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WE'RE CLOSING IN



TARGETING GREEDY BOSSES & CORRUPT POLITICIANS

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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.

The Green Shoots of Class Consciousness?

ALL PREDICTIONS point to how the current crisis will hit Britain much harder than Brown and Darling care to admit. Understandably, working people are angry at the loss of security, livelihoods and, for some, even their homes. Beyond doubt, however, is the fact that this cost will rise even further in the years to come as the state tries to force us to pay for the billions it has borrowed and is still doling out to the rich and powerful.

In what will amount to a gigantic wealth transfer, the state bails out the bosses with one hand, while with the other it calculates how best it might claw this back in the future. One thing is certain; no government, whether Tory or Labour, will inflict undue pain on the so called "wealth producers", the capitalist class. So the tax rises, cuts in wages, attacks on services and benefits and the rest will fall disproportionately on us, the working class.

green shoots...

Unless, that is, the British working class can once more forge itself into a force capable of resisting the bosses' and the state's attacks. Encouragingly, we may be witness-

ing the first signs of this. While bosses and the state expect us simply to roll over and meekly accept their decrees without so much as a murmur of protest, some workers have been showing us there is another way.

Back in February the Lindsey oil refinery workers kick started a wave of unofficial strike action in the energy industry as a response to the deployment of foreign workers. At the time, those bastions of conservatism, the right (and not so right) wing press welcomed the walk outs, opportunistically overemphasising the "British jobs for British workers" undercurrent to launch yet more attacks on migrant workers. In reality, the Lindsey strike committee's

demands were nothing of the sort, and are best summed up by one committee member thus: "Our action is rightly aimed against company bosses who attempt to play off one nationality of

More recently, there's been a number of workplace occupations, attempts by workers to press for improved redundancy terms or to prevent job losses and closures. Workers at Prisme Packaging in Dundee and at Waterford Crystal in Ireland are notable examples of this. As we go to press (mid-April) the Visteon (aka Ford) car parts plants in Belfast and Enfield are also under occupation by workers responding to Visteon's attempts to rob them of unpaid wages and proper pension contributions.

...class consciousness

Lindsey, Prisme, Waterford and Visteon are all signs that workers can and will resist the bosses' efforts to trample over us; that, in doing so, they can and will ignore the anti-strike laws and go beyond trade union structures that time and again have only acted as a brake to frustrate workers' militancy. For workers to successfully resist the coming attacks as the state seeks to cover its borrowings such actions are not only inspirational, they are also necessary. In the face of a totally discredited and anti-working class Labour Party, this crisis presents us the perfect opportunity to begin to reverse the rolling back of class consciousness witnessed during much of the last century.



worker against the other..." Attempts to whip up nationalist fervour and play the race card have always been suited the bosses and the state, intent on dividing and ruling us.

Beyond the Usual

WORKERS AT METRONET, THE FORMER LONDON Underground (LUL) engineering contractor, have developed their Strike Committee as a form of rank and file organisation that represents an interesting step beyond the confines of the usual trade union structures. Now that the track contract is back in house, they are rolling this organising model out across the whole of the underground to become the London Underground Strike Committee. Here we look at the background of struggle against which the strike committee has been built up, and the bottom up tactics that have been vital to its successes.

Historically, the RMT's strength on the underground had been among train drivers and station staff. Engineering workers had been the poor relations, and the union had relied on drivers to win disputes.

In 1998 the Public Private Partnership (PPP) for the Tube was announced, with the RMT and other unions opposing it and organising a series of one day strikes. This built up resistance, delayed the PPP until 2003 and won a series of concessions including no compulsory redundancies. In addition, all staff reductions were classified as matters for negotiation, not simply consultation, making them harder to implement and easier to organise against. This agreement, dubbed the "jobs for life deal" by the *Daily Telegraph*, had been won through balloting for strike action to take place during General Election week, demonstrating that well timed industrial action, or the threat of it, is more effective. The fight also turned the RMT membership into fighters, and they adopted a "Trojan horse" strategy of fighting the PPP from within.

During this period, the RMT leadership was overstretched and couldn't attend all of the many meetings, which consequently were conducted by the workplace reps, displacing full timers and taking control of the union on the underground. It is from this, and through a series of disputes, that the strike committee model of rank and file organisation on the underground has been developed. The years between the start of the PPP in 2003 up to the present have seen the following disputes:

- in the first pay round of the PPP the union struck to win a good pay deal, raising the profile of the engineering branches and giving their members confidence;
- 2005: when Metronet tried to cut jobs, simply to increase profits, the RMT used the "jobs for life deal" to grind them down, holding a solid strike with solidarity from train drivers and station staff;
- also in 2005, Metronet tried to outsource train maintenance; reps were worried about "ballot fatigue" among members, so they



formed the Strike Committee to widen rank and file involvement – 25 to 30 delegates came from all parts of the workforce, a Literature Group produced leaflets and information, and the Negotiating Team had to report to the Strike Committee to avoid isolation at ACAS; they won a settlement which stopped the reorganisation;

- when Metronet went into administration the union had its most successful strike, with great solidarity from other workers; they not only stopped all lines maintained by Metronet but, through control of certain infrastructure, they also stopped the Jubilee and Piccadilly Lines, maintained by Tubelines; a key factor in the victory was that the strike was kept going during negotiations;
- the fifth dispute, when the contract went back in house, aimed to win equality of pension and travel rights for workers who started during the PPP and who hadn't transferred from LUL; however, RMT leaders were keener on getting the contract back in house than on workers' pay and conditions and, as the dispute held up this objective, they hastily agreed a deal over the workers' heads and had to be challenged over it;
- last year saw the attempted victimisation of safety rep, Andy Littlechild; the sacking would have been the first of many in an

Union Structures

attempt to break the union, but a 48 hour strike, coordinated via the Shop Stewards Network to coincide with planned bus workers' strikes, forced management to cave in;

- a new dispute is brewing after LUL announced 1,000 job cuts, threatening the "jobs for life deal" and seeking compulsory redundancies and a five year pay cut; with the Metronet organising model now becoming the London Regional Transport Strike Committee, the successful methods used in the past mean that activists are confident they will win.



The tactics used by the Metronet Strike Committee are crucial factors in its successes. Their organising model is built from the bottom up – the reps meet with the rank and file members; the reps then meet with the Strike Committee; and the Negotiating Team takes its lead from the Strike Committee. They use the ACAS guidelines on consultation to organise workplace meetings to speak with the membership. After talks at ACAS, the Strike Committee meets and coordinates the activities of the reps while the Literature Group constantly puts out information to the membership. When still under Metronet they also involved other grades, like drivers and station staff, in the Strike Committee. When it suited them, they also

made sure that Metronet and LUL knew what they were doing, as it put pressure on them to back down.

Widening involvement maintains rank and file control and provides an anchor for the Negotiating Team, who could easily become isolated and open to the suggestions of management and full timers at ACAS. The Strike Committee had



even considered giving the Negotiating Team a mandate that would be flexible but with a bottom line beyond which they would be trusted not to concede. If the Negotiating Team were in a position where they had to break the mandate to make progress, they would have to meet with the Strike Committee first. The Strike Committee is also able to monitor and challenge actions by

full time officials and, crucially, does not call off any strike before a firm deal is on the table.

Some factors in their success are unique. They had built up a culture of resistance from fighting the PPP; they had the "jobs for life deal"; they also had a critical mass of good reps – whereas TubeLines had a shortage of reps and workers have suffered in comparison despite similar conditions. Solidarity was also built up with the many subcontractors and agency workers on the track, over health & safety issues, for instance. This paid off when the RMT fought against the PPP – even though ten RMT members scabbed on the first strike, none of the 200

agency workers crossed picket lines. Another factor was their ability to have big mass meetings, as the workforce is dispersed and has to come back to the depot. The RMT also has a "short structure" where there are not too many layers between the rank and file and the national leadership, which makes it easier to pressurise the leadership. The small number of full timers also worked in the reps' favour.

This organising model shows the possibilities for building a culture of resistance in any workplace, if effective reps, and affinity among them, are built up and spread out. A resolution is to be put to the RMT's AGM to formalise the position of Strike Committees in the union's structure. Although it includes a few sops to the Executive, it would also make them accountable and force them to consult Strike Committees before doing any deal with bosses.



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PFI: the Economics

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (PPP) IS AN UMBRELLA term for a range of initiatives involving the private sector in operating public services. The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) is the most frequently used. The key difference between PFI and conventional ways of providing public services is that the asset is not in public ownership. Instead, the public service provider makes an annual payment, like a mortgage, to the private company which provides the building and associated services. Whilst PFI projects are structured in different ways, there are usually four key elements – design, finance, build and operate.

The government uses PFI because costs are spread typically over 25 years; because, it argues, the private sector would be much cheaper and more effective in building and running public sector projects; and because it was calculated that the public would care little about who actually provides public services, just as long as they remained free and available to everyone.

Though the Tories first brought in PFI, Labour has embraced it with a real passion. PFI is now one of the main ways to build and run public sector projects, funding everything from schools and hospitals to roads and the underground. Totally hooked on free market principles, the government has increasingly forced various departments and local authorities to use PFI.

In PFI's early years government could silence critics by pointing to shiny new hospitals and schools as evidence of success. But as time has passed, and as more and more PFI funded projects have come on

stream, its "wonders" have been challenged by an increasing number of highly critical reports. In recent years this has reached the point where even the government's own auditors have been slamming the performance of PFI.

Criticisms of PFI are many, ranging from cost to quality. For example, an Audit Commission report into PFI funded schools found their

quality to be far worse than publicly financed schools. The best examples of innovation came from traditional schools and the cost of services like cleaning and caretaking was higher in PFI schools. The report also criticised poor design in PFI schools, such as small classroom sizes and poor acoustics. A report by the Audit Office in Scotland was equally damning. It found that PFI schools were completed no quicker than state funded schools, that the cost of building and running PFI schools was much higher, and that over a 25 year period local councils would be paying up to five times more than the original investment by the private companies involved.

soaring profits

That PFI is far more expensive than traditional state funded projects should be no shock; after all the state can always borrow money to finance projects more cheaply than the private sector. Another reason why PFI is more expensive is the huge profits made by PFI companies. The 20% annual profit rate for companies involved in the PFI funded London underground improvements is typical. Another thing pushing up the cost, and the profit margin, is the clever little insurance trick. All the risk in PFI projects comes in the first few years; once the building is completed at cost and on time, there's very little risk. PFI companies can then renegotiate loans, allowing profits to soar, in some cases by 80%. Another factor driving up costs is the use of advisers and consultants. The first 15 NHS trust hospitals spent £45 million on advisers, a full 4% of the capital value of each hospital.

PFI companies have also boosted profits by driving down wages and working conditions. A Unison report found that in 80% of PFI



of the Madhouse

projects surveyed pay and conditions were far worse than for the already poorly paid workers in the state sector.

To meet the rising cost of PFI schemes local authorities have been forced as divert money from other social provision. In many cases they can't even pay for staff to work in the PFI funded building. A British Medical Journal investigation found that due to lack of resources there has been a 20% cut in staff in PFI hospitals, badly impacting on the services provided.

You might think that as the problems pile up the government would seek to save face and revert to state funded public provision. But no, the opposite is happening and Labour seems ever more determined to make PFI work.

However, they now face a threat to the whole scheme. PFI has been based on cheap loans but the era of cheap money has ended with the credit crunch and companies are finding it almost impossible to borrow the huge amounts needed for PFI projects. This is putting at risk all of the government's public sector programmes, like the proposed £40 billion school building programme and the multi-billion pound waste processing and recycling facilities, which must be in place by 2013 to meet EU targets.

no longer viable

The simple answer would be to announce that, due to the credit crunch, PFI is no longer viable and planned public projects are to be state funded. This would allow the government to argue that, not only is it guaranteeing public services, but it's also providing a much needed boost to an ailing economy. But, in a sign of just how much free

market orthodoxy grips the Labour Party, it seems they are about to announce that state funds will be used to prop up PFI.

This will bring us, in a somewhat bizarre circle, to a situation where the government funds companies to



build public projects. These companies then charge the state highly inflated prices, with part of the price returning to the government to pay the original loan. This is not only the economics of the mad house; it is yet another example of the state taking all the risk while capitalists make all the profit.

