spirit which has since coalesced into wider opposition to globalisation. The people of the Bolivian region of Cochabamba successfully thwarted attempts by the US Corporation Bechtel to privatise their water supplies. Indigenous peoples the world over are defying the corporate takeover of their lands and culture. With waves of international strikes, determined opposition to G8 forums, culture-jamming and an expanding underground media, the tide of popular resistance is snowballing. Many of these forms of organised resistance are in their embryonic stages, but together exemplify a current which rejects the failed vanguardism and centralist dogma of leftist parties which have brought only more misery.

We cannot afford to engage in delusional triumphalism; there are long, hard roads ahead. The workers' movement has been severely weakened by decades of anti-union legislation and casualisation and employment precarity. We see rank and file workers' organisations, strong communities and a generalised culture of resistance as the way ahead. Our workplaces, as the heart of the capitalist system, provide the arena where a crippling blow can be delivered by us taking control of the means of production. As anarcho-syndicalists we emphasise industrial direct action and the general strike as the means to achieve this. Protest must morph into organised community and workplace-based resistance. Mobilising every time a G8 summit comes along is not enough on its own. If we want a new world, we can't wait for the politicians to do it for us. We must do it ourselves and do it now.

Our movement needs to be imaginative, coherent and multidimensional; offering both a vision of how things could be and championing prefigurative forms of horizontal organisation to build a new society within the shell of the old. We need a strength of conviction and robust approach to all who would take control on 'our' behalf; already the SWP and other leftist parties are attempting to hijack the anti-capitalist movement with front organisations such as 'Globalise Resistance'. Power is never given, it has to be taken. Through solidarity and direct democracy, we can dissolve and decentralise power, and restore decision-making to its rightful place, to local communities. But we must be mindful of the need to forge links across national borders, for just as capitalism has gone global, so must organised resistance to it.

Industrial capitalism and hierarchical society has long since reached the pinnacle of its development. Like it or not, we cannot continue as we are. Social anthropology and the history of autonomous workers' struggles shows that another, better world is an infinite possibility. The abolition of capi-

talism and the state and its replacement with a system of libertarian socialism is no longer a desirable, utopian pipe-dream, but a compelling and practical necessity.



In the words of the People's Global Action manifesto:

"The need has become urgent for concerted action to dismantle the illegitimate world governing system which combines transnational capital, nation states, international finance institutions and trade agreements. Only a global alliance of peoples' movements, respecting autonomy and facilitating action-orientated resistance, can defeat this emerging global monster. If impoverishment of populations is the agenda of neo-liberalism, direct empowerment of the peoples through constructive direct action and civil disobedience will be the programme of the Peoples' Global Action against 'free' trade and the WTO.

We assert our will to struggle as peoples against all forms of oppression. But we do not only fight the wrongs imposed on us. We are also committed to building a new world. We are together as human beings and communities, our unity deeply rooted in diversity. Together we shape a vision of a just world and begin to build that true prosperity which comes from human empowerment, natural bounty, diversity, dignity and freedom."

Global Action against Starbucks

Defending Victimised Union Activists

Starbucks' marketing presents them as a trendy, ethical corporation. However, when it comes to their own workers they are ruthless union-busters determined to stop workers organising.

In April, Mónica, an activist in the anarcho-syndicalist CNT Commerce Union in a Sevilla branch of Starbucks, was sacked. She had worked there for a year and a half when management suddenly claimed that she "created problems with her workmates". She had refused to work public holidays without extra pay and to attend work meetings outside work time without pay or time off in lieu. The end came a few days after she had asked her workmates for details about another worker who had been sacked. The CNT is demanding her reinstatement.

Six weeks later, in June in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA, Starbucks sacked Cole Dorsey who had over 2 years service and is active in the IWW Starbucks Workers Union. The National Labour Relations Board in the US has already made the firm re-hire two sacked workers and is looking at this latest violation and others. These cases are the latest events in Starbucks

ongoing victimisation of workers who dare to try improving their working conditions.

Service industry jobs like Starbucks are traditionally poorly paid and un-unionised with poor observance of workers rights. Starbucks is determined to keep things this way and is stamping down hard on anyone who tries to change this. As more and more jobs move away from traditional industry and into new serv-

Repression was held on July 5th which was supported not only by CNT local federations, IWA sections and IWW locals but also by various other anarchist/syndicalist groups.

In Britain there were pickets in Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Leeds, London and Manchester. There were also pickets and other



ice sectors, workers such as these are taking an important and difficult first step in defending workers rights in modern workplaces.

Due to Starbucks' globalised response to union activity, Sevilla CNT and the IWW Starbucks Union (IWW) have joined their struggles for the reinstatement of their members. As a consequence a Global Day of Action against Starbucks

protests in Argentina, Australia, Austria, Chile, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Switzerland and Taiwan as well as Spain and the US.

For further information, reports, pictures etc. go to:

<http://gda.iwa-ait.org/>
where there are further links.



