

Direct Action

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Magazine of Solidarity Federation

***We Pay For
Capitalist Greed***



credit crunches and capitalist calamities
anarchism, fascism and the state
get rich or die tryin'

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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.

Privatising Profits, Socialising Losses

Free market theory argues that hedge funds,...currency speculation, private equity firms and the other obscene money making machines are somehow vital to...the economy.... [This] is a joke. They contribute nothing...and are merely a means by which the super-rich get even richer. Real economic wealth is created by the working class who...create the goods and services that are vital to society...

(from Hedging their Bets, DA39 summer 2007)

A *lmost totally lacking in regulation – that is, until the recent “stable door bolting” emergency restrictions against “short selling” and betting on declines in financial markets – hedge funds and their ilk have constantly moved trillions of dollars around the globe searching for ever higher returns and leaving economic chaos in their wake. And so it has proven yet again.*

Economic uncertainty, which had rumbled on for over a year, spilt spectacularly back into the headlines at the end of September, when the free market dream was abruptly brought crashing to its knees on both sides of the Atlantic. As the world financial system melts down and the economy convulses in response, the resulting shock waves will no doubt be felt far and wide for years to come.

The ensuing chaos in the banking sector has brought a rash of institutional failures and state backed rescue deals involving astronomical sums of public money to find what could become the biggest bail out in history. Meanwhile, although markets may not actually be paying attention to our advice to “never trust a politician” (DA41), Brown and co’s calls for calm and assurances of

stability have certainly gone unheeded – at least before the bail out.

Now the same super-rich elite that profited from the collapses in the likes of Russia and Asia during the 1990s have once more disappeared over the hill with billions. This time, however, it is those western economies that sit at the very heart of the modern imperialist web that are taking the hit. How this is going to play out in terms of the dominant ide-



John Paulson, top earning “Hedgie” of 2007, who bet on the mortgage market collapse, walking off with £1,900,000,000

ology within capitalism remains to be seen. But some shift in the balance between state intervention (or “socialism” as some

knuckle headed U.S. Republicans would call it) and free market *laissez faire*-y land seems inevitable.

Nevertheless, the spiralling cost of the downturn – in the form of soaring prices, rising unemployment, shrinking wage packets and increasing taxation – will yet again be borne by ordinary people. The actions of the hedge fund managers and the other speculators are nothing short of legalised theft; the actions of Bush, Brown and their like in bailing out the banks is nothing less than socialising the losses of private shareholders to protect the obscene profits of their super-rich friends, whose very greed is the root cause of the recession in the first place.

More than ever, these attacks on our living standards underline the need for working class organisation and solidarity in order to mount some resistance to the onslaught. In the longer term, this is the means by which we, as a class, can overcome both the state and the chaos of the market. If nothing else, surely the current crisis is proof enough that capitalism needs to be consigned to the annals of history where it so rightly belongs. Only then will society’s true economic wealth be harnessed, not to chase profit around the globe, but for the benefit of all.

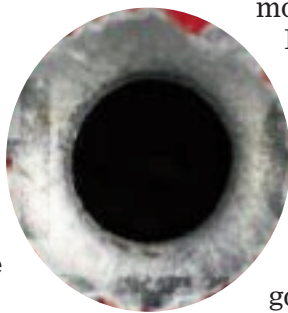


The Shock Doctrine

Dear DA,

I just wanted to thank your reviewer in **DA43** for turning me on to Naomi Klein's *Shock Doctrine*. I couldn't agree more with the comment that "the sheer scale of abuses detailed...is simply jaw-dropping". For one who felt hardened to the ways of the capitalist world, this account of sheer cynicism, corruption, double standards and outright lies was still something of an eye opener.

I'd also like to leave your readers with one thought for the current climate. If the *Shock Doctrine* thesis holds water then maybe the recent financial meltdown is only the latest shock that will provide yet more massive pickings for the free market vultures. Emergency bail outs of banking systems need massive borrowing on the international



money markets. The IMF for one, as Klein so clearly shows, will demand something back on top of the years of debt repayment. If the past is anything to go by, then we're going to see more sell offs of state owned assets.

What would this mean in Britain, with up to £400 billion that needs finding for the promised bail out? Full blown American style privatisation in the health and education sectors? Certainly this New Labour government has brought in elements of privatisation through the back door in both sectors, so there's no ideological objection. The same goes for the Post Office, with the Communication Workers Union perhaps cast in a similar role to the NUM in times gone by.

Regards,
MMcC, Fife.

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The Shape of Things to Come

Dear DA,

The EU is currently developing a new 5 year strategy for justice and home affairs and security policy for 2009-2014. The proposals set out by the shadowy "Future Group" set up by the Council of the European Union include a range of highly controversial measures including new technologies of surveillance, enhanced cooperation with the United States and harnessing the "digital tsunami". In the words of the EU Council presidency:

Every object the individual uses, every transaction they make and almost everywhere they go will create a detailed digital record. This will generate a wealth of information for public security organisations, and create huge opportunities for more effective and productive public security efforts.

Seven years on from 11 September 2001 and the launch of the "war on terrorism" a major new report *The Shape of Things to Come* (60 pages) examines the proposals of the Future Group and their effect on civil liberties. It shows how European governments and EU policy-makers are pursuing unfettered powers to access and gather masses of personal data on the everyday life of everyone – on the grounds that we can all be safe and secure from perceived "threats".

The *Statewatch* report calls for a "meaningful and wide-ranging debate" before it is "too late" for privacy and civil liberties.

For 8-page conclusions or full report:

<http://www.statewatch.org/news/2008/sep/the-shape-of-things-to-come-conclusions.pdf>

<http://www.statewatch.org/analyses/the-shape-of-things-to-come.pdf>

From all at *Statewatch*.

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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

Financial Crisis: What Happened? What Next?

Dear *DA*,

Even without really understanding the current "financial 9/11", one can pick up a sense of fear, panic and uncertainty.

Blame for the crisis is attributed to "greed and fear"...or insufficient regulation...or too high bonuses paid to financial whizz kids...or irresponsible lenders pushing cheap loans...or irresponsible individuals accepting them...and so on.

But the crisis also needs a deeper structural analysis of how financial markets have changed over the past 2-3 decades – because it is these changes that lie behind the current financial meltdown, particularly those changes associated with "new financial instruments" and "vehicles" such as derivatives and private equity.

And because the neoliberal edifice has been so spectacularly shaken in these past few months, the crisis also provides an opportunity for the public to redefine what constitutes "the public interest" and to reassert its claims over how finance should be managed and allocated and in whose interest.

For the past couple of years, The Corner House and its colleagues have been trying to understand the impacts of the new finance on the ground – for instance, on communities affected by mining or planta-

tions – and to analyse what difference it might make to solidarity strategies with affected communities: Is capital just capital, whether it comes from hedge funds, private equity, banks or the state? Or does the very structure of this new finance create new challenges?

Our work on this is still unfolding, but with the financial landscape changing by the day, we thought we should share with you now our analysis to date. So we have posted on our website two papers – see www.thecornerhouse.org.uk:

*A (Crumbling) Wall of Money:
Financial Bricolage, Derivatives
and Power*

*Taking it Private: Consequences of
the Global Growth of Private
Equity*

Because events are still unfolding so rapidly, however, we are posting them as "works in progress" that we aim to update as soon as we can.

Within the next few weeks, we hope to post other papers on sovereign wealth funds, hedge funds, and the liberalisation of the banking and financial system that enabled the crisis to happen.

We hope you find the papers useful. Your comments and feedback are always welcome.

Best wishes from all at The Corner House

Union Busters

Dear *DA*,

There's a new threat to workers organisation stalking the British labour relations scene. Employers are increasingly turning to U.S. style management consultants that "specialise in union avoidance and preventative industrial labour relations". At least, that's how the Burke Group describes itself. The Omega Division, an arm of Burke, was last year called in by Lion Capital, owner of Kettle Foods, in its attempt to prevent the T&G/Unite from organising workers at its Norwich plant. The Burke Group has also been consulted by T-mobile and Virgin Atlantic.

Another name in the business is law firm, Pinsent Mason, which has been widely consulted by British universities in their efforts to undermine the unions. This has come to a head at Nottingham Trent University which has derecognised the campus trade unions and brought in new "employee forums".* This looks likely to lead to strike action, and managers throughout education and beyond will be watching and waiting.

See: www.ntuucu.org.uk/RAD.htm for further information.

Solidarity,
Jan, Nottingham

*See latest issue of *Education Worker*

Credit Crunches and

Just when you think the credit crunch may be past the worse, along comes another bank, or two, or three, going bust and the financial system is thrown yet again into crisis. Afd as each crisis hits, governments rush in with our billions, to keep the whole financial sector from collapse.

So much for all that crap preached for years about the need for market discipline under which uneconomic companies are allowed to go to the wall. It would seem that the iron laws of the free market only apply to coal mines. The banks are allowed to play by another set of free market rules, in which the well connected are allowed to make billions from corrupt deals, then when it all starts to fall apart, we pay the price with rising unemployment, falling living standards and repossession. In the words of the old song, it's the rich who get the pleasure and the poor who get the blame.



And what about all that nonsense from Labour that we can no longer afford to use public money to build houses, hospitals and schools. For years Labour has forced PFI (private finance initiatives) down our throats, a system under which fortunes are borrowed from the private sector, at

loan shark rates, in order to finance public sector buildings. Now here we are pouring in public money to keep the financial sector afloat. Would it not have been a tad cheaper to use the vast amounts of money being used to bail out the financial system on building schools and hospitals in the first place?

That we should find ourselves in the current mess should come as no surprise. The whole history of capitalism has been one of booms followed by bust. The markets are inherently unstable due to their internal contradictions and the freer they are the more unstable they become. That is precisely why state regulation was introduced in the first place as an attempt to stop the whole chaotic market system from going down the plughole.

This lesson, that capitalism is profoundly unstable, was lost on a new right wing breed, made giddy on long discredited free market ideology. The Thatcherites dusted off the old free market textbooks, injected some of their own dodgy economics and announced to the world that they now had the solu-

tions that would free the world from the evils of the state.

From the 1980s the Tories started to dismantle state regulation. In the City this took the form of the "big bang", which heralded the era of deregulated financial markets. That the "big bang" would end up in a "big mess" should have been obvious from the outset. If the sight of all those obnoxious city traders, off their heads on a mixture of money and cocaine, was not enough, little things like the "saving and loan" scandal or the "dot.com" crash should have been enough to warn our glorious leaders that, just perhaps, all was not quite right in the financial sector.

But no; these warning sign were ignored. Labour were quite happy to see the country slip ever further into debt. As ever bigger slices of people's income was handed over to the filthy rich in the form of interest payments, the City of London boomed. Labour leaders began to brag how deregulation had turned the "City" into the world's leading financial centre. Taking the lead from their "new comrades" from the extreme free market right, Labour even started to boast that capitalist boom and bust had been overcome. Life from then on was going to be one long economic party.

All of which now seems just a little bit over-optimistic. But as governments struggle to stop capitalism going into meltdown, we should not be seduced into thinking that once the crisis has passed, it will be back to business as usual. There will be a price to pay for the current debacle. And

Capitalist Calamities

not just by the population as a whole. It is true that those at the top, and in the know, have been able to walk away from the car crash, having earned a fortune for doing nothing. But there will be a reckoning and that reckoning will be paid for by the right, whose whole free market ideology now stands in tatters.

Events like the credit crunch change perceptions; they alter how people view the world. And amid those changing perceptions free market solutions no longer have a place. Free market ideology had already lost its allure; gross inequality, obscene wealth, privatised utilities hiking up bills and making billions, had already tarnished many of their ideas. The credit crunch will be the end of them.

But before going out and celebrating the demise of the right, it's worth remembering just how we ended up with a lunatic like Thatcher. The Tories came to power in the late 1970s on the back of economic crisis, which state regulation had failed to control. As unemployment grew and inflation shot through the roof, panic set in and people started turning to free market solutions in desperation. It was that failure of the whole post Second World War state interventionist project which breathed new life into a moribund set of free market ideas, long abandoned by the sane after the horrors of 1930s depression.