There's worse to come. Labour's free market indoctrination is such that it now appears about to renege on its promise that PFI schemes will return to the public sector. The government has made it known that some primary care trusts will remain in private hands after the repayment period. This totally undermines their argument that PFI is not just a more complex method of privatisation.

Should this policy extend to all PFI projects it brings us closer to a point where the vast majority of the public sector will be privately owned and run. The only social

aspect left then will be the principle that public sector provision is free at the point of delivery. But there must be doubt as to how long this will last. The very act of privatisation pushes up the cost of public sector provision, putting ever more strain on public finances.

Eventually a time will come when it is argued that we can no longer afford the public sector. No doubt it will start with people having to contribute a small amount. This will be a first step in a process leading to full privatisation of public services, only adding to the economic and social inequalities we already have.

It is quite remarkable how Labour has been able to move ever closer to private sector provision of public services in a way that Thatcher could never have. They have been able to disguise their free market policies in the language of fairness and equality to deflect public opposition. This has been achieved only due to the cowardice of the trade unions. Had the unions organised action against privatisation it could have been a focal point for much wider action by the whole population. Instead they restricted themselves to token action while continuing to bankroll Labour's extreme free market views. As such, how the unions are currently structured means they are part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

That is not to say that union members and activists are part of the problem, rather that active trade unionists must look beyond the current union structures to better organise class struggle.

The Dead End of

how state ownership of industry does not, never

FOR OVER A CENTURY NOW ALL SORTS OF SOCIAL democrats, Stalinists and Trotskyists have espoused the view that the state can be used to bring about a communist society through reforms and/or seizing the state on behalf of the workers. This has often been dubbed by libertarian communists as “state socialism”. One of the staple demands of this statist strategy is the nationalisation of banks and other industries, bringing them under the direction of the state. This is usually disguised in leftist terms like “public” or “social” ownership, offering the illusion of a “worker’s state”.

However, state ownership of industry is in no way a communist measure – by communism we mean a society free of state direction and based on direct democracy, common ownership and production for need, not want. Nationalisation takes control out of the workers’ hands and into those of the state, which bolsters the rule of class over class. In the Soviet Union, as in the West, there was still a small boss class who gained profit from the labour of the mass of the population.

Nationalisation is not only the preserve of the left. Other “state capitalist” ideologies exist which use nationalisation as a tactic. These include those on the right (such as the Nazis) and so-called “democratic” governments (such as Roosevelt’s with the “New Deal” and the Labour party prior to 1997).

Often, nationalisation has been a tactic for large scale industrial restructuring. It was used in 19th century Europe to develop infrastructure. A classic example is the railways, built at a time when it was believed that market forces would reward the good and useful and eliminate the bad or socially useless. However, it was necessary,

brought the Bank of England, coal mining, steel, electricity, gas, telephones and inland transport under state direction. It also developed the “cradle to grave” welfare state.

However, in the past 30 years, nationalisation was thought to have dropped off the mainstream political agenda. The rise of neo-liberalism, the fall of the Soviet Union and the Labour Party’s dropping of its commitment to state ownership before its 1997 landslide, were, for many, the final nails in the coffin.

the current crisis

To many people’s surprise though, nationalisation has made a comeback. Facing the worst downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s, the near collapse of the banking sector has forced the state to once again openly intervene in the economy. With workers’ militancy at a low ebb, leading to a low wage economy, the growth in credit provided the money to keep consumers spending. This was coupled with

as early as 1840, for the government to regulate and supervise them, simply to protect the public.

In Russia, after the revolution of 1917, the Bolshevik regime used state ownership to develop Russian industry defending it as socialist by saying that fully fledged capitalism was required for socialism to be achieved. In post-war Europe nationalisation was used to restructure devastated economies. Attlee’s Labour government, elected in 1945,



1930s: public works under Roosevelt's New Deal

Nationalisation

has, and never will serve working class interests



the UK economy’s reliance on banking and “mortgage derivatives”. So when the housing bubble burst credit dried up, banks teetered on the verge of collapse and the economy went into recession.

This was most spectacular in the case of Northern Rock with the first run on a bank in over a century and its eventual nationalisation. Since then, the state has also rescued Bradford & Bingley and the Royal Bank of Scotland, while the Anglo-Irish Bank was bailed out by the Irish government. The car industry has also been hit with renewed calls from some on the left for its nationalisation.

However, governments do not nationalise industries because ministers heed the calls of small leftist groups. They do so because of a need to prevent a banking collapse and its inevitable consequences – economic disaster, falling profits and the danger of social unrest.

This use of state intervention by so-called free marketeers like Brown and Bush isn’t new. According to one expert, Ronald Reagan,

great that defender of the individualistic free market, “presided over the greatest swing towards protectionism since the 1930s”. In essence, American workers bore the brunt of “free market discipline” whilst the rich benefited from the actions of the state. *Laissez faire* principles didn’t apply to the working class in that they had no freedom in opposing their exploitation. In Britain, after 17 years of Thatcherite economic gospel, public spending was still the same, 42.25% of GDP, as it had been when she took over. Meanwhile sustained attacks on the working class continued which saw the breaking of militancy and chronic levels of poverty. Unsurprisingly, finance and industry did very well for themselves.

In this recession conditions for ordinary working people are coming under further attack.

Redundancies, unemployment, wage cuts, cuts in public services and home repossessions are all on the rise. Benefits are also being targeted with the unemployed, single mothers and recipients of incapacity benefit, among others, in the firing line. At JCB workers voted for a £50 a week pay cut to avoid redundancies only for the company to make workers redundant anyway. With repossessions hitting record levels the government has even had to ask banks to go easy on mortgage defaulters. So, yet again, we see attacks on working people as a small minority of fat cats get billions in state aid.

communist critiques

So, with all this state intervention, why are we no closer to a glorious socialist future? Why are we actually seeing peoples’ lives devastated by homelessness and unemployment? Simply put, nationalisation is not, and cannot be, a tool for achieving a communist society. Nationalisation by state socialist regimes has never eliminated capitalism. In the Soviet bloc there were superficial differences with the West. Most capital was owned by the state; there was no free >>>



market in labour; the poor had the "right to work". Fundamentally though, the conditions of life for the working class were the same as in the West. Capitalism still existed, because workers sold their labour power and consequently were dispossessed of the means to freely create the conditions of life. As in the West, there was a ruling class which lived off the surplus produced by the workers – this class consisted of a central Party elite which owned the state.

We would thank anyone to point out to us what function, if any, the state can have in an economic organisation, where private property has been abolished and in which parasitism and special privilege have no place. The suppression of the state cannot be a languid affair; it must be the task of the revolution to finish with the state. Either the revolution gives social wealth to the producers in which case the producers organise themselves for due collective distribution and the state has nothing to do; or the revolution does not give social wealth to the producers, in which case the revolution has been a lie and the state would continue.

Diego Abad de Santillan



Peter Kropotkin argued that:

Everywhere the State has been, and still is, the main pillar and the creator; direct and indirect, of Capitalism and its powers over the masses. Nowhere, since States have grown up, have the masses had the freedom of resisting the oppression by capitalists. . . The state has always interfered in the economic life in favour of the capitalist exploiter. It has always granted him protection in robbery, given aid and support for further enrichment. And it could not be otherwise. To do so was one of the functions – the chief mission – of the State.

So when left wing groups today call for the nationalisation of the banks and other industries (as the Socialist Party of England and Wales and their local councillors do) they are not arguing for socialism. After all, state intervention

has historically been a way to save capitalism from itself as it expands and dominates. After a decade of the Labour Party claiming there was no alternative to the free market, an alternative was soon found once the capitalism system faced the threat of collapse.

libertarian communism

While libertarian communist and anarchist arguments against state intervention seem to be vindicated by the credit crunch, how can we respond to the crisis? We, as workers, have to widen and deepen our struggles and not hark back to archaic, out-dated solutions like nationalisation which should be left in the history books. Instead, when struggles arise we have to push tac

tics which are anarcho-syndicalist and libertarian communist in nature such as collective action, direct democracy, mass assemblies and for links to be made between workers despite artificial divisions of workplace, union, sector, temp/permanent status, nationality and so on.

A libertarian communist economy, a system without the state and without the free market, where everyone has equal rights to have their needs met, has always been the aim of anarcho-syndicalists. Workers' self-management will amount to little in a world of inequality with decisions being dictated by the market. However, we have also been careful to always point out that any communist system will be nightmarish unless the people support it and are involved in running it. Thus we argue for the *socialisation* of the economy, not its nationalisation.

*From each according to their ability,
to each according to their need.*

The spirit of anarcho-syndicalism...is characterised by independence of action around a basic set of core principles; centred on freedom and solidarity. Anarcho-syndicalism has grown and developed through people taking action, having experiences, and learning from them...the idea is to contribute to new and more effective action, from which we can collectively bring about a better society more quickly. That is the spirit of anarcho-syndicalism.

SelfEd Collective

Breeding like Rats

the professional middle classes under new labour

AFTER THE SUPER RICH, it's the professional middle classes who've done best from the Brown/Blair years. This army of public sector managers, consultants, advisors, holders of quango posts and various other hangers on have bred like rats under New Labour. They even have a kind of ideology to unite them – an abhorrence of all -isms. These very very nice people have a hatred of anything sexist, racist or homophobic. Their ideology has even been codified in the form of political correctness through which they impose their (in)tolerance on the rest of us.

Take the smoking ban. It's clear the lower orders don't realise smoking is bad for them. The answer – make smokers social outcasts by banning them from public places until they learn the error of their ways. The same applies to those nasty racist, sexist hoodies who're a blot on the landscape of liberal Britain. The answer – ban the horrors, without trial, from where they live and distribute photos so everyone can identify them.

The stronghold of the liberal middle class is the public sector. This army of middle managers spend their whole lives rushing round, clutching mobile phones and attending meetings. No one really knows what they actually do but when they occasionally stop to talk down to you, they always make it clear just how busy they are and how hard life is being a manager. Their mantra is that the public sector must deliver an ever improving service to the customer. Or is it service users? Then again, it might be client – it's so hard keep up with

the latest pronouncements. But keep up you must, because failure to use the latest correct form of words can lead to trouble.

The bane of the middle manager is the manual worker, a group of people who just don't want to be team players. In team meetings they rarely say anything constructive and show no enthusiasm for the latest initiative aimed at delivering a better service. When given their brightly coloured uniforms, to encourage a sense of team working and to present a positive image to customer, they wear them reluctantly and only occasionally wash them. In fact, washing doesn't seem a high priority for them in general.



It's for these reasons, and the suspicion they all vote BNP, that the professional middle management have tried to ethnically cleanse manual workers from the state sector. Through privatisation and competitive tendering, directly employed manual workers are now increasingly a thing of the past. In their place it has been possible to recruit more and more professionals who now make up a whopping 29% of

the public sector workforce, compared with the reactionary private sector where it is only 8%.

Of course it's not been possible to completely get rid of the lower orders. But middle management have been able to draft in some of their professional friends who've set up little companies that run courses on such things as team motivation and health and safety. For a few thousand pounds a time these people are drafted in to train workers how best to go about their jobs safely with wonderful smiles permanently fixed on their faces.

However, professional middle class tolerance doesn't extend to the home where, in order to dedicate themselves to their jobs, they employ a small army of domestic servants. Here they're happy to employ working class people to do the cleaning, tidy the garden, do odd jobs and so on; here their commitment to equality is geared to ensuring their employees are paid the lowest rate possible. In this endeavour, single parents claiming dole, or illegal immigrants scared of being deported, have been found to make for the cheapest and most hard working employee.

But there's a worry that's spoiling this liberal utopia created under New Labour – a growing realisation that Labour may be kicked out at the next election. But then again, that nice Mr Cameron does seem to be one of us. His commitment to the equality agenda does seem real. And there's the added bonus that he might cut taxes. After all, with the credit crunch, professional middle class parents are struggling to pay the kids' school fees. Perhaps it's time to send back the Labour membership card and see if the Tory commitment to keeping Britain as unequal as Labour is really true.

The Crisis

the roots of the global

FROM REYKJAVIK TO RIO, FROM WOOLIES TO Whittards, the fall out from the economic downturn reverberates like a Mexican wave around virtually every inhabited corner of the globe. But this crisis, just as surely as it began, will eventually peter out – but not before wreaking misery and destitution upon millions. Alongside this latest recession is the environmental crisis, with far more irretrievable consequences, and a severity we are now only just waking up to.