Mayday 2008

While in the UK the Mayday tradition of resistance and protest against the capitalist state may be on the wane as the unions adopt the watered down alternative of 'Workers' Memorial Day', across the world workers still take to the streets in opposition to their daily exploitation.

Here we present some images from around the world and the declaration of the International Workers' Association (IWA) of which we are the British section.



Jakarta, Indonesia



Karachi, Pakistan



Manila, Philippines

Against the State and Capitalism, in Memory of the Haymarket Martyrs!

Another Mayday has come, and with it the time to remember, in struggle, our comrades – five anarchist workers who died in a war between classes that we are still fighting today. They were murdered by the State because they didn't accept without resistance that they had bosses who lived off their labour, because they didn't accept that the State and Capital had power over their lives.

But it is not only those five anarchists – let us remember all those countless workers, syndicalists, anarchists, libertarians, proud human beings who died, because they didn't accept the idea of one human being exploiting another. All of them survive on the 1st of May as the international day of working class struggle.

It is with their noble ideas in our hearts and with our unions in the streets that we have to defend our rights and lives against the ferocious attacks of neo-liberal capitalism and fight for a free world. Today, just like more than hundred years ago.

In the EU, workers suffer from the breakdown of the welfare state and the massive growth of precarious work. The treason of social democracy, the incapacity of bureaucratic unions and three right wing governments in central Europe will still worsen the situation.

In Latin America, the poor still struggle against the yoke of multinational enterprises plundering the whole continent, the destruction of the environment and a life of utmost misery. But also Africa remains nothing but a toy in the hands of post-colonial imperialists who fan the flames of war between the poor, let whole populations starve and die from diseases in order to rob a whole continent of its natural resources.

The world is reshaped with the sword by US, Chinese, European and Russian imperialism. In endless wars the poor and the working class are slaughtered to secure the interests of military industries, private mercenaries and the power of ruling cliques over the resources.

In this situation of economic crises, wars and increasing misery the International Workers' Association calls for a Mayday of struggle against exploitation of the working class. It calls for a Mayday of solidarity and mutual aid against racist divisions of the poor. It calls for a Mayday of resistance to capitalist wars and it calls for the working class to regain their dignity, to take their fate in their own hands, and to emancipate themselves from the interests of bureaucrats, capitalists and politicians.

The emancipation of the working class can only be done by the workers themselves.

For libertarian communism and social revolution.
Belgrade, First of May 2008
IWA Secretariat



Madrid



Belgrade



Athens



Bern



Poland



Switzerland



Jakarta



India



St Petersburg



Quebec



Madrid

Symond Newell & Kett's Rebellion

Norfolk's Great Revolt against enclosures, 1549

by Peter E. Newell – Past Tense 2007 – 24 pages – £1.50

A Glorious Liberty the ideas of the Ranters

by A. L. Morton – Past Tense 2007 – 48 pages – £1.00

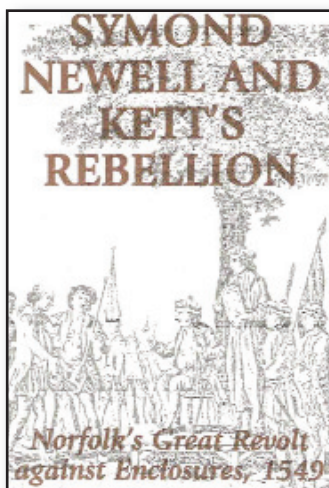
South London radical history group, *Past Tense*, has recently released two excellent new pamphlets covering early modern resistance to capitalism and authority. The first, on Kett's Rebellion of 1549, is ostensibly an attempt by the author to trace the involvement of his ancestor, Symond Newell, in the insurrection. In 1549 a major revolt against enclosures in Norfolk rocked England. The enclosures were class robbery on a grand scale. As common land was fenced off by rich landowners to make more profits, many ordinary people were deprived of land for growing food, grazing and wood for fuel. Many were forced onto the poorest soil or into the cities. Enclosures were fiercely resisted, though, and Kett's Rebellion is one of the stand-out examples of popular fight backs in British history.

In July 1549 many thousands of Norfolk yeomen and labourers took up arms against landlords and demanded an end to enclosures. After some initial victories, however, they were crushed by government forces the following month. Three thousand men were killed and another 360 hanged. William and Robert Kett, the leaders of the uprising, were found guilty of treason and executed. It is unknown exactly if Newell escaped. Nevertheless, the pace of enclosure in Norfolk dramatically slowed and the

"Great Commotion", as it was then dubbed, was locked into popular memory for generations.

A century on, during the English revolution, masses of people took direct action to challenge, in all sense, the systems of morality, authority and property of their day. The Ranters were the most extreme movement to arise in the aftermath of the defeat of the Levellers. Mainly a movement of the urban poor and wage labourers, the Ranters saw the execution of Charles I as the first stage in a grand revolution that would turn the world upside down and see people living in peace and freedom as equals. "Howl, howl, ye nobles, howl ye rich men for the miseries that are coming upon you," wrote prominent Ranter Abeizer Coppe. "For our parts ... we will have all things in common." However, the movement was unco-ordinated and short-lived. Though important iconoclasts, the Ranters were largely unorganised.