So, as the social democratic bandwagon begins to roll and calls for ever greater state intervention increase, it is worth remembering that it was the failure of state

intervention to control the worst excesses of capitalism, that got us here in the first place.

It may be true that certain sectors of the economy, such as health and education, are much too important to be left to the gross inequality of the markets, but that is not saying much. The idea that the state is the answer to all our problems has been the disaster that wrecked the socialist movement in the 20th century. State control cannot replace capitalism; look at the Soviet Union. Nor can state intervention be an instrument for making capitalism



a pair of bankers

a more humane system. Ultimately, the capitalist beast will always slip the state leash, causing mayhem in its wake.

So state intervention may get capitalism through the current crisis but it offers no long term solutions. As long as there is capitalism there will be instability, inequality and misery for much of the world's population. The only real solution is to rid our-

selves of capitalism for good. And for capitalism to go the labour movement has to reinvent itself and once again begin to challenge the very existence of capitalism.

At the heart of that redefining of socialism has to be an alternative to market forces. It is here that anarcho-syndicalism has much to offer – an alternative to the market that is not dependent on the state. As opposed to a state run economy we put forward a democratically controlled economy based on workers' control.

Anarcho-syndicalism argues that the economy should be owned and run by society as a whole to the benefit of each and every one of us. In contrast to the chaos of the market, we propose a planned economy in which goods and services are produced to meet need rather than profit, a system in which all the rich resources that society has to offer are made available to everyone so that we can all develop and explore our individuality to the fullest.

Without an alternative to capitalism we are condemned to live with its many failings. Standards of living may rise and the quality of life improve but such gains will always be dependent on a failing and unjust system controlled by such charming people as hedge fund managers. The task facing us all at the start of the 21st century is not only to organise as working class people to improve our immediate lives but to constantly link the fight for improvements to the wider struggle to rid the world of the capitalist system that will always put profit before people.

Our Health, our Care, our

reports and comment from the

Putting Profits First

In the last couple of years, the Government has announced far-reaching plans to radically transform the way in which social care is delivered to vulnerable members of our community. With the *Our Health, Our Care, Our Say* White Paper and "Putting People First", plans to massively extend the use of individualised budgets and self-directed support schemes have been outlined.

So what does this mean in practice? And what are the implications for both service users and their carers?

Well, in a nutshell, self-directed support means that, in future, individual budgets will be paid directly to people in need of help – in theory to enable them to exercise choice, control and flexibility over their support. This

effectively entails them acting in the capacity of employer to their carers, or personal assistants (PAs) as they are now called. However, while this sounds all very well in theory, it is actually far more beset with problems than first meets the eye. Research conducted over recent months into personalised budget schemes has exposed a number of serious flaws, and in the process, inadvertently revealed the government's true incentive for introducing the scheme in the first place.

A joint study conducted by UNISON and the Scottish Personal Assistant Employer's Network (SPAEN) earlier this year showed that PAs employed by people with disabilities failed to benefit from the minimum wage, statutory leave or maternity pay. Further, service users often reported being left without support if their PAs went sick.

The Chairperson of SPAEN, who is also a service user, expressed concern at the lack of training given to users in employing and managing staff; a recurrent failing which the government is still to address. Skills for Care, the professional body providing guidance on workforce development in social care, found that nearly half of the service users they surveyed had not completed adequate pre-employment checks on the PAs they employed. The implications of this are that a vulnerable person could, in theory, have employed a convicted sex offender or serial thief.

Feedback from one direct payment scheme, "In Control", in Oldham, revealed that some agency support workers employed were inadequately trained to support people with complex needs such as hoisting. Indeed, self-directed support schemes still do not fund service users to provide the specialist training that the people supporting them may require.



The suspicion that part of the overall plan of the personalisation agenda is to de-skill and de-professionalise the whole social care workforce (thereby cutting costs) was partially confirmed in August when Wirral Council announced plans to cut 29 qualified social worker posts, whilst simultaneously expanding non-qualified positions. Other local authorities look set to follow suit. One North West social worker summed up the concerns of many:

The whole personalisation agenda...is just a disaster waiting to happen. For all the positive spin and rhetoric the government provides about giving people choice and control, the reality is that service users and personal assistants alike are being left wide open to abuse. I cannot understand how the rest of the social care workforce can be required to adhere to professional codes of conduct, policies, procedures and training programmes while personal assistants are not. The whole self-directed support model seems devoid of any regulation and service users have the onerous responsibility of employing PAs without adequate training or support. It is simply inconceivable that the powers-that-be could not have foreseen these problems. Individualised budgets are being extended daily and still nothing is being done to address these fundamental issues. To me the whole thing stinks. It's all about cutting costs and privatisation by the back door.

Education Worker

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Say? You must be Joking

health and social care frontline

Migrant Care Workers Abused

Joint research carried out by Citizens Advice and the TUC published in late August identified the low-paid care sector as having “some of the highest incidences of employment rights abuse”. Nicola Smith, Senior Policy Officer on the TUC’s Commission on Vulnerable Employment cited that legal migrant workers employed by agencies to work in care (who need 12

month’s employment before they are entitled to UK rights and benefits), were often threatened with deportation or the sack if they reported abuse. These commonly included issues on pay, dismissal and working hours. Smith also expressed concern that the government had not extended the writ of the Gangmasters Licensing Authority to cover the care sector.



Battle to Save GP Surgeries

Sixty years after its birth, the process of auctioning off the most profitable sections of the NHS is now well and truly underway. GPs who have traditionally run their own small, locally-based surgeries are now being forced to compete with huge international companies as a result of legislative changes introduced in 2003.

to say, are not bound by NHS terms and conditions and pension schemes, which allows them to undercut wage costs and offer vastly reduced tender prices. Commercial bodies are also more preoccupied with making profits than making sure that patients get optimum care.

Primary Care Trusts who manage and oversee local healthcare budgets are increasingly being swayed by a new Alternative Provider of Medical Services (APMS) contract model which enables GP surgeries to be sold off to big profit-making companies like Virgin, Boots and the US corporation, United Healthcare Europe. The latter body is the British section of the largest healthcare provider in the United States – which is under investigation there for allegedly using subsidiary company Ingenix to defraud patients by manipulating benefits below the usual costs.

The Darzi Report in 2007 introduced the concept of polyclinics, large impersonal GP-led health centres designed to replace traditional, more intimate surgeries. However, groups like Stop Haringey Health Cuts Coalition have sprung up in opposition. In the last 3 years coordinated protest and resistance to £15-20 million worth of local cuts, closures and threats of privatisation has occurred. One activist describes how:



Our main tactics have included extensive e-mailing through affiliates, mass leafleting, regular presentations backed by

In the London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Camden, local GPs lost out in the tendering process, and practices were duly transferred into private hands. Commercial contractors, needless

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lobbies and protests at PCT Board meetings and Council Scrutiny Committees. In the last 4 months there has been uproar over local plans to force GPs into polyclinics which would result in the closure of 45 out of 60 surgeries. The eyes of the country are on Haringey which appears to have been chosen as a guinea-pig for a highly controversial "slash and burn" approach to this reform.



We have publicised and joined protests organised by campaigners in neighbouring boroughs such as the recent anti-privatisation protest at the Whittington Hospital in Camden, and last year's 5,000 strong march to save Chase Farm hospital in Enfield.

We've also sent delegations to [campaign group] Keep Our NHS Public meetings because we know that it is vital to link up all the many grass-roots struggles and campaigns into a countrywide movement capable of ensuring the free, comprehensive and world class public health services our communities are entitled to.

For more information on grass-roots struggles against NHS privatisation, cuts and closures, see:

www.keepournhspublic.com.

Comment

These 3 articles demonstrate New Labour's unflinching commitment to privatisation, deregulation and cutbacks in vital public health and social care services. At a time when the economy is on the downturn, with the government firmly committed to neo-liberal policies, workers and communities are bearing the brunt. We have already seen the devastating effects with the nationwide hospital superbug epidemic. (Incidentally, figures published by the Office for National Statistics in August confirmed a 28% annual rise in the number of patients dying while infected with superbug C-Difficile). Pinpointing the underlying cause, Karen Jennings of UNISON said:

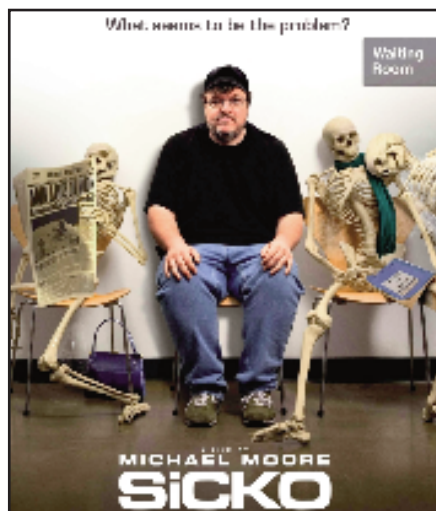
We are losing any sense of collective responsibility or equity in the NHS. The super bug phenomenon can be directly attributed to the contracting out process: hospitals had 50% more cleaners in 1982 than in 2007.

Anyone unconvinced of the dire consequences of privatisation should see Michael Moore's *Sicko*, which chronicles the abysmal state of the fully privatised US system.

In order to combat these wholesale attacks on our services and working conditions, positive action-based solidarity between workers and local

communities is needed. We cannot rely on the politicians and bureaucrats, who, for all their silver-tongued spin, are working towards their own clear long term agenda.

In the final analysis, under capitalism health and social care provision will always be seen as a disposable, dispensable commodity, playing very much second fiddle to the bosses' drive to make profits. So while we expose and resist cutbacks in the here and now, we work towards a time when the services we use and provide are directly shaped, organised and controlled by the workers and local communities who know them best.



Housing Associations & Housing Benefit

For two years running, the Housing Association (HA) that owns my dad's home have not informed the local council of the annual rent increase. The house was council owned but was transferred over to the HA, in this case L&Q, some years ago.

Housing benefit (HB) is treated differently when paid to council tenants – they receive it in advance, usually weekly or fortnightly. The council pays it and usually tells itself when the rent rises so there is no break in claim for the tenant.

HAs are treated as private landlords, and HB is paid 4-weekly in arrears. This alone can be quite a shock to council tenants transferring to a new landlord. While it is good practice for HAs to inform the local council when the rent goes up, it is not compulsory. The HB regulations state that it is the duty of the tenant to inform the council of any change in their circumstances, including any change in their rent. Not surprisingly, many ex-council tenants don't realise they need to do this. When I challenged L&Q last year, they fell back on this defence. In both instances I was able to get the difference in HB backdated, but I'm sure there are people who have lost out.

As the rent for HA properties often goes up by more than £5 a week, it doesn't take long for the discrepancy between the old and new benefit rates to build up. In cases like this, it's worth applying for backdating of HB in the first instance. If that isn't successful, the HA should be put under pressure, particularly as it is in their own interests as a business to maximise the HB their tenants get, which can be achieved simply by sending a file to the local council.

If you want help on a case like this, contact South London SolFed:

PO Box 17773, London, SE8 4WX;
07 956 446 162;
southlondonsf@solfed.org.uk

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 felt bound by class, with a massive majority - 89 per cent - of those surveyed feeling their social standing determined the way they are judged by the rest of society.

HEALTH AND WEALTH

A report recently released by the End Child Poverty campaign group - based on a comprehensive analysis of government data - reveals that an epidemic of poverty in Britain is having a dramatic impact on the survival rates and life chances of children from poor families.

The report, which also makes a mockery of New Labour's "commitment" to eradicate child poverty "within a generation", found:

Children from poor families suffer

10 times the risk of sudden infant death syndrome as children from better-off homes.

Babies born to disadvantaged families weigh an average of 200 grammes less than children from the richest families.

Poorer children are two and a half times more likely to suffer chronic illness when toddlers and twice as likely to have cerebral palsy.