Over 100 years ago Karl Marx foretold, how the inbuilt tendency of industrial capitalism to expand would give rise to not only continual cycles of boom and slump, but

also the phenomenon we now call “globalisation”. More contemporary analysts, such as Murray Bookchin and the social ecology movement of the late 1960s and 70s,

later warned of the profound ecological crisis that we now face.

The globalisation of the market economy in the last 30 or so years has been closely paralleled by the unprecedented rise of mega-corporations like Exxon-Mobil, ICI and Coca Cola that have successfully extended their influence around the world. Like all capitalist businesses, they are motivated by 2 key imperatives – the need to make profit and the need to increase market share and expand.

Furthermore, this drive to expand can only be fed by using up ever more resources to produce ever more commodities to generate ever more profits. Where there is economic growth, there is also mass consumption. But our capacity to consume, like the capacity of the natural world to fuel the commodity market, is to any rational mind, finite.

wiped out

The crisis of overproduction that leads to recession occurs when the market becomes oversaturated with unsellable commodities. In this sense, the current downturn is no different from those of the past. The most robust businesses, the transnational corporations, are nevertheless sufficiently well resourced to weather the storm as others inevitably go under. Once unproductive capacity has been (painfully) wiped out, the economy will eventually pick up, and the market monopolising transnationals will emerge even stronger than before.

The same cannot be said, however, for the natural world.

In the last 30 years, one third of the planet’s natural resources have been used up. To quote the New Economics Foundation:

For everyone on earth to live at the current rate of consumption, we would need more than double the bio capacity actually available – the equivalent of 2.1 planet Earths – to sustain us. If everyone consumed at the U.S. rate, we would need nearly five.

Also of growing concern is the ominous spectre of global warming, caused by overreliance on fossil fuels by capitalist industry and



Factory

ecological crisis

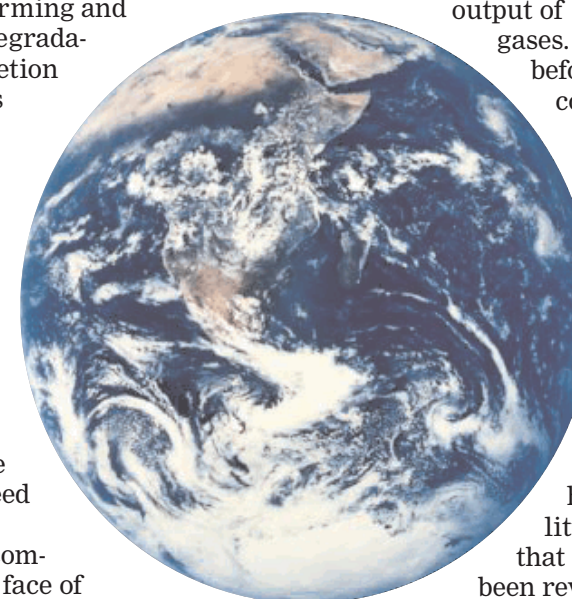
transport. The long term effects of global warming, predicted by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change to take effect by 2050, are likely to result in:

- displacement of populations from island, coastline and river delta areas
- more frequent and more severe weather related natural disasters
- desertification, famine and increasing food shortages

These factors will, in turn, contribute to more widespread human suffering (especially in poorer parts of the world), greater social instability and higher levels of enforced migration. Ongoing resource wars and increasingly repressive population control measures also seem likely.

capitalism in action

Yet global warming and the general degradation and depletion of the world’s ecosystems – the scale of which has only been touched upon here – is no random occurrence or aberration. It is capitalism in action. The overriding need for economic growth flies completely in the face of



responsible and sustainable use of natural resources. Profit margins deter oil corporations from investing heavily in renewable energy sources.

The 1997 Kyoto Protocol committed governments to reducing the output of greenhouse gases. But last year, before the climate convention in Bali, U.N. figures revealed an 11% increase in emissions world-wide. Ahead of the November climate summit in Copenhagen, there’s little to suggest that this trend has been reversed, or that

a proposed new treaty will succeed where others have clearly failed.

What the politicians and corporations (whose interests the politicians support) will never admit to us, is glaringly simple. Capitalism, whether of the free market or state run variety, will **always** trigger ecological and economic crises because, in the final analysis, the overriding priorities of economic growth and profit accumulation come first.

Like the moribund dinosaurs of the old left, our morally and ideologically bankrupt leaders scramble around for false solutions in the wake of their failing system. It is neither alarmist nor inaccurate to suggest that we are living on borrowed time. For us, the immediacy of the need to dismantle the corporate and state hegemony and shape a new libertarian (eco)socialist order; quite simply, cannot be understated.

An Overseas Development Institute report indicates that the global economic crisis could cost up to 90 million lives, increase in the number of those going hungry to nearly a billion.

A Killer at Work

Though asbestos is now banned in Britain, many buildings we live and work in today predate the ban. For example, about 90% of schools still contain asbestos. As a result, thousands of people are dying, and will continue to die, from asbestos related diseases which very often are not manifest until many years, even decades, after exposure.

Asbestos is a fibrous substance found in seams between layers of rock. The fibres are strong, flexible, and will not burn below 1000 °C. There are different types but these days 95% of all asbestos mined is white asbestos, or Chrysotile.

When processed it is broken down into tiny fibres, which are so strong and pliable they can be spun and woven. There is practically no limit to how small these fibres can get. When asbestos is used, even if only handled, it gives off dust, some of it invisible. These invisible fibres can enter the lungs and are responsible for asbestos related diseases.

Asbestosis is the most virulent form of pneumoconiosis and, unlike silicosis, continues to worsen, even if the victim has ceased working with asbestos. In 1947 the Chief Medical Inspector of Factories reported that asbestos victims were ten times

more likely to get lung cancer than miners or quarry workers suffering from silicosis.

Mesothelioma was a rare cancer of the lung until, in the 1950s and '60s, increasing numbers of cases were reported, nearly all connected with asbestos. What was even more alarming was that many of the victims of Mesothelioma had contracted it from either living near a mine of factory, or from dust shaken off a relative's work clothes. Mesothelioma is today the biggest industrial killer in this country.

Conservative estimates for the number of British people who will die of asbestos related diseases, based on World Health Organisation figures, are 50,000 for lung cancer and 12,000 for Mesothelioma.

If workers discover asbestos contaminating their workplace, they should act immediately; under health and safety legislation, we have the right to refuse to work in hazardous conditions. So, workers should walk straight off the job, demanding the boss to bring in qualified people to seal off the hazardous area and to remove all asbestos.

Further info:
www.hazards.org/asbestos/

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April Fools

Dear comrades,

On April 2nd, the multinational G20 circus descended on London. The G20 is composed of Finance Ministers from the world's foremost advanced and emerging economies, and representatives from the IMF, European Union and World Bank. The stated purpose of the summit was "*to seek solutions to the global financial crisis*". Abolishing capitalism, however, didn't feature highly on the agenda. Instead discussion centred on measures aimed at restoring confidence in the battered financial markets and further attempts at "restabilising" the fragile world economy.

In the last 20 years or so, global capitalism has predicated growing social inequality, war and pillaging of the environment. The impact of this has been especially acute outside of the richest 20 nations. Just 4.3% of the recent Wall Street bail out could have ended world hunger (source: Dissent G20), but making poverty history is never the priority of the ruling elite.

Our futures, and those of millions like us are gambled away daily on the world stock markets. When the banks collapsed they were bailed out by our money, while their overseers like RBS's Fred the Shred were pensioned off to the tune of millions. We, on the other hand, get saddled with job losses and home repossession.

If the G20 leaders had the power to solve the turmoil we wouldn't be in it. Capitalism is not in crisis, capitalism *is* crisis.

Solidarity, A.D.



Police are the Rapist's Best Friend

Dear **DA**,

If Sapphire had been created to protect the rapist, John Worboys, they couldn't have done a better job.

For 30 years WAR has been doing all it can publicly and privately for the police to take rape seriously, and for 30 years all we have seen is a series of public relations exercises while rape continues to be de-prioritised and one case after another is sabotaged by the police.

We are constantly told that rape cases are particularly difficult to prove. The truth is that the police are the rapists' best friend, and this case proves it. What all these women suffered is a result of a comprehensive refusal by London Sapphire to act on rape allegations: a refusal to gather and keep evidence, search premises, and interview witnesses, and a readiness to dismiss the word of any young woman who has been drinking or drugged and even children, a habit of delaying arrests for days, weeks, or months while rapists continue to assault more and more girls and women.

While the public make protection from violent crime their top priority for what the police

should be doing, the Met and the Home Office have other priorities. Investigating rape is low-priority, low-resourced police work. Every day rape survivors comment on how terrorism, surveillance of protests, property crime and arresting sex workers take precedence over the safety of women and girls.

"Public information campaigns" by the Met, the GLA, and the



Home Office, advising women to avoid unlicensed minicabs and watch our drinks, distract from the real danger resulting from incompetence, prejudice and laziness by the criminal justice authorities.

No doubt we will be told again that the black cab driver case is an isolated incident and offered more technical fixes. But the only way we will see real change, as opposed to cover up, is for those responsible for this disaster at the highest levels to be sacked – just as they would be in other jobs where dereliction of duty leads to innocent lives being wrecked. This time heads must roll.

Women Against Rape

020 7482 2496

war@womenagainstrape.net

Single Status

Dear **DA**,

As if the credit crunch wasn't bad enough, many of us employed in local authorities are now also reeling from the effects of "Single Status" implementation. The 1997 Single Status agreement between employers and public service unions called for a pay and grading review of all local government posts. Many were conned into believing it would give a fairer pay structure within and across local councils. Indeed, at the time, the union bosses told us that "many will gain and nobody will lose".

So what really happened? Most of the reviews are now complete, and the outcomes simply beggar belief. In my local authority, the senior managers all got handsome pay rises, thank you very much! At the other end of the scale, some workers gained while others lost. Significantly, many of the lowest paid, predicted to benefit from Single Status, endured losses. Many others will now get inferior enhancements. The amount of pay lost in the review runs literally into thousands for some. It has not been unheard of for some to lose up to 20% of their salary. The stress caused and the detrimental effects on morale are well documented (see labourunion digest.org.uk).

The new pay structure won't be introduced for 1 to 2 years (some consolation!). The whole fiasco has seen furious back peddling by the unions, embarrassed at reneging on earlier claims. Sporadic strike action broke out in Glasgow and other places. However, again the unions' response nationally has been piecemeal, disjointed and lacking any real conviction.

The long term squeeze on local government funding has resulted in this "rob Peter to pay Paul" pay review. Despite all the talk of "pay harmonisation", there is nothing harmonious about this whole sorry affair. Yet again workers will pick up the tab in the form of pay cuts and rising council taxes for government policy and a failing economy.

That the union hierarchies have again colluded with this should act as further vindication of those like SolFed who advocate direct action and workers' control.

Yours, Dave.

1976 and

NICKED THE TITLE FROM AN OLD *FINANCIAL TIMES* article about the economy in the early 90s and whether we were in for a repeat of the crisis of 1976. Memories of 1976 include the hot summer, Man City's last silverware, and early punk rock songs about anti-christs, anarchists and being "pretty vacant". However, for the wealthy and powerful – and those of us who want to destroy wealth and power – 1976 was a catalyst for change and these changes are still going on over three decades later, in a crises that's at least as severs as we had back then.

Jim Callaghan's Labour government had to beg the IMF for a bail out. They were in that much debt nobody would lend them any more. Nor did lenders like our "stagflation" (high unemployment and high inflation at the same time). To the rest of the world Britannia was knackered after years of "ruling the waves", battering the colonies and robbing them blind. So they turned their backs on the 15% interest rate on British government bonds. As a result, the pound was worthless.

The pig rich moaned about dwindling returns on their "un-earned income", their investments and stash in the bank; about the spiralling prices of luxury items and posh food; about the new taxes that they had to employ someone to dodge; about punk rockers,

football hooligans and kids coming out of school thick and with dirty finger nails; about nobody doffing their caps any more, the riff raff going off to Spain, and there being too many foreigners about the place.