The pamphlet is taken from a 1970 work by East Anglian schoolmaster AL Morton, who was a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, so its perspective is redolent of Leninism. Still, this is a valuable excerpt reprinted from arguably the best book on the topic. Better still would have been a look at what the Ranters might mean to us today.



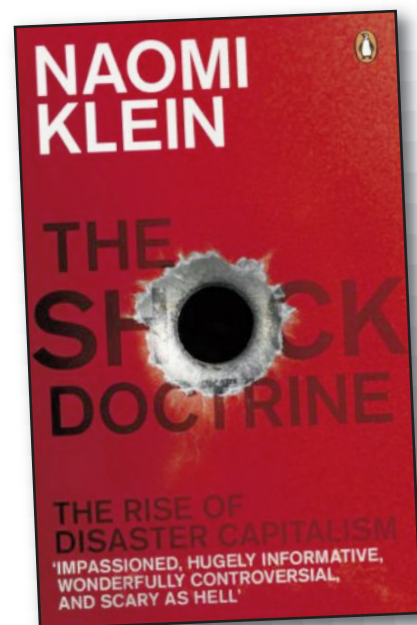
PAST TENSE

cheques / POs payable to
'A. Hodson'

c/o 56a Info Shop
56 Crampton Street
London SE17

add 50p postage for 1
pamphlet, 70p for both

www.past-tense.org.uk



Naomi Klein's critically-acclaimed bestseller, *The Shock Doctrine*, chronicles – in painstaking detail – the rise of disaster capitalism. Tracing its ideological inception to Milton Friedman's 1950s Chicago School, she explodes the myth that neo-liberalism – an unfettered, deregulated brand of free

Under Two Dictators A Prisoner of Stalin and Hitler

Pimlico 2008 – 350 pages –

There are numerous memoirs by prisoners of Stalin or Hitler but it is unusual for someone to have been a prisoner of both.

Margarete Buber-Neumann was a member of the KPD in the twenties and early thirties and wife of Heinz Neumann a once rising star of the Communist bureaucracy and editor of the paper *Red Flag*, who fell foul of party intrigues and lost out to party chief Ernst Thälmann. The couple arrived in Moscow in 1935: Heinz was arrested in 1937 and shot in November of that year (on the day of his 'trial'). Margarete was arrested in 1938; she was only informed of Heinz's fate in 1961. Sentenced to five years (a relatively light term) she was transported to the Gulag where she met Zensl Müsham, wife of the German anarchist Eric Müsham.

Conditions in the Gulag have become fairly well known through such

The Shock Doctrine

The Rise of Disaster Capitalism

by Naomi Klein – Penguin 2007 – 576 pages – £8.99 – ISBN: 978-0141024530

market economics – is inspired by anything as prosaic as the desire to extend prosperity, freedom or democracy.

From Buenos Aires to Baghdad, the book charts the cynical corporate carve-up of the globe in the name of profit. That this has been exacted using calculated murder, bloodshed, and torture is virtually without exception. But the sheer scale of abuses detailed in this comprehensive account is simply jaw-dropping. The dominant forces of the US government and corporate elite are implicated time and time again, aided and abetted by compliant cohorts based in Asian, South American and Middle Eastern regimes, including those bastions of socialism, South Africa's ANC and Poland's Solidarity. The privatisation of state-owned resources, wholesale corruption and combination of strings-attached loans, aid and deployment of military muscle

to enforce the global neo-liberal agenda are recurrent themes impeccably researched and unearthed by Klein. Even Thatcher's crushing of the miners and the Falklands/Malvinas conflict fall neatly into the context of the book's compelling narrative.

Klein traces the roots of methodologies deployed by the neo-liberal architects, the shock doctors, whose well-worn tactics of cashing in on the chaos wreaked by both man-made and natural disasters, were unscrupulously honed behind closed doors in the economic, military and psychiatric laboratories of the US before being unleashed with terrifying ferocity on an unsuspecting world. She clinically debunks the efficacy and morality of these methods as anything other than cynical profiteering. In the words of the sleeve notes: "Raking in billions out of the tsunami, plundering

Russia, exploiting Iraq - this is the chilling tale of how a few are making a killing while more are getting killed".

The core tenets of neo-liberalism – privatisation, deregulation, cuts to government services and their shattering impact – are articulated brilliantly. Klein notes how, in December 2006, a month after Friedman's death, a UN study found that the richest 2% of adults in the world own more than half of global household wealth. She also observes that in countries where the shock doctors have exerted greatest influence, an underclass of between 25 and 60% of the population has resulted. But, despite the wholesale terrorising of populations by state and corporate forces, those on the receiving end have refused to bow down, organising at grass-roots level and taking direct action to reconstruct their broken lives and ravaged communities.