Children living in disadvantaged families are over 3 times more like-

ly to suffer from mental health disorders as those from well-off families.

Infants living in a household with an annual income of below £10,400 are twice as likely to suffer from asthma as those from families earning over £52,000.

Furthermore, the report also suggests that the consequences of poverty continue well into later life, with adults from deprived families 50% more likely to suffer serious, debilitating conditions



such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

Donald Hirsch, co-author of the *Health Consequences of Poverty for Children* report, commented:

It is one of society's greatest inequalities that poor health is so dramatically linked to poverty... This is a huge injustice for one of the richest nations in the world.

Echoing similar sentiments, another report, this time by the World Health Organisation - on discovering variations in life expectancy of nearly 30 years between two areas of Glasgow - warned:

Biology does not explain any of this...social injustice is killing people on a grand scale.

We couldn't have said it better ourselves.

Tax Credits favour the middle class

According to a recent report from Barnardos and the accountants Deloitte, the number of children living in poverty could be dramatically reduced in months. The report says the Prime Minister's cherished target of halving child poverty by 2010 can be met without any extra cost to the taxpayer. It was published on the eve of the Labour Party conference in Manchester, the city with the highest proportion of disadvantaged youngsters in the country.

Under current spending plans and with the UK facing the prospect of a recession, 2.2 million children will live below the poverty line in two years - 550,000 more than the

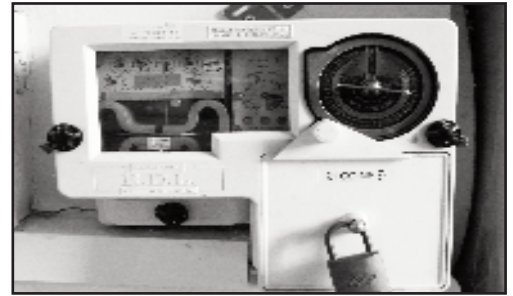
Government's target. The report says £1.35bn a year could be raised by reducing the upper limit at which families are eligible for tax credits, from £50,000 to £40,000. The £2.7bn used to compensate families for the abolition of the 10p tax rate earlier this year could be diverted to helping the poorest households.

Barnardo's and Deloitte argue that those who gained most from the £2.7bn handout were middle-income families earning £35,000, who received an average of £3.31 a week. Those who gained the least were families earning less than £16,000, who received an average of 44p extra a week.

Not very revolutionary but much too much for this Labour government to take in.

Domestic Fuel: The Facts

The colossal hikes in domestic fuel prices seen this year represent one of the most flagrant abuses committed by big business against ordinary citizens in the UK.



Household fuel bills have soared by an average of 42% since January

6.8 million households are now in fuel debt

1 in 5 households are now officially classed as being in fuel poverty

Meanwhile...

Annual profits announced by energy suppliers this year: £3 billion

Annual increase in dividend payouts to shareholders on last year: 20%

The rise in dividend payments rubbishes earlier claims made by the energy companies that they needed to maintain high prices in order to invest in new forms of energy for the future.

Brown and Co. even ignored calls for a piecemeal windfall tax, and the grim reality is that many, particularly the old and the most vulnerable, will be forced to choose between eating and heating their homes this winter.

That's capitalism, and its twisted morality: protect the profits of big business at all cost - whatever the consequences. But in the final analysis, this state of affairs, can only continue as long as we allow it to...



"The super-rich have not created much in the way of extra wealth - they have mostly taken it from the rest of us. It's Robin Hood in reverse. Those suffering from the impact of the credit crunch should know that it was caused by the super-rich taking risks with other people's money, pocketing the profits and passing on the inevitable losses."

Brendan Barber, TUC General Secretary - telling the truth, but still waiting in vain for New Labour to deliver the goods.

Work, Buy, Consume, Die!

why capitalism needs the consumer dream and we don't

During the 1950s, at a time when the U.S. was in recession, Victor Lebow outlined what was to become one of the enduring tenets of global capitalism in the years to come:

Our enormously productive economy demands we make consumption our way of life, that we convert buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction in consumption. We need things to be consumed, burned up, replaced and discarded at an ever accelerating rate.

And so mass consumerism was ushered in. Indeed, the inescapable need for us to work hard and spend hard is now instilled in us, virtually from birth. But while this mass materialist mantra is highly effective in funnelling huge profits to the super-rich, the consumer dream is fast becoming a nightmare of cataclysmic proportions which threatens to suck us all into its destructive vortex.

Unmistakably, the consumer dream now pervades every area of our lives and, in an era of globalisation, virtually every corner of the planet. Five major processes are integral to the materialist economy, and most of us in paid employment will be involved in at least one of them. These include extraction; manufacture; distribution; marketing; consumption; and finally, disposal.

I asked the president, "What can we do to show support for America?" He said, "Mom, if you really want to help, buy, buy, buy".

(Barbara Bush, 2001)

Buoyed by mass advertising, two calculated marketing strategies, Planned Obsolescence and Perceived Obsolescence are used to hook us into the mass consumer frenzy which teaches us that in order to have value and happiness, we must spend, spend, spend. (Easy credit also helps, of course.)

Planned Obsolescence entails industry manufacturing goods deliberately designed to break or become out of date quickly. Perceived Obsolescence convinces us that the stuff we have, although still functional, needs to be upgraded. This is achieved by changing the colour, style and function of the product, to create the latest must

But while this endless cycle of production and consumption creates enormous wealth for the few at the top of society, the lasting economic, environmental and social costs are profound.

The extraction of raw materials, by its very nature, destroys the environment. From strip mining to deforestation, the taking of resources from the planet leaves desolation and hardship in its wake. Populations, especially those in poor countries, are forced to leave ancestral lands as industry moves in to obtain its much needed raw materials. Refinement of materials into manufactured commodities and fancy packaging produces millions of tons of industrial waste. Transportation of goods to retail outlets across the globe burns up more resources, generating further pollution.

A few facts to consider – see www.storyofstuff.com:

In the past 3 decades one third of the world's resources have been consumed. If we continue to extract and produce at current rates, soon there will be nothing left.

If the entire world consumed at the rate of the USA, we would need up to 5 planets to support us. 99% of goods bought in North America are disposed of within 6 months.

We are losing 2,000 trees a minute, and last year, the global production of hazardous waste reached more than 300 million tons.



have accessory in our daily lives. Our new state of the art computers, mobile phones, TVs and CD players quickly become outdated. Cars are intentionally built to fall into disrepair. Fashion accessories, clothing and hairstyles are constantly changing and so on.

So much for the environmental costs, what about the social impact?

In his book 'Affluenza', the psychologist Oliver James describes how our dog-eat-dog consumer culture gives rise to obsessive, envious emotional states, making us prone to anxiety, depression and addiction. (It may also be surmised that the culture of ruthless selfishness upon which modern capitalism legitimises itself, prompts a multitude of other dysfunctional, anti-social and violent behaviours.)

Impossible ideals of beauty and nubility are foisted upon women daily by advertising and the mass media – primarily to boost profits in cosmetic products/ surgery, diets, fashion items and so on. Consciously or subliminally, mass marketing

has the effect of producing mass dissatisfaction; cured temporarily by a course of highly addictive retail therapy. I recently read about a study into the steep rise in eating disorders in the Cook

Islands, which coincided with the influx of western marketing and its idealised images of feminine desirability and perfection. Significantly, before the arrival of consumer culture, eating disorders had been virtually unknown on the islands. Manufacturing artificial needs and dissatisfaction to sell goods (and services) is what capitalism is all about.

But the harmful effects of mass marketed discontent are not con-

fined to adults. A recent study undertaken by Cambridge University into the psychological states of primary school children revealed high levels of stress and consumption obsession. The commercialisation of childhood is an industry now estimated to be worth £30 million annually in the UK alone. Back in the U.S., a recent American Psychological Association study produced compelling evidence of the media's sexualisation of girls as young as five – breeding a preoccupation with body image and dieting. Encouraging kids to grow up prematurely serves the economy by fuelling spending on dating, cosmetics, music, fashion and other such trappings of young adulthood. Morgan Spurlock's film 'Supersize Me' exposed

cates that our collective misery has become more acute since the 1980's – a time when Thatcherite selfish capitalism was at its height. And, as James points out, the most significant act of selfish capitalism – which has also been enthusiastically embraced by New Labour – has been to rob the poor to give to the rich. Misery (surprise, surprise) is also linked to poverty and debt, other inevitable by-products of the prevailing political, economic and social infrastructure. Consumer debt in Britain alone is estimated at a staggering £1.3 trillion, and with social inequality, recession and the rising cost of living precipitating growing absolute poverty, the system is crying out not for reform, but complete overhaul.

However, capitalism is remarkably resolute. Its capacity for absorbing and commodifying the very disenchantment it churns out with such efficiency is highly impressive. A whole industry of self-appointed gurus has sprung up to sell us alternative therapies, lifestyles, guides and other panaceas for our terminal disconnectedness. Notably, all the 'solutions' offered are strikingly similar in their inability to offer any genuinely empowering collective solutions to the socio-economic systems which form the primary cause of our discontent. You can be as spiritually enlightened as you want, but its not going to stop the polar icecaps from melting of the poor from starving.



how the junk food industry deliberately targets children with feel good advertising, premeditated to make consumption of their (unhealthy) products an everyday, lifelong ritual. With 1 in 5 U.S. meals comprising of fast food, there is every reason to believe that this strategy has been a success, even if this has been to the lasting detriment of the nation's public health.

A considerable body of evidence (showcased in James' most recent book, 'the Selfish Capitalist') indi-

So there we have it. By treating the planet and its resources as an inexhaustible, disposable commodity, consumer capitalism literally threatens our very long term existence. Without even beginning to consider the damaging effects of wage-slavery on us (see Work is Slavery), the colossal production-consumption corollary spawns poverty, misery, and ill health – surely a recipe for far-reaching and radical social change if ever there was one.

Work is Slavery

unsavoury truths of the global capitalist production line

The portentous development of our present economic system, leading to a mighty accumulation of social wealth in the hands of privileged minorities and to a constant repression of the great masses of people, prepared the way for the present political and social reaction and befriended it in every way. It sacrificed the general interests of human society to the private interests of individuals, and thus systematically undermined the true relationship between men. People forgot that industry is not an end in itself, but should be only a means to insure to man his material subsistence and to make accessible to him/her the blessings of higher intellectual culture. Where industry is everything, where labour loses its ethical importance and man is nothing, there begins the realm of ruthless economic despotism, whose workings are no less disastrous than those of any political despotism.

Rudolf Rocker (1873-1958)

Ever felt like you're trapped in a meaningless job or rat race? Well, if it's any consolation you're certainly not alone. Research on attitudes of employees to work consistently reveals patterns of disillusion, powerlessness, insecurity, stress, and poor income. Despite the UK having the longest average working hours in Europe, it has one of the lowest levels of productivity. See:

www.anxietyculture.com/workhellprt.htm

In addition, since the 1980s, the mass deployment of casualised labour, privatisation of public services and implementation of anti-union legislation has further forced down wages and led to worsening working conditions for the majority. The converse symmetry of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer has closely paralleled these trends.

Like it or not, most of us have no choice but to sell our labour in order to earn a living – that is, we are wage slaves. As workers, we are only remunerated for a fraction of our true worth, with the surplus value of our labours extracted by the owners of

the means of production in the form of profit. Profit levels are maintained only by the owners paying workers as little as possible. Hence, since the birth of the industrial revolution, a fundamental conflict of interest has existed. To put this in more concrete terms, consider the following:

In the Forbes 400 list of the richest people in the world, 5 of the top 10 were members of the Walton family, owners of Wal-Mart. (Forbes 2004)

The average annual pay for a cashier at Wal-Mart is \$14,000, \$1,000 below the federal poverty line for a family of three. (Wal-Mart Watch 2005)

Michael Eisener, CEO of Disney, makes \$9,783 an hour compared with a Haitian worker who stitches Disney products for 28 cents an hour. (K. Viner, The Guardian 2000)

Corporations, the dominant transnational bodies which form the main-

stay of the modern global economy, are motivated in the final analysis by two priorities. The first is the need to make profit; the second is the need to increase market share and expand. These imperatives are succinctly summed up in Coca Cola's annual report of 1993:

All of us in the Coca-Cola family wake up each morning knowing that every single one of the world's 5.6 billion people will get thirsty



that day.... If we make it impossible for these people to escape Coca-Cola...then we assure our future success for many years to come. Doing anything else is not an option.