Above all, they moaned about the unions having "too much power". The country was a right mess according to the daily fascist, drip feeding us with classist and racist shite. They didn't blame the thievery and decadence of money mad megalomaniacs. Oh no! The "British disease" was our fault, what with workers on demos and wildcat strikes all the time and the bone idle unemployed

with no "work ethic" and no respect, being paid "fortunes" on the dole to shag, smoke dope, get pissed and have a laugh.

Blame was all around, but the rich and powerful could pay academics to feed the press. So the likes of Bacon and Eltis argued the problem was "too few producers" because of the size of the 'public sector'.

The "public sector", anything paid for by taxes, includes bombs, the army, navy and air force, the law, police, government, bureaucrats and the dosh doled out to the horde of royal parasites. But it wasn't this "public sector" that got the blame. It was the "cradle to grave" welfare state with free schooling, free teeth and free death. It was also nationalised industries, ones run by the government – some, like transport, gas and electricity, in the name of efficiency; some, like car firms, because the cost of them going under was politically high; and some, like bomb factories and aerospace, because the power freaks want to have their own. Running these industries gave our leaders another excuse to wear hard hats and swan around factories watching other people work.

Lefties loved it. Tony Benn called it "socialism"; others called it "progress", the state working "on our behalf". Some saw it as control and a way to keep us fit for exploitation. The right agreed with Benn and hated it, and 1976 gave them their chance to stop it. From then on "progress" went into reverse.

Among other things, Callaghan kiboshed Keynesianism – the idea that governments spend their way out of trouble – and rubbished the

All That

education "system" for turning out kids who couldn't read and write. These ideas showed the growing influence of what was to be known as the "New Right". They weren't really new though; they just latched on to the ideas of Smith, Ricardo and Malthus from the 1700s, kept alive in books and in academics' heads.

The state protecting private property and defending the "realm" is good, but taxing upstanding rich people is bad – prevents the "trickle down effect". Giving money to charity is good but the state taking the money and giving it to the poor is bad – makes them lazy and dependent; they have too many kids and need "the whip of hunger" to make them work. Education in the hands of "pinko" teachers is bad – might encourage kids to think, when what they need is "facts" and the "work ethic". Free health is no good either. How can "experts" know each individual's wants and needs? Only the free market knows that. All the welfare state has done is give cushy jobs to loads of know-it-alls and give them power over the humble *Daily Mail* reader.

The nationalised industries had done the same, giving jobs to militants like "Red Robbo" who were "holding the country to ransom". What, with all those "loony left" councils too, taxpayers' money going down the pan had to stop.

According to Bacon and Eltis, 60% of the economy was in the non-productive public sector: High taxes

and government borrowing was "crowding out" the "dynamic private sector", where all the profits were made and all the real wages were paid. Others argued that the welfare state stopped us doing things for ourselves; yet others that it hadn't worked anyway, that the middle class had claimed it all.

So, successive governments set out to get rid of it. Callaghan first, then Thatcher with a vengeance. She privatised everything she could and what she couldn't privatise, private sector business techniques (like local management of schools, performance indicators, and so on) were brought in. Managers became the new darlings and have been paid fantastic wages and bonuses.



Another wheeze was to "liberalise financial services". Banks, building societies and other money making schemes the pig rich use to get even richer, were left to control themselves, to do what they wanted. Again, it was the notion that when the rich get richer it "trickles down". So, they gave mortgages to anyone – £100 down and move right in; 100% mortgages to people in the "Anglo-Saxon flexible labour market". The market decided what was

right, based on profit and greed. People "got into property" for profit spawning whole TV channels dedicated to buying and selling "properties" that were once called houses.

Anti-union laws, spineless union leaders and mass redundancies all but killed off militancy. Tax cuts for the rich, benefit cuts and falling wages for the poor all meant more money lining the pockets of the scum at the top. Control of the school curriculum, an end to free teeth, no more council houses, no more this and no more that; make everything hard to claim and get those public sector workers under the thumb; more casual labour, agency working, short term contracts and super-exploited imported labour.... And so it's continued.

The problem is, capitalism is unstable, always moving from boom to slump. Now the experiment that brought fantastic wealth for the greedy rich has been found out. The very policies brought in in response to the "big state" idea being blamed for the 1970s crisis have themselves now been found wanting.

This time governments everywhere are bailing out banks, not the other way round, spending our money like confetti, with borrowing going through the roof. And who is it that's going to end up paying for it all? One thing's for certain, it won't be the rich and powerful. But perhaps this time round people won't fall for it all again; perhaps this time they'll realise the whole system is run by a gang of thieves; perhaps this time they'll get organised and begin to fight back.

Primark's use of a Manchester sweatshop paying way below the minimum wage is followed by TUC findings that over 1.5 million workers are being cheated out of the minimum wage – hairdressing, hotel and bar staff are among the most likely to be affected.

The Healthcare Commission reported at the end of March that the pursuit of (market driven) targets to the detriment of patient care may have caused the deaths of 400 people between 2005 and 2008.

Looking back at the 1984-5 Miners' Strike

IN MARCH 1984, TWENTY FIVE YEARS AGO, THE NATIONAL Coal Board announced it intended to close 20 pits with the loss of 20,000 jobs. Cortonwood in South Yorkshire was earmarked as the first to close, "imminently", in the words of the NCB chairman, Ian MacGregor. The miners at Cortonwood immediately came out on strike and by March 12th the National Union of Mineworkers had made the strike national. This was to become the bitterest industrial dispute in most of our lifetimes and marked a major defeat for the working class.

The background to the strike lies in the early '70s, when the miners fought Ted Heath's Conservative government and its neo-liberal economic policies. Famously, Heath called an election over "who ran the country" while the miners were on strike, and lost. The right wing of the Conservatives began planning its revenge almost immediately, with the Ridley Report of 1974 laying out detailed plans of how a future Conservative government would provoke and win a conflict with the unions, and the miners in particular. There had been a close call when a strike nearly happened in 1981, but the government backed down. It later emerged this was because they didn't have all the elements of the Ridley Plan in place by then.

anti-union

The government brought in Ian MacGregor as head of the NCB. He had previously been in charge of British Steel where he successfully closed plants and made redundancies. MacGregor was viciously anti-union and was greeted with hostility by Arthur Scargill and the NUM leadership.

The miners' action at Cortonwood quickly spread across the coalfields, with Yorkshire, Kent, Scotland, South Wales and the North East all being solid. Lancashire and North Derbyshire had about two thirds out, but the rest of the East Midlands had a very poor turnout. Their pits were more modern and the miners there

had higher pay. Nottinghamshire in particular was told that their pits were safe from the programme of closures

to ballot or not to ballot

Central to the arguments amongst striking miners was whether there should have been a national ballot. Dave Douglass, who at the time was a delegate from Hatfield Main colliery in South Yorkshire, argues that the national ballot would probably have been won. However, he also believes that the leading role played by the rank and file miners meant that it wasn't going to happen. The militants were afraid the union was going to sell them out, and could see the strike had already stopped most production. They were also well aware that a successful ballot would not have stopped



Cortonwood Colliery



the hardened scabs in Nottinghamshire. In Douglass' words they

...instructed their delegates at pit after pit to vote against a national ballot and to continue the strike to victory. It was an entirely understandable reaction, but in retrospect a mistaken one...

The main flashpoint between scabs and strikers was Nottinghamshire, where scabs were just over the county border from the striking militants in South Yorkshire. The other notorious flashpoint was the Orgreave Coking Works, the scene of mass pickets which were attacked by police. These are the well known clashes, but there were many more, particularly as militant miners were using informal groups known as "hit squads" for lightning actions under the noses of the police.

Not only did the miners have to contend with scabs and management, though. As the full force of the state was mobilised along the lines of the Ridley Plan, parts of the country



were turned into a virtual police state as miners were prevented from travelling and anyone who looked like a miner or supporter was stopped on the roads. The police acted with impunity on the picket lines, and anecdotal reports from the

miners stated that certain forces were much worse than others. Undoubtedly it was deliberate policy to use police with no local connection or sympathy for the miners. In particular the Metropolitan Police were renowned for their arrogance and brutality.

scab union

The state also used devious methods – infiltrating the unions, intelligence reports from the EEU (electricians union) and conniving with the Notts NUM officials to create a breakaway scab union, later to become the Union of Democratic Mineworkers.

Because the strike was declared illegal by the courts, miners and their families were not entitled to benefits and the NUM's funds were sequestered. The media played its role too. All the main papers were resolutely against the miners, and the BBC edited footage of heavily armed police attacking unarmed miners to make it look like the miners started it.

Solidarity from other workers was in many senses magnificent. It kept the miners going without any other income for twelve months, and >>>



donations came from all over the world.

solidarity action

Unfortunately, the sort of solidarity which might have made a difference was in short supply. There was some blacking of coal by rail workers, seafarers and dockers, and there were rumblings in the power stations, but none of these were sustained. Most important was the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers (NACODS), the union for supervisory grades in the pits. NACODS members were going home on full pay if they met a “difficult” picket line. In August, the NCB rewrote these guidelines and they would have to go into work in the reinforced buses used for

scabs. NACODS held a ballot over this and got an 82% yes vote and were on the verge of striking in September 1984. Even MacGregor, in his biography, says that if they had come out a compromise to end the miners’ strike would have been forced on the government. However, the government had an informant in NACODS; their demands were quickly met, avoiding the strike.

Electricity companies kept the power going over the winter of 1984-5 and the strike began to fade. The media became obsessed with the numbers of miners who were back at work, even though the government later admitted that the figures had been inflated. On 3rd March 1985, miners marched back to work behind their banners.

The miners’ strike was a time when class conflict in Britain was open and not one sided. The strikers

knew who their enemies were. Those deceived by the media, the government or their own self-interest have nearly all fared as badly as the strikers. The areas which scabbed had their pits open for longer, but eventually they were still closed and their communities destroyed. There are now only about six thousand coal miners in the UK – twenty five years ago there were two hundred thousand. In 1994, British Coal was privatised and only fifteen pits remained – a vindication of the warnings by

the work, but because they understood what would happen to their communities if the pits closed.

The strike also raised questions of where solidarity came from and how different struggles were linked. The role of women in supporting the men, particularly that of Women Against Pit Closures, went some way to counteract chauvinist attitudes of many miners. The active support of black and gay groups also challenged prejudice.



For anarchists, the strike showed us that our ideas were relevant. Those so-called anarchists who were really individualist liberals found themselves adrift, but for SF’s predecessor, the Direct Action Movement, the lines drawn by the strike were clear. Militant workers used direct action in a hard fought, serious class struggle.

Scargill and the NUM militants of what lay behind the closure programme. Only four deep pits and five open cast mines remain open.

aftermath

Former mining areas are pockets of poverty and disadvantage. There were very few other jobs available for redundant miners in the coalfields and unemployment reached 50% in some areas. Suicides were higher, particularly around the time of the strike. Economic stagnation has been followed by an influx of drugs and the despair that goes along with them. Some pit villages have high numbers of empty or abandoned homes as residents have migrated elsewhere for work. As Dave Douglass writes, “visit the former pit communities today and you will still see the results of that defeat”. The miners weren’t striking because they liked

However, the question was also posed of whether the DAM was an anarcho-syndicalist organisation or an organisation of anarcho-syndicalists. While DAM had some support among the more direct action oriented miners, none of them joined. Dave Douglass later joined Class War, which was popular with the strikers for its no nonsense tabloid style. This is a question DAM continued to grapple with and was one of the main drivers for its transformation into the Solidarity Federation, which was designed as an organisation that would be easier for militant workers to join.