Although we would depart from Klein in her unequivocal support for statisticians such as Latin America's Chavez and Morales, her championing of the cause of humanity against the savagery of capitalism is commendable.

The conclusion contains cautionary notes which we ignore at our peril. Whilst neo-liberalism may give the appearance of an ailing beast on course to its eventual demise, it is far from a spent force. Key world leaders such as Bush, Brown and Sarkozy – and bodies such as the World Bank and IMF – remain firm and powerful protagonists. Klein also comments on how the casual exclusion of tens of millions by free-market ideologies has given rise to conditions in which racism, nationalism and religious fundamentalism have flourished.

All in all, the prescient analysis of *The Shock Doctrine* offers a vital riposte to those who still believe that capitalism and freedom are indivisible. It may yet prove to be one of the most vital mainstream texts of our time.

tators:

ler – by Margarete Buber-Neumann
£17.99 – ISBN: 978-1845951023

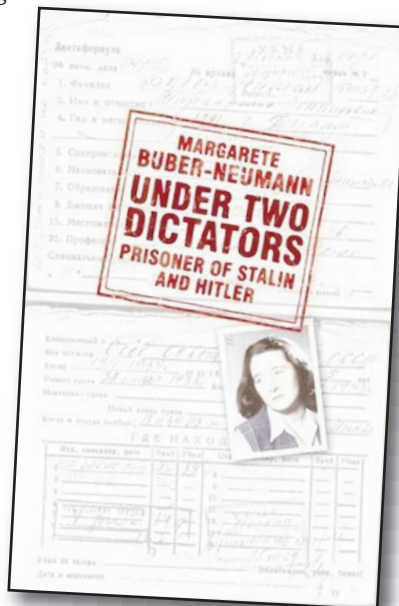
authors as Solzhenitsyn so there's no need to go into detail here. Following the outbreak of the Second World War and the pact between the two dictators the question of former German activists and the Nazi desire to punish these "Jewish-Bolshevik terrorists" arose. So they were handed over by the Stalinists to the tender mercies of the Nazi Gestapo. She was eventually sentenced to "preventative arrest" and taken to Ravensbrück.

We are familiar with the obscenities imposed in these hellholes but interestingly (and familiar to us of the awkward squad); those who did best were those who held a larger vision. There were Jehovah's Witnesses (Margarete became their Block Senior, a task she didn't want needless to say) who ran their hut incredibly efficiently (too efficiently you might say). Die-hard Communists were well organised and there are interesting anecdotes of the ways these retained

belief in the Russian "socialist state" and the author's sometimes successful attempts to disillusion them.

The end of the book reads like a novel, and you'll be shaking your head at some of the events following Margarete's 'liberation'.

Solidarity was evident in both concentration camp systems, giving the lie to those who claim life is merely a struggle of self-interest (*Freedom* passim). It is also very interesting to have a woman's perspective on these matters.



Workers' Solidarity, not

The current "debate" about immigration focuses on economic arguments, with the bosses arguing that they need "skilled migrants" to fill gaps in the workforce. This is a partial truth, the other side of the coin is that migrant workers are also needed to do the low-status "unskilled" jobs as cleaners, security guards, agricultural labourers and workers in food processing plants which "native" workers can't be dragooned into doing. However, the argument that immigration is "good for the economy" is not one we should adopt. "The economy" is the value of what the ruling class own, increased through our exploitation; anarcho-syndicalists reject the social democratic view that capitalism can be managed for the good of the working class.

not driving down wages

Similarly, we also reject the simplistic view that immigration forces down wages merely by increasing the labour supply. No-one accuses non-unionised "native" workers of driving down wages by taking low-paid jobs. Workers who are low-paid and unorganised are not so by choice, they are forced to work for whatever they can get and prevented from organising to improve pay and conditions by circumstances which make it difficult to do so. So

why are migrants accused of undermining pay and conditions? The truth is they just want to earn a living on the best terms they can get and would love to have better pay and conditions. Many of them would also like to be active union members and to organise to improve pay and conditions for all workers.

It is immigration controls which prevent many migrants working legally and make them vulnerable



to super-exploitation. Their most significant effect is to undermine the pay and conditions of first migrants, then of all workers. If you want to improve pay and conditions in sectors where there are many migrant workers you have to offer them solidarity, you have to organise with them and you have to oppose immigration controls which hinder resistance. The nationalistic ideas that migrants are taking jobs which belong to "British" workers, competing with them to drive down wages, claiming benefits and using public services paid for by "British" taxes serve to legitimise both immigration controls and the

idea that migrants are somehow second class workers whose super-exploitation is justified. "Native" workers who buy into these ideas are buying into the mechanism by which their own pay and conditions are undermined by the bosses and the state, not by migrants.

workplace checks

Since the immigration "debate" is now framed as being about distinguishing between "good" migrants – skilled, well-paid, English-speaking, "westernised" – and "bad" – "unskilled", low-paid, poor English language skills – the government has introduced a regime of workplace immigration checks employers are required by law to carry out, backed up by heavy fines and enforced through high-profile raids on those who don't. Companies like *iss*, who have a cleaning contract on London Underground, are systematically calling in workers to check their National Insurance numbers. Those who are working illegally usually respond to this by disappearing; to turn up for work with a bogus NI number is to invite arrest, detention and deportation. Collective action is difficult to organise as these are poorly-unionised sectors with little real industrial muscle or, as in the case of *iss*, a contractor separated from the unionised workforce directly employed by London Underground Limited (LUL).