In placing the profit motive above all else, it is easy to see why, in a competitive market economy, humanitarian and ecological concerns take a back seat, and why poverty, imperialism and environmental degradation are the accepted norm. But another side effect of this dynamic is the immense waste of our productive and creative potential to benefit all of humanity.

In *Work, Buy, Consume, Die!* we cited how corporate profits are realised via the deliberate and concerted manufacture of artificial consumer need. Consider the huge amounts of labour time deployed in the various processes that are integral to this – from extraction to marketing to disposal. Think how many are engaged in jobs which involve selling us crap we neither need nor want. Look at the endless tiers of bureaucracy and management that are the norm in most large organisations. Think of the colossal quantities of labour time invested in preparing for and conducting war, or the numbers employed to tinker with the volatile financial markets. Then consider the massive state machinery that propagates, enforces, and props up the whole system. You don't need an intricate understanding of Marx's theory of alienation to realise that most jobs are pointless – serving no other purpose than making someone, somewhere, very rich.

George Bernard Shaw predicted that by the year 2000 we'd all be working a two day week, but in stark contrast, a *Labour Force Survey* showed that working hours for full timers in the UK have actually increased in the last 20 years. Long working hours and so-called high performance management techniques have merely given rise to burgeoning stress levels. A 2002

study in the *British Medical Journal* found that those with stressful jobs are twice as likely to die from heart disease. Reflecting the prevalence of unsafe working conditions, a UN report from the same year revealed that work kills more than war or, for that matter, alcohol and drugs. And it's getting worse; earlier this year, the Health and Safety Executive reported an 11% rise in workplace related fatalities in 2006-7.

To further rub salt into the wounds, capitalism disproportionately rewards those who stoke the fires of economic growth for their own selfish gain, compared to those who ply their trade to benefit the community. As top CEOs command salaries of over £2.5 million a year, care workers barely get paid the minimum wage. The wealth gap in Britain is bigger now than it has been for 40 years and, as the lives of the ultra-rich grow ever more opulent, there is scant evidence of any trickle down effect. Internationally, the picture is even bleaker. As extensive sweatshop labour delivers huge returns for the global fashion and grocery industries, workers on the receiving end exist in squalor, denied even the most basic pay and conditions.

Via the deliberate and calculated misdirection of productive forces, the deaths of millions can be directly attributed to global capital. In a world of lightning quick communications and breathtaking technologies, some 24,000 starve every day when, as Jean Ziegler of the UN pointed out, "world agriculture could feed the population twice over, at its current level of productivity". But feeding the poor is simply not profitable, and with unfettered market forces and financial speculation massively inflating global energy and food prices, more and more go hungry. And for what? This entire sham functions for no other reason than to feed the fortunes of



the corporate and political oligarchs who lord it up at our expense. And whilst we remain inescapably shackled to the profit/power discourse, our relative and actual enslavement will continue – however many courses of therapy (retail or otherwise) we endure to relieve the pain.

But it could all be so different.

So what is the solution? Well, what we clearly *don't* need is another manual on downshifting, or a repackaged, fluffier brand of capitalism, for it is the entire barbaric system, driven by profit, maintained by power, that is rotten to the core. If we really want a more sustainable, just and contented world, one where hunger, war and want are consigned to history, libertarian socialism is the only practical solution. Power needs to be wrestled back from the elites who have constructed the whole world economy to serve their own narrow interests. A system of popular direct democracy is required to restore power and decision making to the people, and productive forces based on co-operative mutual aid need to be garnered towards fulfilling the needs and wants of our communities as a whole. This would mean less work, less waste, better social relationships and, with the judicious use of technology, much more time to enjoy ourselves.

Such a radical prescription for change may seem utopian and motivated by higher civilised aspirations, but even our most fervent detractors cannot deny that continuing as we are is simply not an option. Rather, the unrealistic ones are those advocating that we proceed along the same path or, alternatively, submit to the tyranny of yet another "socialist" dictatorship.



Anarchism, Fascism & the State

This year marks the 75th anniversary of Hitler's accession to power; it is appropriate therefore to look again at fascism, and to remind ourselves of those salient features of fascist movements and regimes which have become obscured with the passage of time. There is more to fascism than the legacy of war and genocide. That was where fascism ended, but during its rise, and where it took power in the years before the Second World War, many observers, particularly those on the left, noted its anti-working class bias and the nature of the economic system over which it presided.

No little nonsense is written about fascism these days, mostly by historians and commentators trying to explain it without a class perspective. They are therefore prone to being led astray by claims made by fascism about itself, claims which, then as now, were designed to obscure its true nature and to prevent people asking the important questions: under what conditions did fascism grow, how was it elevated to power and who benefited from its rule?

Fascists presented themselves as idealists, as saviours of race and nation and as the heralds of a new age. They spoke of heroism, glory and redemption. Their movements and regimes cloaked themselves in pageantry, ritual and spectacle. This was a heady mix, and fooled many at the time. Yet it has also filtered into more recent attempts to explain what fascism was, and writers who are not sufficiently critical are at best perpetuating the myths that fascism spun, and at worst obscuring important lessons learned

the hard way.

The keenest observers of fascism were on the left. This is unsurprising as fascist movements made it their business to attack socialists, communists and anarchists almost from their inception. Fascism emerges in times of intense economic crisis or social upheaval and draws support from those classes which feel themselves threatened by the resulting working class discontent.

italy: revolution and reaction

In Italy, the birthplace of fascism, the movement had been ignited by nationalist sentiment engendered by the outbreak of the First World War. It took hold among those who believed Italian neutrality to be a mark of shame and who saw in the conflict an opportunity to revive national pride and to seize territory beyond Italy's borders. Mussolini and others formerly of the left abandoned

their socialism and embraced nationalism. Italy entered the war in 1915, but this band of interventionists emerged embittered at the minimal gains the country received in the aftermath.

Their hatred was quickly turned against other Italians when the post-war depression led workers to occupy factories and peasants to seize the estates of the landed gentry. To the fascists, these were Italy's new enemies, and the industrial and agrarian ruling class, terrified by the threat of revolution, eagerly turned to fascism as a means of crushing these movements and securing their status and profits.

In fact, the industrial strike wave was undermined without overmuch fascist intervention, defeated not least by the moderation of the reformist trade union leaders who, much like the British TUC in the 1926 General Strike, were as scared of revolution

as were the ruling class.

Nevertheless, Italian fascism eagerly entered the fray in many areas, beating and murdering workers and peasants, and attacking the premises of the left. In this they were blatantly aided by the state. Police turned a blind eye to fascist "expeditions", the army provided them with weapons, transport, training and personnel, while political leaders often looked on with glee at the fascist assault on the working class. The wily Italian prime minister, Giovanni Giolitti, was clear that the fascist movement was doing his dirty work for him, going so far as to call Mussolini's thugs "my Black and Tans".

But greater rewards awaited Mussolini. Despite having next to no electoral support, the fascists were included on the conservative/nationalist slate in the 1921 elections and, by means of a behind-the-scenes deal involving the king, the military and much of the political elite, Mussolini was installed at the head of a coalition government the following year. In Italy, as elsewhere, fascism took office at the behest of a ruling class badly shaken by class conflict and fearful of the future.

Once at the helm, Mussolini enacted measures that "democratic" governments could not get away with. Wages were driven down and working conditions rapidly deteriorated. Unions were restricted and then replaced by fascist labour organisations.



failed Nazi attempt to seize power in Munich 1923

Sweeping privatisations were carried out and a campaign of violence, arbitrary imprisonment and murder was carried on against all sections of the left. Economic and business policy was given over to financiers and bankers who had had no connections with fascism before 1922.

germany: fascism and racism

A model had been established: in crisis conditions the existing ruling class would back a fascist movement to smash the working class, ceding a measure of political power in order to retain and extend their own economic power. Whether or not they believed they could control their new partners, they nonetheless allowed fascism to pursue its own obsessions, be they imperial, martial or, when it came to Germany, racial.

Like Italian fascism, Nazism arose in the desperate conditions prevailing at the end of the First World War. Fiercely nationalistic, terrified by the threat from the revolutionary left and even of the prospect of moderate socialists participating in govern-

ment, the Nazis attracted embittered former soldiers, frightened members of the middle class and, from the start, elements of the German military and industrial elite who saw in the party the chance to smash the left and the unions, and to re-impose order and discipline on the working class.

Added to this was a poisonous and paranoid racial hatred, scarcely present in Italian fascism, and directed pri-

marily against German Jews. Yet this does not differentiate Nazism from Italian fascism, but merely shows that fascism could have distinct national characteristics while still sharing the vital defining traits: the desire to crush the working class and to impose an enhanced capitalism in the name of national unity.

Hitler made no secret of his admiration for Mussolini and wanted to replicate his assumption of power. Yet he was premature in his first attempt. He mobilised his forces in Munich in November 1923, believing that significant elements in German society would then support his accession to power at the head of a conservative/nationalist/Nazi coalition. But at this time Hitler's later backers still had other alternatives and were not ready to throw in their lot with this largely provincial movement. Hitler went to jail for his adventurism, and emerged convinced that he and the party would have to work much harder to inculcate themselves with sections of the German people and, just as importantly, with those potential sympathisers who already held influ-



Fiat factory occupation, Italy 1920

ence in the corridors of power:

This he did over several years, determinedly making contacts with military men, industrialists and conservatives. Though Nazism never made significant inroads into the labour movement, in the streets and at the ballot box the Nazis mobilised a broad coalition of those fearful as to the course of events in Germany: the middle classes who suffered under inflation and the depression; anti-Semites who blamed the Jews for every wrong; some of the unemployed who had lost faith in the potential of their class; nationalists who still resented the outcome of the war; and conservatives who foresaw revolution.

Eventually, the Nazis' moment came. At a time of acute economic crisis, with unemployment running at six million in Germany and the Communist Party making gains at each successive election, Hitler's carefully cultivated friends in high places bit the bullet and installed him as Chancellor at the head of a coalition cabinet. The Nazis had never won an election, indeed their vote seemed to have peaked and was in decline, yet Hitler's promises to smash the left and the labour movement, and to lift restrictions on German business were enough to activate the backstairs alliance which elevated him to power.

Of course, they were wrong in thinking they could contain him in a conservative-dominated cabinet, yet he was still as good as his word. The organisations of the left were assaulted and then proscribed. Germany's venerable reformist unions were banned in a single day. Workers were forced into pro-boss Nazi labour organisations and it became illegal to strike and dangerous to com-



plain. Wages shrank and profits increased. Militants of all shades disappeared into concentration camps, exile or early graves. The Jews were increasingly dispossessed and their wealth and businesses were redistributed, usually among the German bourgeoisie.

As in Italy, those within fascism who wrongly believed that the nationalist rhetoric meant a measure of equality and a fair shake for the working class were quickly disabused of their illusions. In Italy there were regular purges to remove these deluded souls. In Germany, those with equal faith in both the nationalism and the "socialism" of National Socialism were murdered in the "Night of the Long Knives" in June 1934. Hitler had always set his face against what he saw as dangerous experiments with the economy. When it came to a choice between pre-existing power structures in Germany and the lives of some of his oldest comrades, he did not hesitate.