Dave Douglass

A Year of Our Lives – 20 years since the Great Coal Strike

<http://libcom.org/library/20-years-since-the-great-coal-strike-of-1984-1985-dave-douglass>

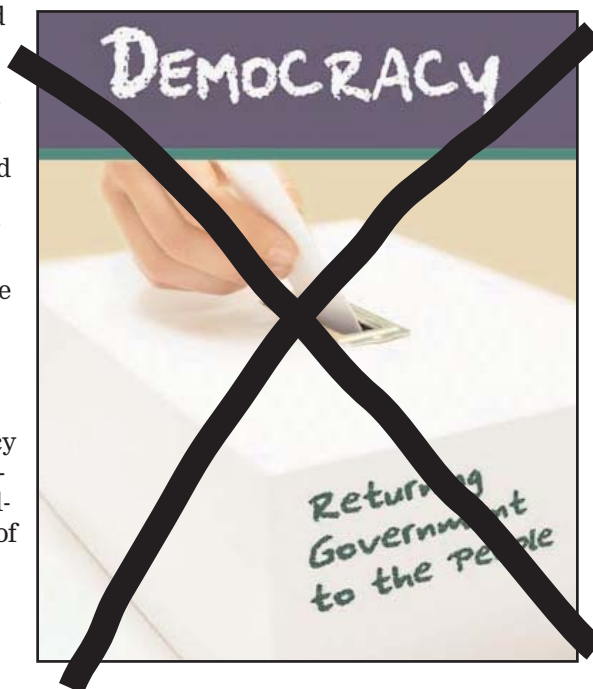
If Voting could Change the System...

the libertarian case for direct democracy

ONE OF THE DEFINING TENETS SETTING LIBERTARIAN socialism apart from authoritarian political traditions of both left and right, is an unshirking commitment to the principles of direct democracy. This is the means advocated by anarchists for exercising and enabling genuinely participative decision making in all domains of human life. Rejecting hierarchical organisation, we argue that both parliamentary “democracy” and totalitarianism have the same intensions – to maintain the distinction between leaders and led, rulers and ruled. Both, in the final analysis, are designed to ensure our passive acceptance of a system that oppresses us.

The idea of direct democracy is not a new one. It surfaced during the Paris Commune (1871), the early part of the Russian Revolution (1917-21), and was implemented on a large scale during the Spanish Revolution (1936-9). Direct democracy is a method used by workers, radicals and protest movements alike, often arising spontaneously during periods of struggle. Employed with a federal and horizontal organisational structure, direct democracy ensures that decision making power flows not from the top down, but from the circumference to the centre. This type of organisation “from the bottom up”, enables authentic democracy and collective decision making, maximises accountability and eschews the ability of any would be leaders, bureaucrats or party hacks to sell us out or otherwise usurp control.

During the early days of industrial capitalism, ideas of direct action and direct democracy posed a very real threat to the established order in strongly advocating the masses’ participation in rather than exclu-



Politics is the art of governing mankind by deceiving them.

Benjamin Disraeli

sion from political, cultural and economic decision making. Thus, conceding some semblance of democracy, while still maintaining their privilege and wealth, became a major priority for the ruling classes in the late 19th century.

manufacturing consent

From the onset of the industrial revolution, against the background of a growing urban working class, dealing with “the problem of democracy” was an urgent matter for the rich and powerful. The arrival of universal suffrage saw a shift from a political order where the masses were denied *any* say, to one where they were *nominally* included – a state of affairs that continues essentially to this day. Our compliance with a social order based on profit, power and exploitation is now routinely achieved by “manufactured consent”.

In contemporary society, the information we receive, and the media that conveys it, is controlled by a select few. In 2004, the media critic Ben Bagdikian pointed out how the entire US media was then owned by no more than five companies. The information presented is constrained by economic dictats and priorities to coincide with >>>

corporate and state interests. Far from an informed choice, the electorates of supposedly “free and democratic” nations face a constant barrage of disinformation and media distortion – not only at election time, but all year round. Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman’s *Manufacturing Consent* and Paul Davies’ *Flat Earth News* (see review, p29) chronicle the mechanisms for misinforming and manipulating the electorate. The net result is all too predictable:

...corporate lobbies and other elites determine political agendas and ensure that elections choose between candidates who differ primarily in how best to maintain elite prerogatives and advantages. Most of the population doesn’t even participate in electoral charades, and among those who do, most have no other option than to repeatedly favour a lesser evil.

Michael Albert, *Realizing Hope*

...they’d make it illegal

The emergence of the parliamentary socialist movement in the early 1900s gradually dissuaded large sections of the working class from taking independent action. This curtailed more substantive forms of democracy in favour of one which served the rich and powerful. The Labour Party may have been, in Kier Hardie’s words, “*born from the bowels of the trade unions*“, but nevertheless proved invaluable in channelling the more progressive working class demands up a safe, controlled blind alley. The integration of the unions into the state structures also helped diffuse militancy. The unions’ hierarchical, bureaucratic structures not only wrestled power from the rank and file, but also promoted sectional rather than class interests. This model of state managed mitigation of conflict was thereafter highly effective in preserving power relations and class privileges.

Internationally, Labour governments have consistently attacked workers’ interests and steadfastly upheld market priorities at all

costs. Even reforms like the welfare state were only conceded because they met the demands of industry for a healthy productive workforce. The few elected “socialist” governments that veered from a pro-business mandate, have been invariably weakened by financial sanctions like “capital flight”. This is the deliberate removal of financial and capital investment – as happened in France after the 1981 Socialist Party victory. As intended, this “moderated” erstwhile progressive and popular policies.

Other subtle financial and market constraints have also succeeded against non-compliant governments. After the 1994 election of the ANC in South Africa, the *Financial Times* cited the “disciplinary effect” of the devaluation of the rand. This led to the adoption of free market reforms that quashed the expectations of the dispossessed in the aftermath of apartheid. Further-more, it has been well documented how development loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have been issued to governments only on the condition that market liberalisation and austerity measures were put in place.

destabilisation

On other (rare) occasions where a party has been elected with the express intention of fulfilling a popular mandate, the threat of a military coup has been exerted to prevent an unwelcome outcome for the ruling class. A planned coup in Britain against Harold Wilson’s government in the 1970s failed to materialise, but elsewhere, successful coups took place in Haiti (1991), Algeria (1992), Nigeria (1993) and

Chile (1973). It remains to be seen if the South American regimes of Chavez in Venezuela and Morales in Bolivia can survive long enough to implement their social democratic reforms, but already US imperialist and domestic business interests have conspired to destabilise both.



From Iran to Central America, the CIA has a long and distinguished history of initiating covert regime change conducted in the name of “preserving democracy”, a common euphemism for the furthering of US imperialist interests. This phenomenon is chronicled at length by Noam Chomsky, John Pilger and others and offers further proof, if it were needed, that powerful elites and market forces ultimately determine political outcomes.

the rich get richer

Globally, “democracy” and fascism have overseen market forces, covert agendas and the conscious exclusion of the majority from anything other than token involvement in political processes with one irresistible outcome – the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

In May 2006, the UN produced a list of the ten most under-reported stories on the planet. Of these, a 2002 World Bank report highlighted a global surge in poverty since the 1980s, to the extent that 80% of the world’s population were below the poverty line. Meanwhile, 1% of the world’s population enjoyed an annual income equivalent to the poorest 57%. A surge in inequality in developed nations had also gone largely unreported. These trends, plus recurring economic slumps, resource wars and a growing ecological crisis have stimulated

renewed interest in revolutionary socialist and anarchist ideas. Significantly, however, only anarchism explicitly advocates direct democracy – for very good reasons.

change the world...

Anarchists, in rejecting both fascism and the smokescreen of parliamentary democracy, have also consistently renounced authoritarian “socialism”. Instead, as Bakunin argued,

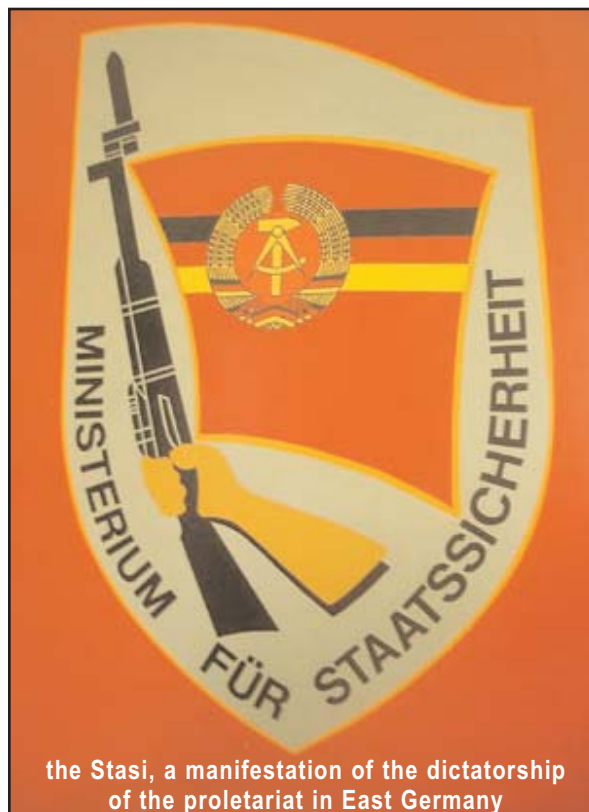
...future social organisation must be made solely from the bottom upwards, by the free association or federation of workers, firstly in their unions, then in their communes, regions, nations and finally in the great federation, international and universal.

Lenin, Trotsky and Marx’s belief that the state could be a tool of liberation has been found severely wanting every time it has crystallised in power. The state, as we have seen, is the means by which the management of people’s affairs is taken from them into the hands of a few. The degeneration of “socialist” regimes time and again into despotic state-capitalist oligarchies is the inevitable failing of a centralist ideology that equates “dictatorship of the proletariat” with “dictatorship of the party”. We now witness the plainly absurd situation of a multitude of leftist parties claiming themselves to be the one true workers’ vanguard. Spouting slightly different variations of the same failed dogma, these clowns all follow a distinctly authoritarian path which, in practice, has always compromised its revolutionary aspirations, actively crushing genuinely liberatory workers’ movements in the process.

At this point it may be useful to explain further why direct democracy is so distinctly socialist *and* libertarian, especially when combined with constructive direct action - autonomous of the state, capital and hierarchy.

Firstly, direct democracy is about originating ideas as much as approving them (as is the case under the elective dictatorship of parliamentary democracy with its preordained party mandates). This is based on the simple idea that people, acting consciously in their own interests, should be architects of their own destiny.

Secondly, direct democracy rests on delegation not representation. Crucially, delegates are only elected to implement decisions and, unlike representatives, can be immediately recalled and dismissed if they do not carry out a mandate allotted to them. Further, delegates do not enjoy privileges, permanence or any other conditions that set them apart from those who elect them.



the Stasi, a manifestation of the dictatorship of the proletariat in East Germany

Thirdly, direct democracy relates to all spheres of our lives; economic, cultural and political. Workers and

communities have very little real say in decisions regarding their workplaces, communities and global politics. Under direct democracy, we exercise real involvement, real ownership, and real control over *all* aspects of our lives.

...without taking power

By practising direct democracy, direct action and horizontal organisation here and now, we begin to not only extend political consciousness and confidence, but also create a new society within the shell of the old. The democratic collectives built by the workers of Spain (1936-7), galvanised by the anarcho-syndicalist CNT, provide probably the best example of this being put into practice. This experience led to the wholesale transformation of not only economic, but also wider social relationships (an experience perhaps most famously eulogised in George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*). Popular rule in this case was shown to be practical, possible and effective on a large scale. However, as with all other examples of direct democracy in practice, the failure to establish libertarian socialism on a more permanent basis owed much to the cynical interventions of power-crazed authoritarians of both left and right. This proves but one thing – without organisation, we are nothing.

Whether we have parliamentary “democracy” or dictatorship, the seemingly insurmountable problems facing the planet and its peoples will not be solved by a few at the top issuing decrees, manipulating public opinion or pursuing their own selfish agendas. On the contrary, the roots of the social ills we see all around us today are the **direct result** of our deliberate disempowerment and exclusion from decision-making processes. It is only by exercising real (direct) democracy with the long-term aim of achieving a libertarian socialist society that we have any hope of retrieving this precarious situation.

It is time to change the world – without taking power.

The Union or

ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM HAS ALWAYS BEEN A THEORY of change derived from the practice of the working class. It started as a movement, expressing itself through action, and any theorists that emerged were militant workers who wrote for workers, not for social philosophers. They dealt with issues of the moment, not with metaphysical niceties that so impress intellectuals and academics. As such, their writings are not to be found in academic books but in pamphlets, newspapers and leaflets. Nevertheless anarcho-syndicalists have always had an overall, coherent view of ends and means.

class struggle

The root of anarcho-syndicalism lies in the class struggle. There are exploiters and exploited, oppressors and oppressed, capital and labour – only the complete overthrow of the existing social, economic and political order, along with the abolition of the state and hierarchical forms of organisation, can change this. This can only be done when the will of the workers to achieve it exceeds the will of capitalism and the state to prevent it. Victory will be by our own efforts. It was once said that while others played at class war like a child with a toy sword, only the syndicalists have constructed from it the appropriate and logical theory of action.