The maximum fine under the "civil penalty" regime which was introduced in February is £10,000 per employee found to be working illegally, so it pays for big companies to do thorough checks. The only possible legal challenge to checks would have to be based on Race Discrimination legislation and

Immigration Controls

would involve challenging those which target a particular group within the workforce on the basis of race or nationality. However, simply checking everybody's NI numbers would avoid such a legal challenge so this has a very limited scope, affecting only incompetent employers. The UK Border Agency has even issued guidelines on how to avoid racial discrimination in carrying out checks.

GMB no help

Companies which don't implement these checks are liable to be raided. To give one example from the Ealing Gazette, 2nd May 2008: "Police stormed the factory at 6am on Monday to make the site safe for UK Border Agency officers following a tip-off. Up to 80 officers spent 12 hours interviewing more than 400 staff at Katsouris Fresh Foods, which supplies dips and ready meals to supermarket chains including Tesco, Sainsbury's, Marks and Spencer and Waitrose." 22 workers, mostly from Sri Lanka, were detained. The factory is unionised, but this isn't much help for the workers concerned because: "A GMB spokesman said: 'We have every confidence in Katsouris and its conduct in this matter and their willingness to cooperate with the authorities. We believe Katsouris has demonstrated to us that they only employ legitimate workers. However, we do have issues with the way in which this visit was conducted and some of our members have raised concerns

at the heavy handed tactics deployed.'"

In other cases the bosses have themselves called in immigration officials as a means of attacking the workforce. In 2006 National Physical Laboratories awarded their cleaning contract to a new firm and the T&G tried to organise the whole workforce. The management retaliated by calling all 30 workers in for a "health and safety meeting" where they were detained in the canteen

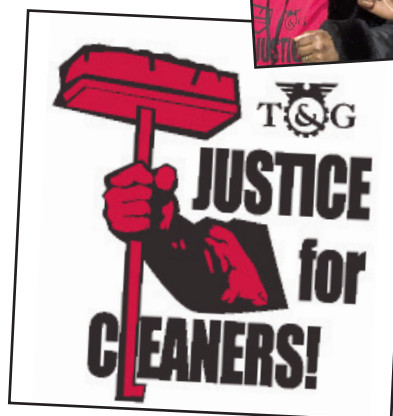
the need for them to be free from the fear of detention and deportation have never been clearer.

Justice for Cleaners

Unlike the GMB official quoted above, however, not all trade unionists see their role as ensuring employers obey laws passed by the Labour government. The most high-profile organising campaign aimed at a largely migrant workforce has been Justice for Cleaners (J4C) modelled on the US organisation Justice for Janitors and run in the UK by the T&G/Unite! Since March 2006 it has relied on

demonstrations, including occupations, by activists from outside the workplace to shame rich companies into granting a living wage, sick pay, holiday pay and union recognition. The aim is to recruit workers into the T&G and to move from an organisation controlled by professional union organisers to one controlled by elected workplace representatives. It has had significant success and this summer the campaign is being brought to a climax aiming to win union recognition at big firms, set up steward systems and organise a branch from over 1,000 members.

The successes have been based on demonstrations at rich firms for whom the cost of meeting J4C's demands is insignificant, and worth it to avoid the hassle of being publicly shamed by the union. The campaign began at KPMG in the City of London, and the biggest success was the occupation of Goldman Sachs which led to a



for document checks by 120 police and immigration officials. Twelve of the workers were deported; another was jailed for benefit fraud. "Coincidentally", the company had been looking to reduce the work-

force and those arrested were not replaced. Subsequently, workers put in a collective grievance about being overworked. The need for migrant workers to organise and

union recognition agreement the next day. Cleaners at the latter have also won 10 days' sick pay, 28 days' paid holiday and the London Living Wage of £7.20 per hour through collective action. There are no undocumented workers at the firm, however, as immigration screening takes place as part of the recruitment process. Anita Ceravolo, the campaign organiser, admitted at the Trades Union & Community Conference against Immigration Controls on 29th March this year that there were very few undocumented workers in J4C, although more than 50% of its members were either African or Latin American. These legal workers are themselves insecure and wary of the risks involved in taking collective action. In buildings where many cleaners are also undocumented J4C has found it harder to recruit.