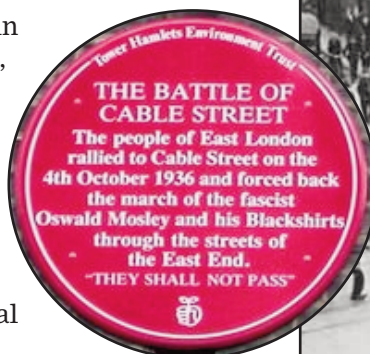
the question of the state

All sections of the left, from moderate socialists to anarcho-syndicalists, can agree that fascism always arises in conditions of economic turmoil and political conflict, that it is always hoisted into power by elements of the existing ruling class and that, once installed, it

acts in the interests of its backers. These elites cede a large portion of their political power to fascism in return for economic security and suppression of threats to their property and profitability.

However, what distinguishes the anarchist critique of fascism from other left wing analyses is the question of the state. We have always opposed the concentration of power that the state represents, whether the state is "democratic" or fascist. But socialists and communists generally believe that the state is a neutral entity, and would be safe in their hands. In fact, fascism always comes to power aided by those within the state structure, then uses and intensifies state power for its own ends and to protect the economic interests of its backers.

The state is not neutral; it is the mechanism by which one group in society maintains control over all others. An anti-fascism which does not aim to dismantle the state is one which leaves intact the very weapon which has been and, in the right circumstances, will be used again to elevate fascism to power and to crush all anti-fascists. Fascism is not just capitalism in extremis, it is the ultimate manifestation of state power, shorn of all restraints. You cannot have fascism without a state, without hierarchy and domination. Fascism is not revolutionary. It does not seize state power. It is given it. And anti-fascists would do well to remember this.



The Social General Strike

The idea of the revolutionary social general strike occupies a central place in anarcho-syndicalist theory. It marks the breach between those socialists who seek to capture the state - by revolutionary or democratic means - and those who see the need for the state to be shattered before libertarian communism can be achieved.

For anarcho-syndicalists it is the declaration of the independence of the labour movement, an inde-

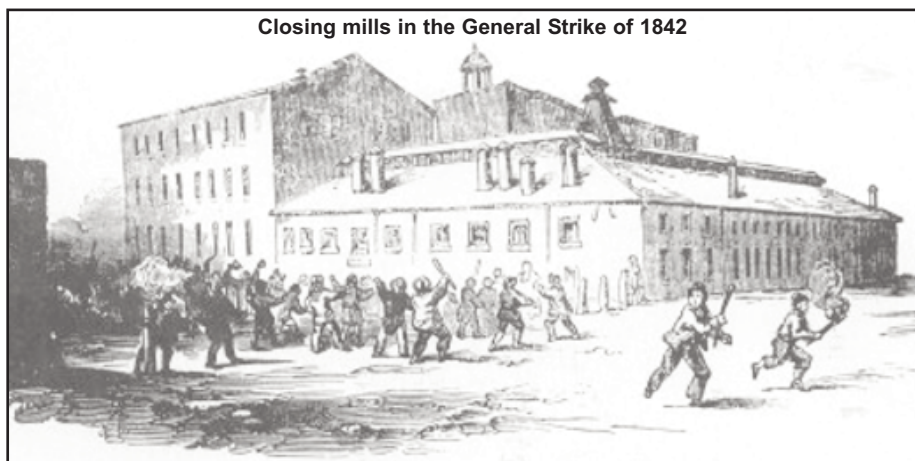
both anarchism and Marxism. In 1799 and 1825 Combination Acts were passed by the British state to try to prevent the growth of working class organisations. The first trades union with an explicit aim to overthrow capitalism was created in Britain in 1834. The Grand National Consolidated Trades Union (GNCTU) was a revolutionary union with aims of creating a co-operative commonwealth by workers taking control of the means of production and distribution. These aims are clearly analogous with the later ideology of

day all the workers would cease work. This would bring the capitalist system to a halt and enable the working class to gain control.

Benbow argued that a month long General Strike would lead to an armed uprising and a change in the political system. He used the term "holiday" (holy day) because it would be a period "most sacred, for it is to be consecrated to promote the happiness and liberty". Benbow argued that during this one month holiday the working class would have the opportunity "to legislate for all mankind; the constitution drawn up...that would place every human being on the same footing. Equal rights, equal enjoyments, equal toil, equal respect, equal share of production."

He convinced the Chartist National Convention to call for a Grand National Holiday on 12th August, 1839 and then toured the country in an attempt to persuade workers to join the strike. When he and George Harney were arrested and charged with making seditious speeches, the General Strike was called off.

In 1842 a general strike did take place and at its peak it involved half a million workers. Factories, mills and coal mines were hit in an area which stretched from Dundee, through the Lancashire and Staffordshire heartlands of the dispute to South Wales and Cornwall. Although later histo-



pendence that can only be brought about by the efforts of the working class itself.

The idea of the general strike as a way of fundamentally changing society is much older than syndicalism. Britain was the first industrialised nation so it was here that the first working class developed and the development of Trades Unionism in Britain predated

twentieth century syndicalists. At its height, it claimed 500,000 members, drawn from a number of trades, including miners, tailors, bakers, and gasworkers.

The GNCTU also developed the earliest incarnation of the Social General Strike, the "Grand National Holiday", first suggested in England by William Benbow in 1832. The idea was that on a set

ries refer disparagingly to the events of that summer as the “plug plot riots”, in reality something far more sophisticated was happening. It was the most immense industrial action in Britain - and probably anywhere - in the nineteenth century and the first ever general strike.

Benbow's idea was eventually bypassed in Britain as the trades unions drifted to reformism – a reformism that eventually led to the formation of the Labour Party. But the idea of the general strike was taken up by anarchists. It was an anarchist carpenter called Tortelier who introduced the idea into the French labour movement and it was adopted by the anarcho-syndicalists in the CGT.

It was anarcho-syndicalists who developed the idea into a more elaborate theory. Firstly it was recognised that the state would not sit idly back and surrender peacefully. If the workers were not starved into submission the state would intervene and use armed force to break the strike. Secondly the idea that the general strike could be planned to start on a chosen day was seen to be inadequate as the state would take preventive action.

Anarcho-syndicalists see the social general strike coming after a period in which there will have been a series of strikes and general unrest. During this period tension would mount and strikes grow in intensity and bitterness. The state would respond with greater coercion and the workers would reply by stepping up their demands and resistance. A revolutionary situation would develop and the conflict would be narrowed down to one between the state and the working class. It is then that workers would take the

Why did the British General Strike of 1926 fail?

Not because the workers failed to strike. The number of blacklegs was insignificant. The attempt of the middle class to scab on the strikers was a poor effort and was rapidly breaking down the machines used. About one per cent of normal train services were running, but only nine days of that caused chaos on the railways for months afterwards. The breakdown was greater than that caused by the air raids on London in 1940-41 and took much longer to repair. The University students and other middle class scabs could not replace the transport workers and certainly did not intend to replace the miners.

Nor did the strike fail because of a fall in the morale of the workers. The Aggregate of strikers was much greater on the last day of the strike than on the first and the fighting spirit was much tougher.

The strike failed only because it was called off by the trade union leaders and the workers had not learned to distrust those leaders sufficiently. Worse still, the most important divisions of strikers were organised in trade unions and they were used to obeying instructions from the officials of those unions. The strike was betrayed by the leadership.

from *The Social General Strike* by Tom Brown

offensive, the separate strikes would turn into a social general strike, workplaces would be seized and transport and communications centres captured for the workers' use. The community would organise the distribution of essential supplies and militias would be formed to defend the revolution.

This means that the working class would take the offensive and not simply wait for capitalism and the state to collapse. This is why anarcho-syndicalists see the necessity of organising in the revolutionary union. Although the social general strike would be largely a spontaneous act “like a dam bursting forth”, the workers must be prepared for it. In other words it may be impossible to organise the

strike but it is necessary to organise for it. The revolutionary union would be the organisation that the workers use to fight the state through strikes and when the moment comes it would provide the framework of organisation in which the new society would develop. This is essential to prevent a power vacuum in which authoritarian elites can take control.

Bitter experience shows that the state will respond to major strikes with forceful (armed if necessary) intervention. How could a general strike avoid an open battle between the workers and the state? Capitalism will not passively surrender. The working class would be met by a declaration of war. They would need the experience of self-organisation to meet this. The need for spontaneity does not contradict the need for organisation. Co-ordination would be essential to ensure the universal and simultaneous suspension of work when the moment comes and also to administer the needs of society. Only anarcho-syndicalism can provide this.



Strikers Shot in Preston 1842

Canada

Farmed and Dangerous

the human and environmental impact of salmon farming

For thousands of years wild salmon have been central to British Columbia's marine ecosystem as a rich food source for all manner of wildlife. For people too, salmon not only provides food and income, but also shapes culture, with many coastal peoples revering it and calling themselves "salmon people".

Salmon remains vital to the marine ecosystem and still plays a part in everyday life. Native people rely on it and view the annual return to spawn as symbolic of a way of life still in touch with the natural environment. Sadly, this timeless connection is so seriously threatened by farmed salmon that the very existence of wild salmon is at risk.



fish farm debris

The fish farms introduced in the 1970s were broadly welcomed as a much needed source of new jobs. And when Norwegian companies, eager to escape environmental and farm size restrictions in Norway, moved in and rapidly increased production, the hope was that farmed fishing would revitalise coastal communities.

However, the Norwegian multinationals soon introduced large scale, labour saving methods that raised production without increasing jobs. As a result, fewer than 3,000 people are employed directly or indirectly in salmon farming, despite the massive expansion over the last twenty years. These jobs have come at a price. Waste fish food and untreated faeces

pour out of net-cages, each holding up to a million salmon, polluting the sea, turning beaches into foul smelling slush, and destroying clam beds that still provide food and income for native people.

But it is the effects on wild salmon that might yet prove most disastrous. The cramped conditions in salmon farms cause disease and parasite infestations which are transferred to wild salmon, with ruinous effect. One study (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 2006) found that 95% of juvenile wild salmon were being killed by sea lice from fish farms. This is backed up by evidence on the ground that the number of salmon returning to spawn is declining rapidly and in at least one area they have failed to return at all.

Apart from the threat to the marine ecosystem, the impact is felt by all other fisheries, which support more than 16,000 jobs and contribute over \$1 billion dollars to the British Columbia economy. Long term, the whole marine tourist industry faces a bleak future.

The fish farming industry lamely argues that they help to "feed the world", a plea not borne out by the facts. Salmon feed contains fish food from the southern hemisphere, which accelerates the depletion of wild fish stocks and strains the food supply in poorer nations. Two to five kilos of feed produce one kilo of farmed salmon, so in reality protein is diverted from poorer to richer nations.

Besides, this food is harmful. A 2005 *Journal of Nutrition* study found the cancer risk from toxins in farmed

salmon to far outweigh any benefits of eating the fish, especially for young people and women of child bearing age. Another study in *Science*, in 2006, found farmed salmon to be so contaminated that it advised it should not be eaten more than twice a month.

It's no surprise that farmed salmon is unhealthy. Due to their diet, they are a horrendous grey colour and are dyed to a more appetising pink. Further, *Environmental Microbiology* recently linked antibiotic use in salmon farms to the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria and increased antibiotic residues in farmed salmon products. The pesticide used on sea lice also poses health risks and is actually only approved in Canada for emergencies. However, the industry managed to treat over 170 million farmed salmon between 1999 and 2003, all "emergencies" of course!

In the past, the Norwegian multinationals that control 92% of British Columbia's farmed fishing, have used their clout to effectively defend the industry. But opposition is now much more organised. Opposition groups have effectively publicised the truth about job numbers and the dangers that salmon farming poses. They have also attacked the safety record of the companies and their mistreatment of workers in British Columbia and Chile, where salmon farming has similarly expanded with the same disastrous results..

All of this is having an effect. There are increasing calls for an end to net-cages and for a switch to the closed containment system, which at least can potentially protect the ecosystem

and wild salmon while maintaining jobs. But the battle is far from won. Campaigners are now calling for a global boycott of farmed salmon.