This shows itself in the rejection by syndicalists of political parties; even those who claim to represent the working class because, by their very nature, they deny the class struggle. Party membership cuts

across class lines, it draws upon people from differing social backgrounds and economic interests. It attracts armchair socialists and intellectuals who often have an abstract interest in change and so can often ultimately betray the working class.

Socialist parties are dominated by intellectuals and professional politicians. Their basis is ideological, dependent on temporary and superficial agreements on matters of philosophy. The party, unlike the class, is an artificial organisation. It lacks

the true solidarity that comes from direct economic interest. Their aim is to gain power by appealing to the lowest common denominator of agreement.

Whatever the method of change, be it by parliamentary means or through the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, it results in substituting one set of rulers for another. Freedom and equality cannot be decreed from above but only achieved by action from below.

revolutionary union

Anarcho-syndicalists recognise the need for the working class to organise to bring about a fundamental change in society and in place of the political party anarcho-syndicalists put the revolutionary union – the autonomous organisation of the working class. It unites the workers, not on the basis of some ideology or sentiment, but in their very quality as workers. Although the revolutionary union is a political as well as an economic organisation, it is not concerned with



CGT speakers at a strike meeting in 1909

the Party?

obscure questions of philosophy. The very reason for its existence is to fight the bosses, to defend the interests of the working class and to push those interests forward until the system of exploitation is abolished. Just as the parliament is the natural expression of the reformist, so the union is the natural form of organisation of the revolutionary working class.

Although the first fully fledged syndicalist union emerged in France with the formation of the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) in 1895 the ideas that were to form the basis of anarcho-syndicalism had first appeared in Britain in the 1830s and were pivotal in the formation of the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union (GNCTU). The aim of the Grand National was the complete replacement of capitalism and the system of competition with a co-operative system based on workers' control. Here we see further key elements emerging of early anarcho-syndicalist ideas. In particular, that of one organisation uniting all workers with the aim of direct workers' control of industry – an organisation based on the ideas of solidarity and mutual aid.

social general strike

The GNCTU and the CGT also rejected parliamentarianism and the artificial separation of the economic struggle from the political struggle. Both saw political change coming through the actions of the working class organised at the point of production. Both saw the method of change to be strike action culminating in the Social General Strike.

Anarcho-syndicalist ideas spread at the beginning of the 20th Century and revolutionary unions were established in Europe and South America as well as having an influence in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the United States. One major difference between anarcho-syndicalism and the “industrial unionism” of the IWW is that anarcho-syndicalist unions are federated together; they do not form “One Big Union”. Unfortunately, in Britain, the birthplace of many of these ideas, the nearest an anarcho-syndicalist union came to being established

idea of the revolutionary union is to link the present with the future.

social revolution

Direct action – strikes and other methods of struggle – encourage solidarity. Every strike, successful or not, increases hostility between the classes and stimulates further conflict. The aim of direct action is to win concessions from the bosses in the short term, but in the long term, to give workers the confidence and ability to make wider demands leading eventually to social revolution. It is defensive and

offensive, destructive and constructive. Every strike is a step on the road to the final conflict – the social general strike, the beginning of the transformation to a free society. While the class struggle is waged, the future is being created. The union becomes the cell for the new society.



was the Building Workers Industrial Union in 1914. This was soon crushed under wartime emergency regulations with the support of the TUC.

In 1922 the International Workers' Association (IWA) was established linking all the revolutionary unions together in one federation and the ‘Principles of revolutionary unionism’ were adopted. Each union federated in the IWA adapted the basic principles to the particular situation they found themselves in. The

The revolutionary union is seen as a permanent organisation of workers that gives a basis for working class resistance while the intensity of the class struggle ebbs and flows. In times of low class struggle the revolutionary union would be mainly a defensive tool while still advocating different forms of organisation and fundamental change. As the struggle intensifies it would become more aggressive and challenge the capitalist system and the state. This is what distinguishes anarcho-syndicalism >>>

from other forms of workplace organisation that see temporary organisations springing up in times of struggle only to fade away.

Such organisations have their place and often emerge spontaneously at certain times but they can so easily be used by various political factions for their own ends. Their political aims may be deliberately obscured to gain support but in an anarcho-syndicalist union the political and economic aims are plain and explicit.

The combining of the political and economic struggle in one organisation is unique to anarcho-syndicalism. Other political groups adopt a dual approach that sees political elites trying to guide the economic struggle in a particular direction. Up to recently the Labour Party has been the main political outlet for the reformist TUC unions. Other groups have been trying to challenge this in recent years but with little success as yet. The various parties of the left will set up groups within the unions to attempt to gain influence and get their members elected into positions of power. These "front" groups will recruit from the wider union membership but will remain under the control of a particular political grouping.

self-appointed elite

Other revolutionary unions have been established over the years but

they have been purely economic organisations that have taken the view that political allegiances should be left out of the union. In reality what has happened is that various political groups have tried to exert influence over these unions in various ways including joining *en masse* and taking positions of influence within them. This leads to decision making being taken away from the ordinary members and left to a self-appointed political elite.



Of course the revolutionary union is not only concerned with economic issues. As a political organisation it fights all forms of oppression, tyranny and domination. Its federated structure means that geo-

graphical links between different industries and international links can be used to resist coercion no matter what guise it takes.

means and ends

Today in Britain there are no functioning revolutionary unions. The Solidarity Federation (SF) is not a union but an organisation of anarcho-syndicalists who promote the idea of revolutionary unionism. To do this it is organised, as any

future union would be, on local and industrial lines that are federated together in a national organisation. A member of SF would be a member of both a local and of an industrial grouping. Even given SF's small size this structure is important since, for anarcho-syndicalists, the means and the ends should be as compatible as possible. In this way we do not lose sight of the final goal. The structure of the Solidarity Federation mirrors how a future union would be structured with no two-tier membership system so loved by other political groups.

Anarcho-syndicalist theory and practice presents a fully harmonised programme of action. The strike, the natural form of conflict, is also the form of revolution. The time that workers could hope to achieve anything purely by insurrection is long past. The revolutionary union gives workers a school in which to practice forms of libertarian organising that reflects how a free society would function, with the ends and means well-matched to create the future society in the shell of the old.



Argentina

Factory Occupation

On February 3rd the workers at the San Andres dough maker, Disco de Oro, occupied their workplace. The bosses had brought the factory to bankruptcy by using it to back up various financial and commercial machinations. In addition to these debts and the factory's utility debts, workers had gone without pay as well as social and medical insurance contributions for five months. To prevent the owners selling off machinery, the workers decided to occupy the plant to save it.

Disco de Oro has restarted production and now operates on an anti-authoritarian basis, without bureaucrats and bosses, as a workers' cooperative. All decisions are taken in a general assembly of workers.

From the outset, comrades in FORA (Argentine IWA section, in San Martín have supported the occupying

workers, joining the picket line, collecting money for the strike fund, initiating an international solidarity campaign, spreading information about the struggle among the population at large, and organising, alongside the Disco de Oro workers, a solidarity festival. Featuring music, drama and films, the festival also heard messages of solidarity from IWA sections in France and Spain, as well as from Greek militants.

There was no real help from bureaucrats nor politicians. The official trade union tried to reconcile the workers with the bosses, while Trot parties loudly declared solidarity but fought to control the workers assembly.



Spain

CNT Takes on Robber Boss

Following the current fashion, José Velasco, boss at magazine publisher, *Onis Comunicación*, is using the economic crisis as an excuse to rob workers. The company is chaotically managed, so much so that suspension

solution.

Given this failure to negotiate, the Union of Graphic Arts, Communication and Events, affiliate of the CNT (Spanish IWA section), energetically rejects Velasco's posture and has

therefore declared an industrial dispute. The union's activities focus on all of Velasco's business interests and, as an act of solidarity, are asking for the message:

Onis Comunicación no paga a sus trabajadores. Solución ya.

(*Onis Comunicación* isn't paying its workers. We demand a solution now.)

to be sent to the following:

Onis Comunicación –
info@oniscomunicacion.com

Zebra Producciones, Madrid
zebra@zebraproducciones.com

Zebra Producciones Gijón:
contacto@zebrastur.com

Further info (in Spanish):

www.cnt.es/graficas



of wage payments is a specialism for Velasco and his associates. Indeed *Onis* was set up to take over titles from another of their publishing ventures which had hit similar problems, with similar attempts to cheat workers out of their pay.

Velasco and co. are hoping the state will save them money, by paying *Onis* workers (part of) what they're owed from the Salary Guarantee Fund. They've certainly shown no desire to negotiate a

Germany

Alternative Cinema Sacks Activist

On March 11th, Benoit Robin, a projectionist at the supposedly leftist and alternative Babylon Cinema in Berlin, and a member of FAU (German IWA section), was sacked. The FAU section at Babylon, formed in January, has been organising for improved pay and conditions. Wages at Babylon are 5.50 to 6 euros an hour, with 6.40 for projectionists, compared with 8.50 euros an hour in other cinemas. Many of the workers are casual, with no contracts, and no

paid holidays or other benefits. By similar workers elsewhere get thirty days paid leave. Babylon cannot be said to be in a poor financial health; as an art cinema, it gets a large government subsidy, almost 500,000 euros a year.

In February, as part of their campaign, the Babylon workers organised a protest during the Berlin film festival. Robin was prevented from speaking at the protest, and one month later, was fired because of his role in organising the campaign. The

campaign has continued, using a Billy Bragg event, and a season of films on the Spanish Revolution to highlight the workers demands.

The Babylon workers have a blog:

<http://prekba.blogspot.de>

and there is an online petition at:

<http://prekba.blogspot.de/solidaritaets-erklaerung>.

Please send protest messages to:

Neue Babylon Berlin GmbH
tgrossman@kinoundkonzerte.de
hackel@babylonberlin.de
Tel.: 0049 (0)30-24 727 804
Fax: 0049 (0)30-24 727 800



Guadeloupe

Revolt in the Caribbean

On January 20th a general strike was declared on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe over rising living costs, ending in early March and achieving an agreed \$250 wage rise for all workers. Forty seven trade unions, associations and political parties under the umbrella organisation LKP (Committee against Extreme Exploitation – *Lyannaj Kont Pwofitasyon* in Guadeloupean Creole French) brought all economic activity to a standstill.

Although Guadeloupe is officially part of the French Republic, the traditional labour organisations in metropolitan France isolated and ignored the struggle and media coverage was rare and superficial.

The response of the Paris government was hostile, sending in the gendarmes and the notoriously brutal CRS riot police. Memories are still fresh in Guadeloupe of the 100 workers shot dead by the CRS during a demonstration in 1967. The leader of the LKP, Elie Domota, stated:

Today, given the number of gendarmes who have arrived in Guadeloupe armed to the teeth, the French state has chosen its

natural path: to kill Guadeloupeans...every time there have been demonstrations in Guadeloupe to demand pay rises, the response of the state has been repression.

Matters turned deadly as union activist, Jacques Bino, was killed in cross-fire between youths on barricades and the police. More recently the strike has spread with reports of riots on the French island of Martinique, 100 miles south of Guadeloupe, as well as on Réunion, a French territory in the Indian Ocean.

Talks between bosses and the union initially agreed a wage rise but the strike continued in protest against the spiralling prices on the island which are much higher than in the French mainland. The islands rely almost exclusively on imports sold in French owned supermarkets. A packet of rice or pasta, for instance, costs 90% more than in the *metropole*. Petrol too is far more expensive than in France. Bosses at first refused to return to the negotiation table, citing an atmosphere of physical intimidation created by the LKP, but had to give in after 44 days of solid action by Guadeloupean workers.