Latin American workers

TUC unions are not really interested in recruiting small numbers of workers in hard to organise workplaces. J4C aims at big membership targets through recruiting in big workplaces in specific areas such as Canary Wharf, the City of London and other areas with a high density of big offices.

Another approach is taken by the Latin American Workers' Association (LAWA), which is supported by the T&G and based in their offices in North London but not part of the union. The office opened in 2005 and has been flooded by workers seeking information and advice about their employment rights, mostly to do with payment problems. They act as "roving shop stewards" and deal mostly with cleaners and catering workers in a huge number of workplaces

spread over the whole region. These are small workplaces, not the kind of bargaining units which interest unions, and many workers are undocumented so the legal approach has severe drawbacks. One solution which has been proposed is for "zonal shop stewards" to take on worker representation.

Recruitment campaigns by the TUC unions also have other drawbacks. At the BBC, LAWA campaigned last year among hundreds of cleaners working for contractor OCS. Workers were paid £5.35 an hour, only got 12 days' holiday a year, suffered daily harassment by management and the English and Irish cleaners over 65 were being forcibly retired. Both groups of cleaners got a petition together against this and for the London Living Wage and J4C's other demands, but BECTU (the broadcasting union which nominally represented the cleaners) wouldn't support it and criticised it because it said the T&G was behind it. In spite of widespread

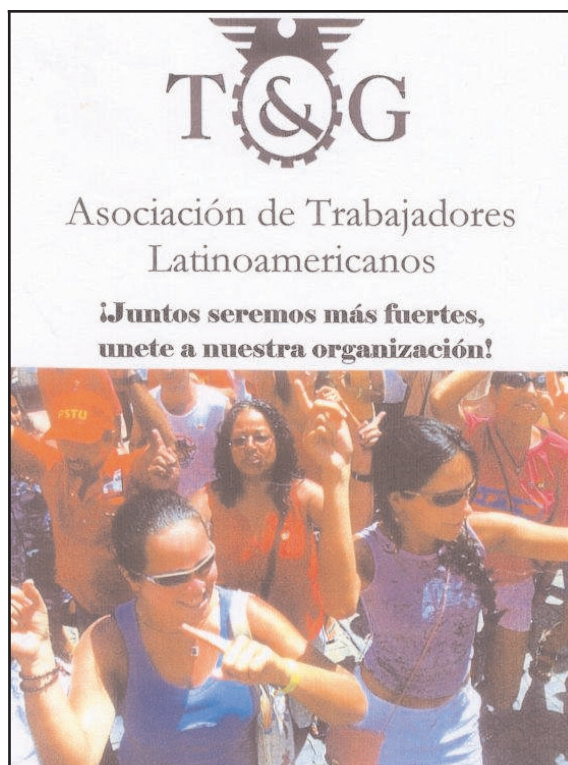
that, because BECTU had the union recognition rights for cleaners, there was no gain to be made for the union.

underground

The RMT has a different attitude to organising cleaners on the London Underground. They take an industrial union approach and regard the cleaners as part of the railway industry not as part of some separate cleaning industry. This puts them at odds with J4C which has tried to recruit tube cleaners into the T&G, but on a principled basis, unlike BECTU. In June the RMT balloted their 700 members working for four cleaning contractors – iss, ITS, ICS and GBM – on strike action for the London Living Wage, 28 days' holiday, sick pay, pension rights and travel facilities. They are also demanding an end to "third party sackings" where cleaners can be dismissed at the behest of parties other than their employer without a disciplinary hearing or right of appeal. This tactic is being used to get rid of union activists.

Here privatisation is a big part of the problem. The cleaners used to be directly employed by LUL and had travel passes and access to canteens, but now they work for contractors they have lost both. Since they have to travel on the underground to get from job to job, the loss of travel passes mean that they have to pay to travel out of their own very low wages and are not reimbursed by their employer for this. They also have to prove their right to work every time they get transferred to another contractor, and black workers have been asked for their passports repeatedly, even if they are British citizens. iss are also currently calling workers in systematically for National Insurance number checks and have appointed a specialist Migration Auditor to implement these, side-stepping the possibility that regular staff might resist.

The Finsbury Park branch of the RMT has been given the task of



support – 700 people signed the petition, including the likes of Gary Lineker and Moira Stuart – the T&G backed off when it realised



organising cleaners who are in the union. They have set up a representative structure and tried to pass on their experience and knowledge to the cleaners to help them organise themselves. The response of *iss* has been to ban LUL employees from acting as RMT reps on their premises claiming their presence breaches commercial confidentiality. That is currently under legal challenge. Although there is historically a degree of industrial snobbery towards cleaners from other LUL workers, there are measures which can be used in solidarity with the cleaners on strike. These include a refusal to work on health & safety grounds when standards of cleanliness cannot be met due to strike action. Legal, health & safety-based solidarity action has already been used by the RMT on the Underground to good effect in support of track maintenance workers employed by Metronet.

outside London

At a workshop at the Shop Stewards' Network national confer-

ence last year other trades unionists spoke about their efforts organising Polish workers outside London. In Luton attempts have been made to organise agency workers who are paid the National Minimum Wage. There was a demarcation dispute between the GMB and Amicus/ Unite! and the local Trades Council responded xenophobically. However, good work was done with an organisation called Migrant Gateway which gets EU funding to provide legal advice, translation skills and a multilingual helpline. They aim to produce EU Passport packs to provide information to migrants before they come to the UK, but need further EU funding to do this.