For more info or to help:



www.farmedanddangerous.org

Poland

Lionbridge: International Solidarity

The struggle at Lionbridge, first covered in *DA42*, continues. In February, Lionbridge Poland sacked Jakub G., an elected rep of the newly formed Krakow Workers Federation (KFP). Jakub was falsely accused of leaking “company secrets”, transferring company data and damaging the company’s image on the internet. Comrades in the ZSP (Union of Syndicalists Poland) have been prominent in the subsequent solidarity campaign to get Jakub reinstated.

Present for the Lionbridge management in Žilina, Slovakia:

The international solidarity campaign has provoked surprise, nervousness and embarrassment among Lionbridge management. The matter has been reported in the mainstream media, Lionbridge is now tarnished with a union-busting image, and their employees around the world have been asking uncomfortable questions. Lionbridge has issued a stream of internal memos attempting to discredit Jakub and his supporters, warning about “dangerous anarchists” and forbidding workers from joining the pickets outside their offices.

According to Lionbridge, “true union members work together with the management for the benefit of the company, because that is the true interest of the workers”. Such ridiculous statements have been treated with contempt by many, but have unfortunately influenced others.

In the meantime, Lionbridge have tried to settle out of court by offering the

equivalent of 3 month’s salary and demanding a promise to “stop slandering the company in the internet”. Since no slander is taking place and since 3 month’s pay is the lowest sum the Labour Court could make Lionbridge pay, the offer was of course rejected.

The Lionbridge lawyers know that they can’t prove the legality of Jakub’s sacking. The company has admitted it didn’t even bother to read the emails supposedly containing “confidential information”, never mind checking the legality of the sacking. Their strategy now is to try to convince the judge that there should be no reinstatement because of



ZSP demonstrating at Lionbridge in Warsaw

the protests made *after* the illegal sacking. Also they are attempting to prolong the hearing in the hope that KFP and ZSP will run out of funds.

Clearly Lionbridge believes that discrimination against workers who dare to organise is something “normal” that they should be able to get away with. Any sign of resistance is portrayed as disloyalty, even in the face of openly stated company policies of cutting jobs and costs, policies that directly affect the workers.

As we go to press the next tribunal session approaches (Oct 22nd). ZSP expresses its gratitude to everyone who joined in the pickets around the world and who sent faxes and emails of protest to Lionbridge.

Please contact info@zsp.net.pl for details about sending bank transfers, and for more information about the Krakow Workers Federation. A full list of Lionbridge offices around the world is available from: www.lionbridge.com.



when Lionbridge eats unions



unions will eat Lionbridge



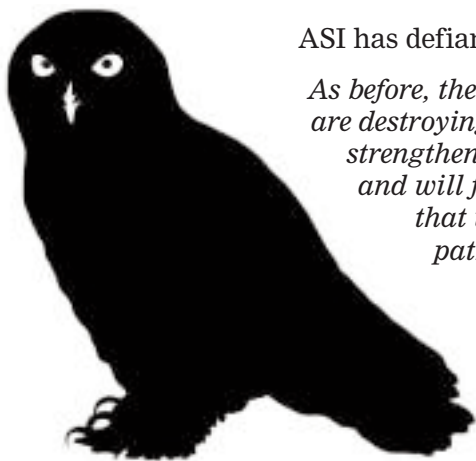
Serbia

A New Wave of State Repression

In recent months Serbia has seen an increase in state repression against any who dare to stand up against the government's neoliberal economic policies.

Since September our comrades in ASI (Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative) have come in for some unwanted attention from the state intelligence agency, BIA.

In Kragujevac, central Serbia, ASI members and their families have been subjected to surveillance, threats of arrest and other repressive measures.



ASI - ACM

alleged murder attempt on a member of the gendarmerie (a military body that carries out general policing duties). Meanwhile, Uros's friends, who protested in the court room against his sentence, have also been imprisoned. The Mayor of Belgrade has threatened that all further social protests outside the Serbian government building will be crushed by force.

ASI has defiantly stated:

As before, the action of those who are destroying our lives will only strengthen our fighting spirit and will fortify our conviction that we are on the right path. We proclaim that we are not going to stop our actions, and that we will approach our fight for freedom, against exploitation, privatisation and lay-offs, with more energy and determination.

What they are trying to do is to break the back of an organisation which has been "a stick in the eye" of local rulers. This is not the first time that ASI has been pressurised by the Serbian ruling class, via its BIA goons. Its members have been arrested, tortured and questioned by the Serbian secret police many times since the founding of the organisation in 2002.

This is happening in the context of general state brutality. The police murder of a demonstrator at a Serbian Radical Party demo has gone unpunished; a football fan, Uros Misic, has been framed and sentenced to ten years for an

Argentina

IWA Day of Action

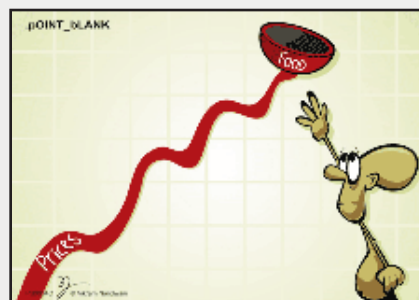
On August 29th IWA sections held a global day of action in support of Federico Puy, a member of FORA, the IWA's Argentinian section. Federico was sacked in May by the Argentine Red Cross from his teaching post at its Buenos Aires secondary school for ideological reasons. His Citizens' Rights syllabus drew management objections due to its "ideological content". The next day Federico got a dismissal telegram with the typical pretexts used to rationalise the sacking of casual labour around the world. Federico's students asked for his reinstatement, which brought threats and persecution. The *Sociedad de Resistencia Capital* (the local Buenos Aires section of FORA) demanded Federico's immediate reinstatement and has taken direct action in the form of demonstrations, street blockades, a boycott and distribution of propaganda. The employers have sent repressive forces to all demos, have offered money as the only solution to the conflict and maintain that Federico will not be reinstated.

Greece

One Way Round the Recession

Greek anarchists have taken to storming supermarkets and handing out food for free in a wave of raids provoked by soaring consumer prices. Usually around twenty unarmed people, mostly wearing black hoods, have been involved. Greek media has labelled the raiders as "Robin Hoods". They take only packets of pasta and rice as well as cartons of milk which are then dropped in the middle of the

street for people to collect. No money gets taken and nobody gets attacked.



Argentina

Interview with Jacinto Cerdá

F.O.R.A. General Secretary

Marta, a comrade from the CNT in Madrid, spent some weeks earlier this year with our sister organisation, FORA (Federación Obrera de la Región Argentina – Workers Federation of the Argentine Region). During her stay she conducted the following interview with FORA's General Secretary, Jacinto Cerdá.

Marta: *Perhaps it would be good to start by pointing out, for people who don't know, some of FORA's characteristics in terms of organisation, structure and objectives, compared to the CNT.*

Jacinto: Well, the first would be not having 'syndicalism' as an aim; instead we think that when a revolution and social transformation occurs, the people have to decide how to organise. Another difference is that FORA doesn't have statutes like the CNT has. Yes, congress resolutions are made with regard to aims and principles. Our aim is anarchist communism, as the 5th Congress defined it. Nor are we registered. Never, since the start of the [last] century, when our organisation was founded has there been a belief in the state and therefore never have we wanted to endorse this institution by presenting ourselves in government offices or such like. Lastly, in FORA we have "Resistance Societies" which are formed either by job or by locality: our structure goes from

the local to the provincial, and from there to the regional, that is the whole country, and from there to the international.

M: Tell us a little about FORA nowadays and how it is being rebuilt.

J: In fact, those of us who are rebuilding FORA are a group of young people who began almost from nothing in 2001, distributing propaganda and focusing more and more on trade union issues. But there has not been a transfer of experience even though a few old comrades remain. We also suffer from what we call a lost generation. That's to say, we go from comrades aged 80 to others aged between 20 and 30 at most. But here in the capital we are getting stronger; this is the only local [*"local" = a physical space, building or premises – DA*] which has been retained and a year ago now we decided to move from theory to practice, working 100% on union issues. All this work has borne fruit and other

groups have been set up such as in Mendoza and Bahía Blanca; and now we have won our first proper workplace dispute, with Restaurante La Pérgola (see page 28). That's to say, FORA comrades



picket at la pérgola

have not had collective disputes before; since we young ones you've met have been organising, the labour disputes that we have experienced have been on an individual level, settled through private lawyers (if we're lucky) and so on. Other struggles we have taken part in have been external such as when a teacher was murdered or many of the struggles that happened as a result of the 2001 crisis.



M: Actually isn't it here that your decision to retain your "illegality" is being tested as you're competing with the only union confederation?

J: Yes, well, the CGT is the only union, an authoritarian union, which is the only one that can legally sign agreements between workers and bosses. Anyone can set up a union but it can do nothing on a legal level. The CTA, the public service workers union, is an exception. If you want to conduct a dispute outside of the CGT you run the risk that they send in heavies against you and you end up badly injured as happened a while back with casino workers here in Buenos Aires.

M: What is the economic situation facing you here in Argentina?

J: The economy has managed to re-establish itself after the massive crisis in the 1990s, with soaring levels of unemployment that exploded in 2001. But the whole explosion that there was in popular organisation during these years has come to nothing. The social movements have been, firstly, run down and, secondly, absorbed. Kirshnerism [Néstor Kirshner, Argentine president, 2003-7, succeeded by his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirshner – DA] has known to play at being the government of human rights, along the lines of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo [organisation of mothers of the "disappeared", those who were abducted in the Dirty

War of 1976-83 – DA]. Cases have been opened against soldiers, money has been given to the MTD (Unemployed Workers Movement) and, in general, the radicalism of these movements has been placated. For instance, now there are groups of piqueteros [organised groups that blockade roads and streets, which were prominent in the social movement during the crisis – DA] that are used by the government for its own purposes.

M: What place does FORA occupy in the anarchist movement and the social movement in general?

J: With respect to the social movement, we've had a recent resurgence. In order to be inside the social movement we need a greater presence. We have just begun this, by supporting disputes and now having our own disputes. With respect to the anarchist movement we have a great

historical presence, but the anarchist movement is very weak compared to trotskyism and marxism. These groups have grown a lot since 2001. They became fashionable and even managed to get money for the unemployed movement. This is something which has also coincided with the government policy of "buying" social movements with social plans, food etc. And so there were people forming their own group and thanks to those "benefits" came to have 100 or 1,000 members. But we are against clientelism; here no one is paid.

M: What are FORA's strong points and what are its weak points?

J: FORA members are activists with a strong conviction. Not being a mass organisation, everyone knows where we are going. Also I believe the government is



unemployed workers movement during the 2001 crisis



giving us a hand because people see how badly it is managing; people live badly and although the economy is recovering, that has no effect on people's living standards. But on the other hand, we have a lazy, sluggish Argentine society, that doesn't know how to leave behind Peronism, clientelism and conformism. Also we suffer from the unpopularity of anarchism and the bad press it gets from some quarters, giving the typical image of violence and chaos. And there are some things that I have already mentioned like the lack of experience transferred from older comrades, and the lack of knowledge about what organisation means on the part of some of the new people.

M: You tell me the work you've carried out over the last year is purely trade union related, but also traditionally workplace agitation has happened, and hasn't this debate arisen now over the issue of taking land in La Matanza district?

J: This discussion hasn't got so far as to say that the FORA is imbued in it; yes, it is possible that it will be dealt with in our plenary; seeing that we all agree to support all disputes that we think are just, above all if they concern us directly, considering besides, that yes, historically the organisation had much influence in local community agitation, understanding why workers were organised in unions before; this is my own personal theory.

M: I wouldn't like to finish without you making some mention of how FORA fights two criticisms which it seems you have to face quite often. One is that you are a sectarian organisation, the other is that

you are a macho organisation. What do you think these criticisms are based on? And can you tell us FORA's response to them?