Pointe-à-Pitre (Guadeloupe)

Flat Earth News

Nick Davies – Vintage Books 2008 –
432 pages – £8.99 – ISBN: 978-0099512684

The cover notes of *Flat Earth News* offer a fairly concise synopsis of the contents:

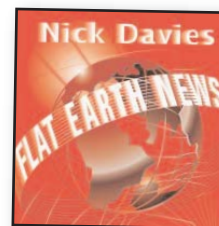
An award winning reporter exposes falsehood, distortion and propaganda in the global media.

For anyone yet to be convinced that the “popular” media is anything other than unbiased, impartial, and representative of the truth, this is the book for you. Lifting the lid on the murky world of contemporary journalism, insider, Nick Davies, reveals an industry dominated by PR, lobbying, mis-truths and powerful interests.

He painstakingly chronicles how the

journalistic milieu – colonised as it is by commercial and power interests – routinely ingests and reproduces prepackaged disinformation designed to satisfy its paymasters. Echoing similar conclusions to Herman and Chomsky’s *Manufacturing Consent*, *Flat Earth News* is littered with examples of how a socially constructed “reality” is used to achieve mass acquiescence with war, corruption and other acts of villainy by the rich and powerful. It forms another vital, essential and

telling reminder to look beyond the façade of media distortion in order to seek out something vaguely resembling the truth.



The Dirty Thirty

David Bell – Five Leaves Press 2009 –
108 pages – £7.99 – ISBN: 978-1905512676

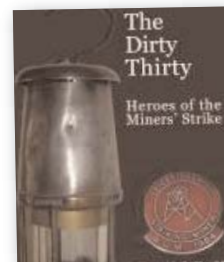
Twenty five years on from the epic 1984-5 miners’ strike, David Bell’s *The Dirty Thirty* pays homage to the 30 or so Leicestershire miners who went on strike from a coal-field where the remaining 2,000 failed to do so.

Illustrated with period photos and ephemera, this inspirational account draws on the experiences of all involved, examining their motivations and offering insight into their tenacity in the face of adversity. *The Dirty Thirty* is a deeply poignant tale of the human impact wreaked by a

regime hell bent on removing all obstacles in its path – one being the National Union of Mineworkers. As a powerful testament to the power of mutual aid, the book describes the emerging support networks during the dispute. The closing

section also highlights “where they are now” and confirms how the thirty’s tireless campaigning came to acquire them hero status among the 170,000 strikers across the country.

This book is a story of how the courage, humour and unbreakable spirit of the miners, their families and the support groups shone through against all odds.



Liberal Fascism

The Secret History of the Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning

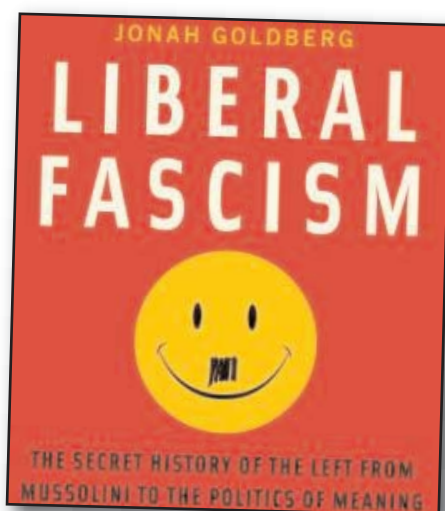
Jonah Goldberg – Penguin 2009 – 496 pages – £9.99 – ISBN: 978-0141039503

A RECENT PROPOSAL BY the student body at London University to campaign against the BNP was unceremoniously rejected by the Tory Party's youth wing unless, they stated, the BNP was identified as a left wing party. It would seem on this occasion leftwing fascism is exclusively the enemy for these young Tories. But there is nothing new about this muddled thinking or its intended implications. To this vein, we can safely say Liberal Fascism belongs. It is an essential crash course in historical revisionism for the American free market right.

Luigi Fabbri described the rise of Italian fascism as a "preventive counter-revolution" to the 1920s worker occupations in Italy. For Goldberg, fascism is defined as:
...a religion of the state. It assumes the organic unity of the body politic and longs for a national leader attuned to the will of the people. It is totalitarian in that it views everything as political and holds that any action by the state is justified to achieve the common good.

There is nothing wrong with saying statism is about bad politics but something else is clearly going on here. (A better definition of fascism can be gleaned from the work of Umberto Eco, for those interested.) We are told that the reason for variants between different national fascisms is because "fascisms differ from each other because they grow out of different soil". Thus begins the clear fudging of what Goldberg defines as the makeup of fascism. German fascism (Nazism) is a product of the social, political and cultural roots of Germany, similarly for Spain, Italy etc., and so it fol-

lows that American fascism is one without need of concentration camps, but one deeply imbued with American liberal culture and institutions. So, essentially, American fascism is a friendly-esque totalitarianism which utilises a plural and pragmatic discourse while bullying the populace into all manner of nasty things. From this we should gather that Goldberg doesn't have the KKK, the various Aryan outfits, the American Nazi Party or any actual nazi group in his sights; no, he's taking time to smear the liberal left, not without reason, but he's missed the wood for the trees.



On the surface this sounds ridiculous, but Goldberg fleshes this out using a myriad of selective sources. He tries to argue that the French Revolution and Rousseau were well-springs for both liberalism and the emerging fascist movement, that fascism is a left wing movement, that progressives were key supporters of fascism – syndicalists, à la Georges Sorel, are also roped into the smear – and that a number of past US administrations and present policies are indeed fascist.

What starts out as political history increasingly looks like a very personalised diatribe. Take the French Revolution; at different points it

can mean different things, but there was potential for progress from the beginning and it is purely ideological of Goldberg to dismiss it. Among other things, the ending of slavery in Europe was a blow delivered by the French Revolution, not to mention the ending of monarchic absolutism. The fascist project during the last century was a movement that sought to defend capital and drew elements from a number of strata. Its absorption of "socialists" like Mussolini was possible because of the political bankruptcy of the Social Democratic movements that had been haemorrhaging members and moving further and further away from any meaningful working class radicalism. Socialism or barbarism as proximity with the truth, it would seem.

The political insight of these fascist thugs was one of rabid anti-intellectualism, not that of a cohort of leftist thinkers as Goldberg would have us believe. What's more, the political model of the German Nazi Party and the Italian Black Shirts was always one of "Bismarckian" reformism – i.e. giving reforms to minimise working class militancy – and corporatism – i.e. the incorporation of economic, industrial, agrarian, social, cultural and/or professional bodies into the state.

The far right have tried to continually undercut the radical left in terms of radical sounding reforms but their interests are firmly wedded to protecting capital. You only have to look up some of the monetary handouts the BNP receives to get your head around this.

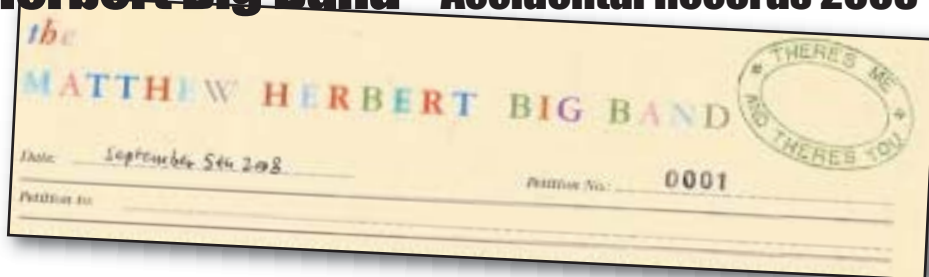
It's telling that, in weaving this history together, Goldberg has little room to mention the right's, or indeed capital's, involvement in any of this; but evidently that would be another book entirely.

There's me and there's you

cd by the Matthew Herbert Big Band – Accidental Records 2008

I REALLY LIKE THIS ALBUM; the music has a modern big band sound with heart and the lyrics say something (although what is not necessarily always apparent to this reviewer). Beside the classic big band swing, there are samples, a strong hint of the classical musicals as well as more modern takes on these – there are similarities with Barry Adamson (a favourite in this house) as well as some of Björk's work.

Having listened a few times without reading the sleeve or the bumf, it is good that the medium used for the message holds its own. If you're writing a political essay, it helps if the writing is good; if you're presenting politics via music it really helps if the music is good – and this CD manages that with spades.



So I was ready to give a glowing review, given the excellent music with its heart and head seemingly functioning well together. But, as a review copy, it was unfortunately accompanied by some marketing bumf or press release which really stuck in the throat. It explains the themes as being about power and its abuses, tackling the Iraq war, torture, Guantánamo, Palestine, AIDS, climate change, the monarchy and religion (pretty ambitious in 12 tracks). Nor is the implication that “music” (not musicians, interestingly) is apolitical or, more likely, directly explicitly and implicitly supportive of the rampages of the

current political and economic structures, too much of a problem for a reviewer in *DA*.

However, in other places the content is pretty conceited and really does seem from another world. The idea that the album “redefines the role of music in politics and fuels political debate in a way unique to the usual outlets of journalism, print or film” would make sense if it were true. For a start, popular artists frequently invoke politics, admittedly often in trite and ill judged ways, but not always. Also, I can think of numerous examples of active and overtly political musicians working in the margins as well as a few fairly successful acts who've taken overt, progressive politics into the mass market. Did the person who came up with:

This album is one of courage and conviction. It will directly politicise a largely inert audience

actually believe it at the time? If so, how? If I were to play this to my self-proclaimed politically uninterested work mates, would the passion of the creators flow through them? The lyrics do not seem clear enough to effect any such clear Damascus-type conversion.

So, this is a great album of music, and the fact it has an agenda is to be welcomed. But if you decide to check it out – and by all means you should – if you end up with the press release, just bung it in the recycling and listen unhindered.

www.accidentalrecords.com

www.myspace.com/matthewherbert

The Common Place – cd, various artists – www.thecommonplace.org.uk 2008

A 23 track benefit for the Leeds autonomous, radical social centre space. This genuinely high quality compilation includes tracks from a similar number of bands who have played at The Common Place. The centre is run as a DIY non-profit venue for local bands as well as hosting local community groups for free. Last year the centre lost its performance and alcohol licence. At the time of

writing the appeal has been considered but the result is not yet out. The centre remains open, without the income that the licence would allow it to have to support its other activities. Any cash this CD makes will go towards supporting the centre. Go to:

www.thecommonplace.org.uk
for more information on the centre.

The music is largely by artists I'm not familiar with, with the obvious and obligatory inclusion on a compilation such as this of Chumbawamba. There is a range of styles like electro, hip hop, indie, punk, dance and folk and numerous mishmashes of some or all of the above. As with any such broad ranging compilation there are bound to be personal favourites.



Anarchism and Crime

ANARCHISTS ARE REPEATEDLY ACCUSED BY their detractors of being idealist, utopian and impractical. One matter, on which the libertarian perspective is often seen as particularly weak, is the thorny topic of crime. It would be fair to say that the “all coppers are bastards”-type polemics trotted out with tiresome regularity do little to convince the potential convert that revolutionaries have anything of substance to offer as an alternative to the crime ridden status quo. Moreover, this continued failure to adequately address lay people’s basic questions with satisfactory answers surely goes a long way in explaining why contemporary anarchism has failed to gain a firm foothold in the collective psyche of the population. Here we offer one contribution towards addressing this perennial shortcoming.

crime, profit and power

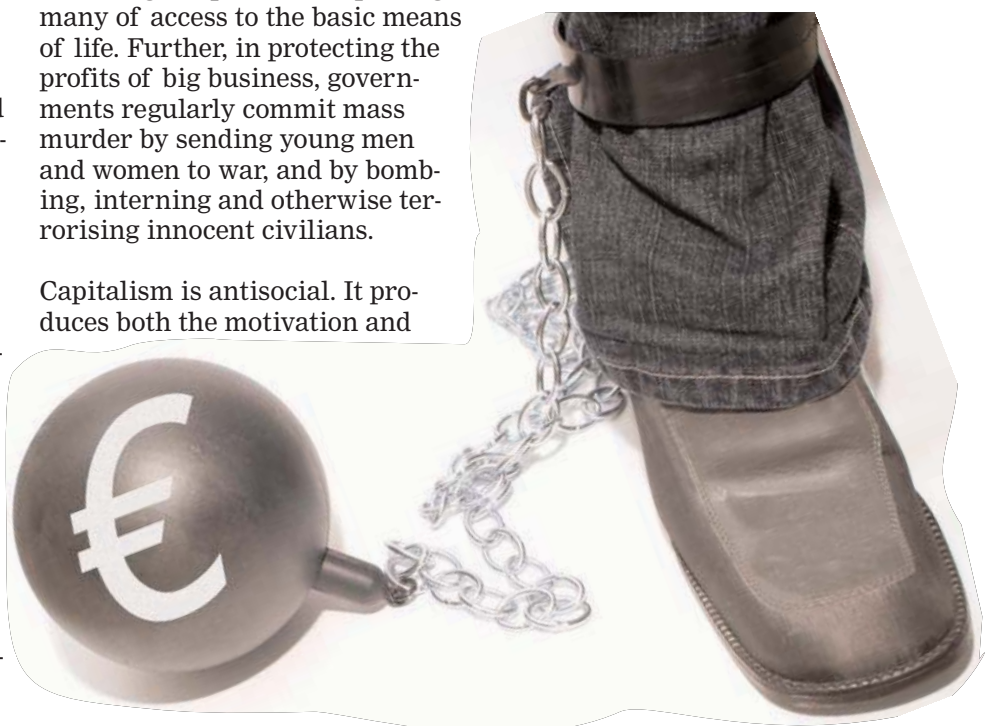
Opponents of capitalism and the state point to the fact that the existing law making and law enforcement infrastructure acts primarily for the rich and powerful. In effect, the wealthy elite, who live in untold luxury from the proceeds of property and labour time stolen from the masses, are just thieves on a grand scale. Their institutionalised theft, however, is perfectly legal. Take the recent cases of the big 6 energy companies that hauled in record profits by introducing unprecedented price hikes that consigned thousands to fuel poverty; or the City speculators who made millions by gambling on the misery wreaked by the economic downturn.