In the GMB's Southern Region they have taken the need to organise migrant workers seriously, but have had to make it up as they went along. At first they created a Migrant Workers' Branch but realised that that was a mistake. They are now seeking to integrate migrants into existing branches and have won a national policy that each branch can request the trans-

lation of all documents on request. In one branch 400 out of around 2,400 members are Polish. They have formed a Migrant Workers Subcommittee which holds meetings in English because integration is important and the migrants don't all speak one language. A delegate is sent to the Branch Committee. The participation of migrant workers at training days is also emphasised and encouraged.

community unionism

They have found that in organising Polish workers they can't just look at workplace issues. They have been training up their lay reps in housing, benefits and other relevant areas of the law, and have organised drop-in days involving solicitors and advice workers. At the same time they recognise the need to organise in the workplace and avoid being a welfare provider. They have found that young Polish workers make good trade unionists. Many of them are women and they recruit British workmates into the union. Other speakers also returned to the theme of "community unionism" which tackles issues which face workers both within and outside the workplace. It was pointed out that in the US there are immigrant worker centres which are geographically-based but focus on workplace issues.

That approach is similar to the concept of the Local which is at the heart of anarcho-syndicalism. Because we reject the idea of a split between political and economic issues and consequently a separate political party, we advocate Locals as a means by which unions can operate geographically to tackle social issues as well as industrially to tackle economic ones. Our approach to both issues is the same



– direct action by those affected. Traditionally, direct action is strikes, boycotts, occupations, working-to-rule and other forms of collective action. We are not in favour of either representation or of using the legal system. That does not mean that we won't use the law as the basis of demands, however, nor as a weapon against the bosses. Health & safety law is a useful tool, as are the National Minimum Wage and the Working Time regulations to a lesser extent. It is in how we enforce our legal rights, and how we deal with individual cases that we differ from the TUC unions and political parties.

direct action casework

In an organised workplace collective action, or the real possibility of it, is used by workers to enforce their legal rights. In a unionised workplace individual cases would be taken up through grievance procedures which usually have to be exhausted before making an application to an Employment Tribunal or going to court. This has the disadvantage of isolating the individual and their grievance from the rest of the workforce through the rules of confidentiality. The alternative advocated and practised by anarcho-syndicalists is now called Direct Action Casework (DAC). This has a particular relevance to undocumented workers who work in unorganised workplaces, who cannot use the legal system and who run the risk of being detained and deported if they take out grievances, where procedures exist.

Although DAC has long been familiar to anarcho-syndicalists it has recently been taken up in Britain

by the London Coalition Against Poverty (LCAP), inspired by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty in Canada. LCAP has had success in challenging the practice of “gate-keeping” in Hackney Council's Homeless Persons Unit by which the right of homeless people to be housed has been restricted in order to hit government targets on ending homelessness. They have also avoided becoming a welfare service provider by helping homeless people in a hostel organise themselves to take collective action to improve their conditions. Part of how LCAP is developing has been to expand the range of competencies to include employment rights and organising in the workplace. In March this year a successful workshop addressing these issues was held involving members of SolFed and of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

The experience of LAWA and of those organising with migrant workers outside London underlines the need for a multidimensional

ees. The civil penalty regime for employing migrants illegally also has potential, if handled correctly, as a means of countering the denial of rights as the bosses have a lot to lose if exposed – the workers can just disappear. LCAP will be running another workshop on enforcing your rights at work aimed at those working with undocumented workers in July.

Finally, the plight of undocumented workers has come to the notice of churches and politicians who are calling for amnesties based on a bewildering variety of criteria. During the recent election for the Mayor of London the Liberal Democrat candidate, Brian Paddick, even advocated military service as a way of “earning” citizenship for long-term illegal residents! An amnesty would arbitrarily regularise the status of some undocumented workers but not others and would leave those who come after it, or who were unable to take advantage of it for whatever reason, in the same situation as before. In order to ward off criticism from softer nationalists, the amnesty has also been proposed as a one-off event in conjunction with a subsequent crack-down on new or remaining undocumented workers.

no one is illegal

Anarcho-syndicalists reject states and their borders; we have always regarded the class struggle as worldwide and offered our solidarity to workers of all nationalities. We reject the idea that there should be second-class workers, that these are themselves the problem and that their presence undermines other workers. Workplace checks cannot be separated from the whole question of immigration control. The political and economic aspects of the issue are inextricably linked, attacks on pay and conditions cannot be effectively fought without also fighting immigration controls. Campaigns to organise migrant workers have to include the demand for the regularisation of all migrants. No-one should be illegal.