J: Comrade, we are far from being a macho organisation. I don't think it's necessary to explain this, above all with you being present on several occasions at the organisation's activities. But if such-and-such a person thinks we're macho because we don't write @ or X [in place of the standard "feminine" -a or "masculine" -o word ending in Spanish - DA], that's up to them. We don't discriminate. Further, the women comrades have edited a publication a while back aimed at women (titled *Without Privileges*), with-

out lapsing into feminism. And with respect to being sectarian, put simply, we are not neutral unionists, the same as you, comrade. We are a free organisation of workers, but with a social objective, and we are ruled by those same principles of equality and fraternity. And I emphasize something that history has proved countless times, that those who go on about political or ideological neutrality are the same ones who consciously reproduce the political plans of the powers-that-be, always with the pretext of supporting the workers, in the process only digging their graves and achieving their submission to tyranny.

La Pérgola Dispute

The dispute came about after a group of eight restaurant workers, fed up of going from union to union without finding solutions, approached FORA back in April. They were owed wages for March as well as tips, and there were workers without contracts. After advice from FORA they went on strike and were sacked a few days later. From there the struggle developed into constant pickets of the restaurant, which held firm despite threats and attacks by paid heavies, and



attempts by the boss to entice individual workers back to work. This, along with some help from sympathetic lawyers, forced the boss to give in after a few weeks, with all of those sacked being reinstated. (Source: *CNT*)

Rebellious Spirit

Maria Occhipinti & the Ragusa Anti-Draft Revolt of 1945

eds. P. Sharkey & A. Key – Kate Sharpley Library 2008 – 30 pp. – £3.00 – ISBN: 978-1873605592

Italy 1943: World War 2 is over for the vast majority of southern Italians; Mussolini and Italian fascism are dead (officially); the Italian government has surrendered to the Allied powers. However, the Wehrmacht still occupy northern Italy.

December 1944: The government decides to redraft Italian workers to fight the war against the German fascist army in the north and retake what's theirs.

However, Italians have already suffered five years of war and occupation and draftees, recently returned from the war, find a new set of call up cards landing on their doorsteps. They decide to say "enough" and the previous defiant watchwords "no go" turn into "no go and no going back".

January 1945: In the town of Ragusa in the Sicilian district known to locals as "Russia", a Communist Party militant, Maria Occhipinti, is called out on to the street by neighbours as local draft dodgers are being rounded up by the *carabinieri* and bundled into a truck. As it's about to drive away Maria, who is 5 months pregnant, throws herself in front of the wheels saying "you can kill me but you shall not pass". As more people approach the truck, the authorities let the draftees go, although according to some, it is the crowd that helps them to escape, rather than the cops bottling it. According to Meno Occhipinti, "the next day dur-



ing a discussion between a sexton and an army officer about why the draft was happening again, the officer decides to lob a grenade at him and blow him up" and this was the catalyst for the revolt. But as Franco Leggio, someone directly involved in organising against the draft and having a hand in the actual revolt itself, tells it, it was Maria diving in front of the truck that was the catalyst.

There are three themes running through the pamphlet: one about Maria Occhipinti, another about the revolt and some context of previous struggle in Ragusa, and the third about Franco Leggio who has almost as much airplay as Maria, but isn't acknowledged in the title (though maybe including his name in the sub-heading would have meant it didn't roll off the tongue?).

The texts about Maria are from a more personal perspective, really reducing her down to one word, "rebellious". This word, to me, is overused and without political meaning, but the authors use it to describe her politically. Coming from a communist party background, there is no fleshing out of why Maria and Erasmo Santangelo split from the local CP to form another party prior to the revolt, nor of her motivation and direction she was heading in while involved in the revolt.

The position is only slightly clarified in prison after the revolt when she mentions having pictures of Stalin and Lenin hung up (I don't think she meant by rope?) in her cell. Maria suffered greatly on her

return from prison. Rumours of infidelity were thrown about as she had been on the run with Erasmo prior to capture, although she denied all suggestions. (Her husband had returned from the army whilst she was incarcerated.) Also the local CP had washed their hands of her; as she had gone against the party – they still had dreams of a conscript red army. She led an extremely interesting life and I have only touched on it.

The revolt itself is placed within the local context of a previous fascist massacre of the "filthy reds" back in 1921, when thirty people lost their lives as they had gathered to listen to an address by socialist deputy Vincenzo Vacirca. There's also a text covering local anarchist and anti-fascist organising from 1921 onwards up to the revolt itself.

To my mind the greatest contribution about the actual revolt is the interview by Stefano Fabbri with Franco Leggio. This gives us an organiser's insight into the events, into the organising prior to the revolt and into how the 'spontaneity' of the revolt wasn't so spontaneous – however many times the word is used, the reality was different. There's also a text devoted to Franco, *The Life of an Anarchist*, about his...er...life as an anarchist.

The players involved are placed in a historical context. This, for me, gives this and other KSL pamphlets a deeper insight, a generally wider and more well rounded feel, and makes them a fantastic resource. And taking up a sub to their now quarterly bulletin and supporting such an important resource at £3 a year is money well spent.



**Kate Sharpley Library, B.M
Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX
www.katesharpleylibrary.net**

Free Comrades

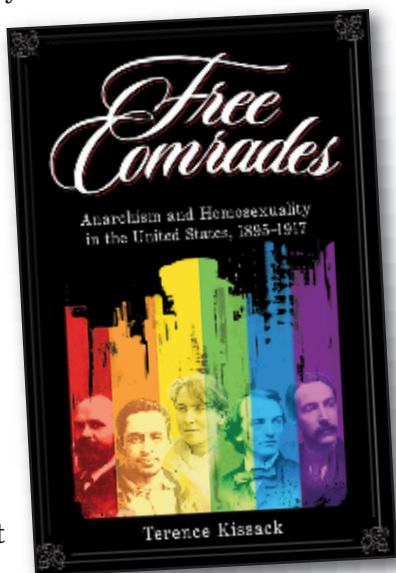
Anarchism & Homosexuality in the United States 1895-1917

by Terence Kissack – AK Press 2008 – 188 pages –
£14.00 – ISBN: 978-1904859116

This book charts the involvement of various types of anarchist in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth in trying to free sexuality from repressive laws and social stigma.

Anarchists in the U.S., usually ahead of their socialist counterparts, advocated birth control methods, non-church marriage (“free love”) and decriminalising homosexuality as part of the human right to enjoy our bodies and sexual desires. Especially after the arrest and trials of Oscar Wilde (1895) and his sentencing to hard labour, anarchists fought legal and social discrimination of homosexuality.

Not all anarchists were in favour of this (prejudice still was widespread) but Emma Goldman, Benjamin Tucker and Alexander Berkman all stuck their necks out to fight for what were to become “gay rights”. Berkman’s experience in prison made him rethink his attitudes towards homosexuality and other anarchists believed that the state had no right to intervene in this area of human life.



While most anarchists, from the account Kissack gives here, did not really think that homosexuality should be treated as of equal worth as heterosexuality, they understood it as a more or less harmless option. Only very few actually declared there was nothing wrong with homosexuality and that it should be considered on equal terms as any other form of sexuality. These were usually the more “individualist” of anarchists in the US.

This pattern followed through in Europe, too. Although not covered by this book, the experience of European anarchism on this question followed pretty much the same debates and

limitations. Some individualist anarchists such as E. Armand in France were in favour of dismissing any kind of legal and social sanction against homosexuality as part of a sexual politics that also advocated women’s right to choose, contraception, multiple partners, abolition of marriage, and sex education.

This historical engagement of anarchism with the politics of sexuality needs to be analysed on a country by country basis but this book is a very good starting point for that history in the States.

An Anarchist FAQ

Webpage

Version 12.2



Uncompromising in their opposition to capitalism and the state, but rather less articulate about explaining what would replace them, anarchists often leave themselves open to some degree of justifiable criticism. But for all the doubters out there comes the perfect antidote, the Frequently Asked Questions website: Newly updated, and soon to form the contents of a forthcoming book from AK Press.

Punctuated with quotes from key texts and impeccably referenced, Version 12.2 of the InfoShop FAQs covers all the vital topics at length, debunking the statist myths and combining both classical and contemporary aspects of anarchist theory and practice to great effect.

The website explores the following in a depth rarely rivalled:

what is anarchism?

why do anarchists oppose the current system?

what are the myths of capitalist economics?

how does statism and capitalism affect society?

what do anarchists think causes ecological problems?

what would an anarchist society look like?

All in all, this invaluable resource is highly recommended for anyone wishing to delve further or gain a better understanding of anarchism as a practical, living, socially relevant ideology.

The material, which is also available in a printable HTML version, can be accessed via the following URL:

www.anarchistfaq.org.uk.

An Anarchist FAQ, Volume I
by Iain McKay

ISBN: 978-1902593906

forthcoming from AK Press

Nowtopia

How Pirate Programmers, Outlaw Bicyclists and Vacant-Lot Gardeners Are Inventing the Future Today

by Chris Carlsson – AK Press 2008 – 288 pages – £13.00 – ISBN: 978-1904859772

San Francisco eco-radical, Chris Carlsson, executive director of the multimedia history project Shaping San Francisco, is a writer, publisher, editor and community organiser who has, for the last twenty-five years, focused on the underlying themes of horizontal communications, organic communities and public space. He also helped launch the monthly bike-ins known as Critical Mass that have spread to five continents and over 300 cities.

The sustainable bio-fuel boom of the past decade is cited as a remarkable example of a passion-driven, grass roots technology/scientific movement, a decentralised, self-directing program that exists outside of capitalist norms. It seemed odd that Carlsson followed up his bicycling chapter with one spotlighting those keeping the use of the car alive and well. Veggie power vehicles are counter-productive to efforts to remove cars altogether. It seems that those who run on alternative fuels or electricity get entitled to feel better about their driving than the rest of us rather than seeking a real alternative to the combustion engine.

Building community is the big goal, including the needs for friendship and mutual aid, together with the necessary ecological intervention. Carlsson examines how a new relationship to food drives a great many garden projects. In turn this is rooted in a different relationship to work that inspires and sustains many community gardeners.

The book notes that more and more people, recognising the degradation inherent in capitalist relations, are creating networks of activity that refuse the measurement of money. They depend instead on sharing skills and technological know-how within new communities, such as the biofuels co-ops that have proliferated in many US cities. Networks have grown, thanks to the spread of the internet and other telecommunications technologies, and new kinds of “families” based on shared values, alternative living arrange-

ments, and non-economic relationships are growing within the old society.

Efforts to create islands of utopia have always flourished on the margins of capitalist society and, as Carlsson writes, “never to the extent that this radically different way of living has been able to supplant market society’s daily life”. Nowtopians, and anyone determined to be free of the constraints of economically defined life, face the same historic limits that have beset all previous efforts to escape. Can the emerging patterns resist the reintegration that has absorbed past self-emancipatory movements? The new apparatus of global production helps speed up the extension of market society, but it inevitably also speeds the spread of social opposition and the sharing of experiments and alternatives. Our moment in history is at least as exhilarating as it is daunting.

Carlsson’s analysis is excellent and he understands completely that pervasiveness of the capitalist system and its ability to colonise even the activities of these emerging communities. Rent, after all, has to be paid in cash, not garden grown tomatoes.



Address Unknown

When *Address Unknown* appeared in 1938 as a short story in *Story* magazine, it alerted the U.S. to the dangers of Nazism in a matter of weeks and was an immediate social phenomenon. A sequence of fictional letters between an art-dealing American-German Jew and his friend and business partner, who has moved back to the Fatherland, *Address Unknown*’s penetrating focus afforded an unprecedented vision of the horror and grief wrought by the Nazis. Within ten days, every issue of *Story* had been snatched up, copies were circulating around the world and Kressmann Taylor became an overnight literary legend.

The “Afterword”, lovingly written by her son, says the idea came from a small news article. When some American students in

by Kathrine Kressmann Taylor
Simon & Schuster 2001 – 64 pages
£6.99 – ISBN: 978-0743412711

Germany wrote home with the truth about Nazi atrocities, it was a truth most Americans would not at first accept. But when friends of these students sent back letters making fun of Hitler, they brought the response “Stop it. We’re in danger. These people don’t fool around. You could murder by writing letters to him”.

“This modern story is perfection itself. It is the most effective indictment of Nazism to appear in fiction” (*New York Times Book Review*).