Capitalism is organised gangsterism. Driven by the need to expand and chase profit, transnational corporations and governments collaborate to pursue their interests by

spending millions on arms, destroying nature, polluting the environment, dominating other nations, enslaving the poor and depriving many of access to the basic means of life. Further, in protecting the profits of big business, governments regularly commit mass murder by sending young men and women to war, and by bombing, interning and otherwise terrorising innocent civilians.

Capitalism is antisocial. It produces both the motivation and

material conditions which enable crime to flourish. As Keynes put it: “Capitalism is the absurd belief that the wickedest of men, for the wickedest of motives will somehow work for the benefit of all”. It is a system where the good guy comes last and the scum rises to the top. The have nots are forever goaded to play catch up with the haves, and the haves are forever encouraged to accumulate more – *and* flaunt their ill gotten gains with aplomb. Capitalism means that for every winner, there are literally dozens of losers. Lack of opportunity denies many people legitimate access to prosperity and breeds resentment and crime. Much antisocial behaviour is the direct result of this insidious dog-eat-dog mental- >>>



ity, a mindset that is unanimously encouraged by the ideological apparatus of the ruling class – the media, the education system and the advertising industry.

Research conducted into the psychological profile of prison populations in the UK and the US in the last decade has uncovered staggeringly high levels of mental illness, personality disorder and/or drug or alcohol addiction. Further studies have conclusively demonstrated a high correlation between poverty and mental illness. Social inequality, alienation, manufactured greed and aggressive individualism thus lie at the root of much of what we now know as crime and anti-social behaviour. Other prevalent crimes are linked to sexism, racism and repressive morality, anachronisms that have been unscrupulously handed down from bygone eras, and that continue to be stubbornly upheld by many of society's key institutions. The criminal justice system is a prime exemplar of this; it focuses heavily on administering punishments based on primitive justice, rather than employing more therapeutic methods which might begin to question the very social origins of criminal behaviour.

moral panic

The tendency of the capitalist media and state to exclusively target working class deviance is purposely designed to divert attention away from the transgressions of the rich and powerful. The government spends thousands on combating benefit fraud, yet virtually ignores tax evasion which, in financial terms, costs vastly more. As workplace related deaths continue to rise, prosecutions for health and safety



WpN/UPPA/Photoshot

violations steadily decline. Crimes of the powerful, like insider dealing, tax evasion, embezzlement, fraud, labour violations, price fixing, money laundering, corporate bullying, unsolicited pollution, bribery and political corruption are all part and parcel of capitalism's *modus operandi*. But more often than not, they go undetected and unpunished.

The right wing press thrives on generating moral panics by greatly exaggerating the threat to society posed by minority groups and working class youth. Moral panics are self-perpetuating campaigns of misinformation

So long as every institution of today, economic, political, social, and moral conspires to misdirect human energy into wrong channels; so long as most people are out of place doing things they hate to do, living a life they loathe to live, crime will be inevitable, and all the laws and statutes can only increase, but never do away with crime.

Emma Goldman

leading to a climate of paranoia that actively escalates social problems. They also act as a means of injecting political agendas into the public domain, and are invariably accompanied by calls for more aggressive policing and tougher sentencing. One classic example is the failed "war on drugs". Since its initiation by US Senators in 1924, based on decidedly dodgy advice, the relentless pursuit of drug prohibition policies by governments worldwide has given rise to the very problems they claim to want to solve – a lucrative black market and a trail of diseased addicts, compelled to steal to feed their habits. (See www.flatearthnews.net – reviewed on page 28).

As the prisons overflow, the criminal "justice" system, based as it is on largely false premises, naturally fails...miserably! Acting as a criminal conveyor belt, it efficiently churns out a steady stream of hardened serial offenders.

policing

Many working class communities have little faith in the police, a force that appears powerless (and apathetic) in the face of rising crime

and anti-social activity. Institutions like the police force rely heavily on obedience, orthodoxy and discipline.

They engender roles that erode individual freedom and humanity. This is because when the going gets tough, the ruling elite needs them to do as they're told, knuckle down and keep the rest of us in line.

When striking workers and popular protest threaten, the strong arm of the state – the army and police – preserves ruling class hegemony at all costs. "I'm only doing my job", they say, but if they didn't exist, the giant disparities of wealth and other obtrusive social injustices we see all around us today would simply not be tolerated.

One recurrent symptom of power is abuse. Some months ago, CCTV footage of 4 policemen apprehending a suspect was shown on TV. It emerged that the suspect was actually an innocent bystander who happened to be in the vicinity at the time a disturbance had been reported. During the incident, the officers wrestled the man to the floor, kicked and punched him and smashed his head into the ground. He was later charged with assaulting *them*. Although this was portrayed as an isolated incident, such occurrences will come as little surprise to many who have been on the wrong end of a force that is largely a law unto itself. The inquest into the police murder of Charles de Menezes was compounded by a litany of lies by the guilty officers. This, along with other famous miscarriages of justice, such as that perpetrated against the Birmingham 6

in the 1970s, may represent only the tip of the iceberg.

To an extent, it may be argued the police officers are also victims of class society. They are required to work long hours, and are brutalised by their constant exposure to traumatic events and the unpleasant symptoms of a terminally dysfunctional

society. Some anarchists, in venting their spleen at the police, tend to convey a rather rose tinted view of criminals as if most are just frustrated Robin Hoods, misguidedly seeking to redress society's injustices. This view bears little resemblance to reality. Burglary and mugging rates are far higher in poor areas than in better off ones, and the actions of some criminals, who knowingly target the old, the infirm or the weak, make even the most hard nosed capitalist look positively human. Portraying rapists, murderers and child abusers as victims, as some sections of the left do, is also, frankly, ridiculous.



Nevertheless, most of what we know as "crime" is definitively linked to social conditions. What evidence do we have for this? Well, crime levels vary massively from place to place, from country to country. Generally, where there's tolerance, minimal economic inequality and a strong sense of community, crime is virtually non-existent. Thus, if we reconstruct society in such a way as to rectify today's iniquitous social conditions and to foster a new social order of participation, mutual aid, liberty, equality and justice, then crime will largely disappear.

libertarian justice

So how, you might ask, would an anarchist society deal with crime and antisocial behaviour?

The first consideration here is that even in a society that has resolved the contradictions of class and the anomalies of moral repressiveness, a small amount of crime would still occur. This may be caused by endogenous pathological disorders or there may be crimes of passion that, although relatively uncommon, would still persist. Further, it must be recognised that humans, even under the most congenial social conditions, are imperfect and subject to occasional erring. Personal freedom must always be balanced against the freedom of others and sometimes mistakes, wilful or otherwise, will be made. So yes, even in a socialist utopia, some degree of policing will be appropriate. Further, there may be social problems other than crime that may call upon specialist policing skills, such as unresolved personal disputes, vehicle collisions or floods and other natural disasters. However, the policing role would not be exclusive to a single profession but would be carried out only as part of a balanced job complex.

The idea that a libertarian society would be a complete free for all with no formalised legal, ethical or moral framework is also unrealistic. All anthropological studies of functioning "anarchic >>>

polities" reveal established justice systems of "laws" and sanctions. In the future, these frameworks would not be manipulated and imposed by an unaccountable elite to serve their own narrow interests, but would be formulated and agreed upon by collective discussion, negotiation and decision making in the best interests of the community as a whole. For instance, it may well be decided that victimless "crimes" would not be punished and informal sanctions would be adequate in the case of most petty, minor and isolated offences.

A limited system of community courts, advocacy and legal representation will also be needed. Just as policing requires skills in forensics, questioning and evidence gathering, court adjudicators and advocates would need some expertise in implementing legal frameworks to ensure equity and consistency. These functions would all be discharged in a way that strictly limits any temporary powers afforded to (instantly revocable) individuals, and to empower the wider community, rather than professional bodies or institutions. All those tasked with roles in preserving a desirable social justice system would be closely monitored, fully accountable and subject to rotation. All procedures employed must be completely open and transparent. For

example, in no circumstances would a situation arise of an alleged wrong doer being "roughed up" behind closed doors.

A libertarian justice system would do all in its power to offer representation and advocacy to alleged transgressors at all stages, and in case of conviction, to ensure any sanctions imposed are collectively agreed, proportional and humane. Incarceration of any kind would not be considered, except

in petty and fraudulent civil claims. "No win, no fee" legal firms – or "ambulance chasers" – have a vested interest in encouraging this. A sane society would dispense with such trivia.

Digressing slightly, a case from some years ago may explain how an anarchist society



as a very last resort in the case of a pathological psychopath/murderer, for example. Imprisonment is opposed both on practical grounds (it does not work) and because it is morally repugnant. In many cases, therapeutic rehabilitation will be deemed appropriate in the best interests both of the individual concerned and of wider society.

Anarchism emphasises individual responsibility. If we are all involved in making "laws" then we'll all feel duty bound to uphold them. Individuals will be encouraged to be fully accountable for their own actions and be expected to act sociably, demonstrating mutual respect for others. The litigious culture of today allows excessive amounts of time, energy and resources to be invested

would deal with a problem like a car accident. In some particularly poor weather conditions, a car driven by a visitor to remotest Yorkshire skidded off the road, overturning and concussing the driver. The local community, on hearing of this minor calamity, responded by quickly attending the scene. Acting in unison, and with minimum fuss, they called an ambulance, alerted the driver's relatives and arranged repair and storage of the damaged vehicle until the owner had recuperated. All this was done with no police involvement and little or no cost to the driver; other than a resounding message of thanks and an expectation that the favour would be reciprocated in the event that the roles be reversed.

When a child goes missing, communities rally round to help with the search. When a ship is in danger, volunteers staff the lifeboats. This represents anarchism in action. Problems and difficulties we face are best solved when we all pull together, reinforcing our common humanity and shared commitment to mutual aid, cooperation and community spirit. In the society of tomorrow, these will be our greatest weapons against crime.

Like aboriginal justice, anarchists contend that offenders should not be punished, but justice achieved by the teaching and healing of all involved. Public condemnation of the wrong doing would be a key aspect of this process, but the wrong doer would remain part of the community and so see the effects of their actions on others in terms of the grief and pain caused. It would be likely that the wrong doers would be expected to try to make amends for their act by community service or by helping victims and their families.

Anarchistfaqs, section 1.5.8

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Scarborough: c/o West Yorkshire SolFed

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| other contacts & information

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

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

Kowtowtonone: freesheet from West Yorkshire SolFed.

Western Approaches: freesheet from South West 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.solfed.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.

May 12th / June 9th / July 14th - topics to be arranged for further info: 07 984 675 281;

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| 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.



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