approach to improving the lot of migrants and thereby raising the bottom line for the pay and conditions of all workers. Since undocumented workers are at the bottom of the pile and cannot use the legal system, DAC has great potential in this area. Even though the workers are themselves “illegal” this does not relieve bosses of their legal obligations towards their employ-

SolFed-IWA contacts

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International Workers' Association: IWA-AIT Secretariat, Poštanski Pretinac 6, 11077 Beograd, Serbia; +38 (0)1 63 26 37 75; secretariado@iwa-ait.org; www.iwa-ait.org.

| locals

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Coventry & West Midlands: c/o Northampton SolFed

Ipswich: c/o N&E London SolFed

Scarborough: c/o West Yorkshire SolFed

Sheffield: c/o West Yorkshire SolFed

South Hertfordshire: c/o North & East London SolFed

| other contacts & information

Catalyst (freesheet): c/o South London SolFed; catalyst@solfed.org.uk.

Education Workers' Network: c/o News From Nowhere, 96 Bold Street, Liverpool, L1 4HY; ewn@ewn.org.uk; www.ewn.org.uk; email list: ewn@lists.riseup.net.

Health & Care Workers Initiative: c/o Northampton SolFed.

Kowtowtonone: freesheet from West Yorkshire SolFed.

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

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

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

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

August 12th: Revolutionary Organisation in the Workplace
September 9th: Immigrant Struggles & Rudolf Rocker's Relevance Today
October 11th: tba

| friends & neighbours

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

AK Press: Anarchist publisher/distributor; PO Box 12766, Edinburgh, EH8 9YE; 0131 555 265; ak@akedin.demon.co.uk; www.akuk.com.

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

Hobnail Review: Guide to small press/alternative publishing from anti-authoritarian/libertarian left perspective; regular reviews & listings; send 2 1st class stamps - Hobnail Press, Box 208, 235 Earls Court Rd, London, SW5 9FE.

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

www.libcom.org: online news and resources

London Coalition Against Poverty: 07 932 241 737; londoncoalitionagainstopoverty@gmail.com; lcap_news-subscribe@riseup.net.

National Shop Stewards Network: http://www.shopstewards.net/.

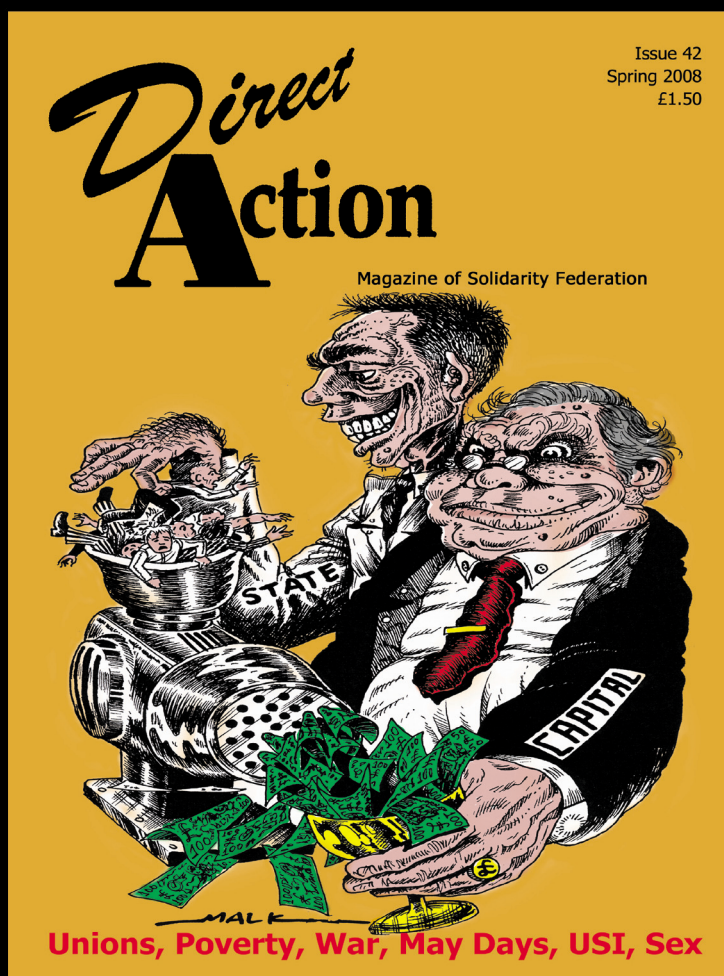
Organise!: Working Class Resistance freesheet/info; PO Box 505, Belfast, BT12 6BQ.

Radical Healthcare Workers: http://radicalhealthcareworkers.wordpress.com/.

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

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

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