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Get Rich or the roots of violence: economic and political

It is with a sense of almost resigned expectancy that we flick open the daily paper or switch on the evening news to learn of yet another fatal shooting or stabbing on our streets. Beyond the tabloid hysteria, the moral panics about out-of-control feral youth and the calls to bring back conscription and corporal punishment to restore some semblance of order, the real roots of our social malaise are expediently overlooked. But the relationship between the turf wars enacted on our city streets and those carried out on the global arena is actually far closer than is apparent.

For a more telling and accurate picture, we need to look more closely at the political, ideological and economic forces which have brought us to where we are today.

selfish capitalism

Socio-economically, the post millennium era is one in which selfish competition and primitive accumulation have never before been so forcefully or universally propagated. From primary school children bombarded with SATS tests to the gangsta “get-rich-or-die-tryin’” mentality, being a winner, flaunting your bling and thereby gaining respect is unanimously held up as *the* way to go. Public duty, community spirit and altruism carry markedly less importance in this climate of unabashed, selfish individualism. And unfortunately, few could deny that this overriding paradigm has been widely accepted across the social spectrum. One common truism for example, is how working class villains, who once had a code of “don’t rob your own”, now seem to consider anyone, even immediate neighbours, as fair game.

Behind these commonly held beliefs lie the artificial need to acquire sta-

tus through materialism and the desire of capitalism, with all its inherent contradictions, to legitimise itself as the natural order of things. However, these ideas actually predate the industrial revolution, deriving from Thomas Malthus and Adam Smith’s views that, to promote efficiency and allay the effects of material scarcity, competition should be rewarded for the benefit of all.

neo-liberalism

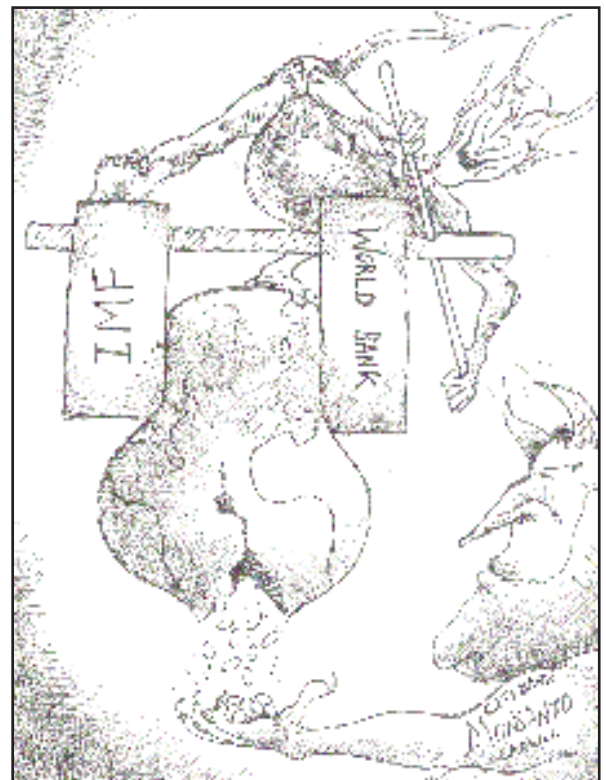
Since World War 2 the world has witnessed a massive growth in U.S. state power and a condition of near permanent imperialist war; a nexus plainly designed to establish total global market domination.

In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. emerged unrivalled as *the* global superpower; a stature subsequently confirmed with a ceaseless programme of economic imperialism and militaristic sabre-rattling. A long list of nations, from Argentina in the 1970s to Iraq in the new millennium, were subject to either overt or covert military destabilisation – invariably followed by structural readjustment of their economies. This two stage process was engineered with clinical precision according to the dictums of CIA training manuals and free market models championed by Milton Friedman’s Chicago School.

The economic programmes advocated by the Chicago School effectively reduced the role of the state to that of privatiser and enforcer. State owned assets were relentlessly sold off, even across much of the decaying “commu-

nist” world. The active removal of barriers to trade such as tariffs and subsidies saw markets in poorer economies depressed and flooded with products from stronger ones. The IMF and World Bank offered overbearing development loans to countries of the poor South in return for assurances that their leaders would, in exchange for a cut of the takings, fall in line with the demands of their corporate neo-liberal masters. Aided and abetted by the wholesale internment, torture and murder of opposition voices, the neo-liberal machine marched merrily on, plundering all in its wake.

Meanwhile, the chief architects and beneficiaries of these destabilising policies, which proved to be an unmitigated disaster for the vast majority, saw their empires and fortunes expand exponentially. (See *The Shock Doctrine*, N. Klein, 2007 & *Confessions of an Economic Hit-Man*, J. Perkins, 2005.)



Die Tryin'

relationships between war and gangsterism

During the 1970s an economic crisis emerged in the UK centring on the declining profitability of industry; a crisis firmly rooted in the contradictions of welfare capitalism amidst increasing hi-tech international competition. In the 1980s Thatcherism emerged from this and the Tories' monetarism foreshadowed the destruction of traditional manufacturing industries, bludgeoned the unions, privatised state utilities, recommodified welfare and facilitated what was later to become the biggest disparity in wealth between rich and poor for decades.

crushing the opposition

The "enemy within", those who failed to fall neatly into Thatcher's scheme, were crushed with all the might the newly emboldened state could muster. The near paramilitary overwhelming of the miners' Orgreave picket in 1984 was matched only in sheer brutality by the police violence meted out to travellers in the infamous "Battle of the Beanfield". And when Argentina's military junta claimed the Malvinas/Falklands in a desperate attempt to divert attention from their own neo-liberal induced domestic crisis, the Iron Lady showed, yet again, that she was not for turning.



Argentinian dead, Falkland Islands 1982

"Gotcha!" cried *The Sun* with true war-mongering fervour, as the scuppered Belgrano went down with its crew of 300.

Soon after, the hopelessly ill-equipped Argentine military capitulated to humiliating defeat, and this last bastion of the British empire, virtually forgotten prior to the invasion, was gleefully restored to sovereign hands.

Back on home shores, structural economic readjustment bore fruit in mass unemployment, the superseding of manufacturing by service industries, a growing deployment of non-contract labour, and the configuration of multiple tiers of micromanagement in the workplace; factors which combined to accelerate the fragmentation of the working class.

The sharp end of the capitalist jungle is always felt most keenly in its ghettos, and in the decaying urban estates and pit villages entrepreneurial drug gangs armed with pistols and knives rose to prominence. Cashing in on the desolation wreaked by economic "rationalisation", a roaring trade in heroin, ecstasy, and later cocaine, was there for the taking.

Echoing the mercilessness of capital globally, the gangs fought – and continue to fight – ruthlessly for markets and territorial dominance.

Along with the mass legitimisation of selfish capitalism came the media's legitimisation of war. Sanitised images of conflict in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Middle East are supple-



the virtual Ross Kemp in Afghanistan and reality in Iraq



mented daily with a diet of computer games, Hollywood movies and TV dramas, all awash with aggression. The real world, it seems, blurs readily and interchangeably with the virtual one. Macho role models like Ross Kemp rub shoulders with squaddies in Afghanistan one minute and then blow baddies to smithereens the next in "Ultimate Force". Months after a teenager was cruelly gunned down in Manchester's Moss Side, a billboard barely a stone's throw from the murder scene bore the image of gun-toting actor Clive Owen plugging the movie "Shoot 'Em Up". The degree to which popular (sic) culture merely reflects or actively perpetuates anti-social violence is subject to much debate. However, it is an inescapable fact that this constant media barrage serves only to normalise the truly unacceptable.

war of words

Controlled almost exclusively by their corporate paymasters, the mass media peddle an unwavering war of words against "our" carefully selected enemies, notably those regimes that fail to tow the western imperialist line. Which brings us full circle. Socially and economically deprived young men now also suffer constant demonisation at the hands of the politicians and tabloids. Raised in the cut-throat climate of modernity and constantly reminded of the bench-

marks of material success that elude them, it is easy to see why some are drawn by the fast bucks, flawed status and perceived security of gang culture. As the actors duly fulfil the roles cast and scripted for them, the only logical solution, it seems, is to send them off to war (hence the calls to restore conscription). And with the competing ruling classes reliant on war to boost profits and avert recession, the vicious circle is confirmed as a bloody self-fulfilling prophecy.

state directed gangsterism

The conclusions we make here are clear and unequivocal. The state, which lays its historical claim to a monopoly on violence, when



stripped bare, is little more than a bullying, coercive war machine cynically motivated by an agenda dictated by profit. The centralisation of ideological and economic power ensures that the state's violence, whether in the capacity of warlord or citizen protector, is always justified as "legitimate". But the territorial gangsterism on our streets, like that of the Mafia underworld, is forever eclipsed by state orchestrated gangsterism initiated on the world stage.

With the economic infrastructure of capitalism reflected throughout its ideological superstructure, values based on greed, competition and selfishness are now widely internalised as "normal". The consequences of this for patterns of social behaviour are all too predictable. To quote Noam Chomsky:

Wealth and power tend to accrue to those who are ruthless, cunning, avaricious, self-seeking, lacking in sympathy and compassion, subservient to authority and willing to abandon principle for material gain, and so on.... Such qualities might be just the valuable ones for a war of all against all.

So, what can be done to rectify this sorry state of affairs?

another world is possible

Various attempts have been made at stocktaking global resources since the 1970s. Most sources concur that there exists sufficient food, energy and natural materials to maintain a high standard of living for every person on the planet. Further, the technological know-how is available, but not used, to ensure this standard of living on a sustainable, ecologically non-disruptive basis. Therefore the dog-eat-dog law of the jungle and the concept of material scarcity, the original premise underpinning capitalist economics, should no longer apply. A competitive economy is simply archaic and no longer fit for purpose. With a global ecological crisis looming, the "expand or die" dynamic of the market can only lead us down the path of eventual destruction. Nevertheless, capital's propaganda machine (predictably) does everything in its power to blame our social decay on the symptoms, rather than concede that the root problem lies in its own flawed, dysfunctional make-up.

We cannot and do not accept the deterministic lie that humans are fixed, immutable beings predisposed to violence, tribalism and anti-social behaviour. If this is the case, why is it that some social groups (usually those most insulated from the harsh realities of capitalism) can co-exist so peacefully? Why is crime and anti-social behaviour virtually non-existent in places where a strong sense of community and social cohesion still thrives? Mutual aid, as Kropotkin argued over 100 years ago, makes far greater sense for our collective well-being than outdated, fatalistic notions of "survival of the fittest". The progress of humanity has remained unshakably entrenched in the dark ages of selfish capitalism for far too long.

The present state of affairs we describe and the culture of violence which is integral to it are firmly founded in a global economic system based on the

oppression, exploitation and alienation of the working class. This means that the tactics required in the pursuit of a better society, one where humans use their creative and productive abilities to assist rather than destroy each other, must be based on us resisting and destroying these evils. This is why we emphasise methods and organisation designed to increase the power, confidence, autonomy, initiative and self-activity of the broadest mass of people.

reconstructing communities

Positive grass roots social action, such as that exemplified by community based groups like Mothers Against Violence and London Coalition Against Poverty, show that we have the potential to build networks without the interference of meddling, self-serving politicians, networks capable of reconstructing our fragmented communities. Rank and file workplace organisation offers the means to restore solidarity and to eventually commandeer the forces of production and distribution for the common good. Direct democracy and horizontally organised federations, transcending national boundaries, will ultimately enable a more functional and just society to be created and administered without succumbing to the corruption, repression and oligarchy that the centralised state/party model inevitably brings. As history bears out, you cannot build socialism using capitalist methods and organisation.

But it is only by our uncompromising rejection of the twin evils of capital and state, and through the innovation of a new world order exalting liberty, equality and fraternity, that we can finally hope to open the doors to a shining new dawn of civilisation.



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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.

November 11th: Discrimination, Discrimination, Discrimination

December 9th: no meeting

January 13th: 21st Century Socialism

| 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.

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.