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Party leaders speak with one voice

savage cuts



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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. Therefore, revolutionary unions fully support and encourage organ-

isation in all spheres of life that consciously parallel those of the society we wish to create; that is, organisation based on mutual aid, voluntary cooperation, direct democracy, and opposed to domination and exploitation in all forms. We are committed to building a new society within the shell of the old in both our workplaces and the wider community. 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.

Principles of Revolutionary Unionism

1. Revolutionary unionism, basing itself on the class struggle, aims to unite all workers in combative economic organisations that fight to free themselves from the double yoke of capital and the state. Its goal is the reorganisation of social life on the basis of libertarian communism via the revolutionary action of the working class. Since only the economic organisations of the proletariat are capable of achieving this objective, revolutionary unionism addresses itself to workers in their capacity as producers, creators of social wealth, to take root and develop amongst them, in opposition to the modern workers' parties, which it declares are incapable of the economic reorganisation of society.

2. Revolutionary unionism is the staunch enemy of all social and economic monopoly, and aims at its abolition by the establishment of economic communities and administrative organs run by the workers in the fields and factories, forming a system of free councils without subordination to any authority or political party, bar none. As an alternative to the politics of state and parties, revolutionary unionism posits the economic reorganisation of production, replacing the government of people by others with the administrative management of things. Consequently, the goal of revolutionary unionism is not the conquest of political power, but the abolition of all state functions in the life of society. Revolutionary unionism considers that

along with the disappearance of the monopoly of property, must come the disappearance of the monopoly of domination; and that no form of state, however camouflaged, can ever be an instrument for human liberation, but that on the contrary, it will always be the creator of new monopolies and new privileges.

3. Revolutionary unionism has a two-fold function: to carry on the day to day revolutionary struggle for the economic, social and intellectual advancement of the working class within the limits of present day society, and to educate the masses so that they will be ready to independently manage the processes of production and distribution when the time comes to take possession of all the elements of social life. Revolutionary unionism does not accept the idea that the organisation of a social system based exclusively on the producing class can be ordered by simple governmental decrees and maintains that it can only be obtained through the common action of all manual and intellectual workers, in every branch of industry, by self-management of the workers, such that every group, factory or branch of industry is an autonomous member of the greater economic organism and systematically runs the production and distribution processes according to the interests of the community, on an agreed upon plan and on the basis of mutual accord.

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Anarcho-Syndicalism

Anarchism is revolutionary anti-state socialism. Anarchists aim for the destruction of ruling class power and of all relationships based on domination and exploitation. This means taking over our workplaces and communities and changing them to meet the needs of all, as well as the ecological needs of the environment. Without this takeover, we can struggle within capitalism but never replace it.

An anarchist society will be created by millions of people, not by a dictatorial elite, and everyone will have their part to play in shaping it. Power will lie with the organisations created by working people to defend themselves and to transform society, not with political parties which will try to dominate and destroy them.

Syndicalism comes from the French word for trade unionism and is a theory which seeks to unite workers in different industries and sectors to fight for their interests.

Anarcho-Syndicalism: As syndicalism is a tactic which can be used by a number of revolutionary movements, we advocate its explicit linkage with the creation of a stateless, anarchist society: anarcho-syndicalism. The International Workers' Association unites anarcho-syndicalists around the world, and the Solidarity Federation is the British section of the IWA.

Revolutionary unions, federated inside and outside the workplace, are the best method of defending working-class interests today and for preparing and delivering the new society of tomorrow. In these organisations, power remains at the base and flows upward. Members elect delegates rather than representatives, and these can be recalled at any time. Decision making power remains with the union membership at all times.

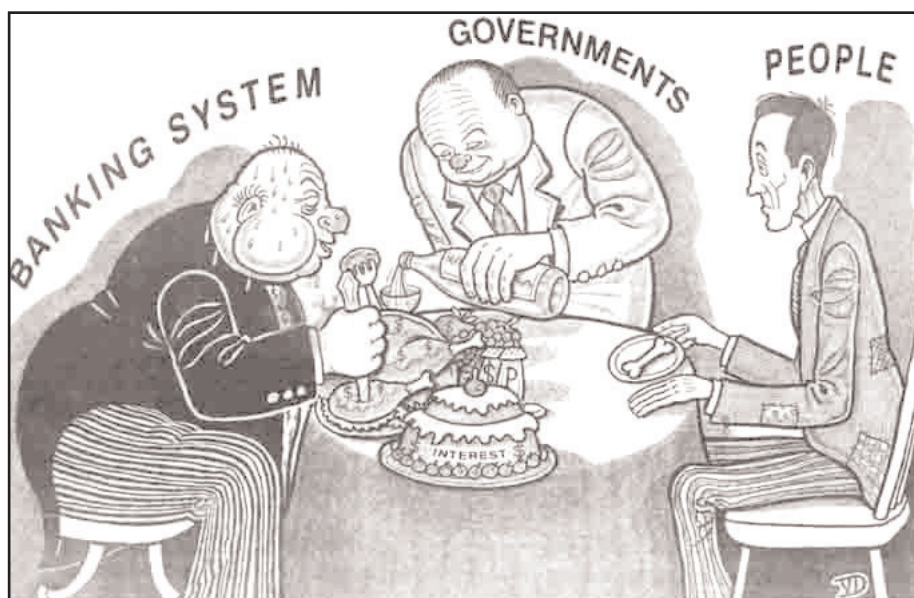
The Red and Black Flag is the primary symbol of the international libertarian labour movement. Its

colours are symbols of the basic principles and goals of anarcho-syndicalism - red is for material and social equality and the black of the anarchist flag is for freedom and solidarity. To that extent the colours of the anarcho-syndicalist flag are a constant reminder both of the libertarian methods by which the anarcho-syndicalist fights and of the goal of freedom from government and wage slavery that she or he fights for.

The red and black flag of anarcho-syndicalism is used by many anarchists around the world in place of their "national" flags. The use of the flag is a statement against nationalism, which is the lie that enslaves and victimises the majority of a people to a minority of exploiters and oppressors in any given country. By the same token, the use of the red and black flag is a statement in favour of internationalism, and of the unity and solidarity of all humanity.

Savage Cuts in Spending -

THE MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES AGREE ON THE NEED FOR *massive cuts in public spending. The only thing separating them is just when the slaughter should begin. They claim the cuts will be painless – in other words, the usual lies. Whichever party is in power, there will be thousands of job losses and savage cuts to vital services with a disproportionate effect on the old, the sick and the poor. The parties are so united on the cuts because they are all wedded to the same free market philosophy. They may fiddle around the edges of free market ideas, attempting to spin them to attract votes but, in the end, none of them have anything to offer but the same free market “solution” of cutting public spending to cut public debt.*



These same politicians were not so ardent in their commitment to free market principles during the financial crisis, principles which see the crisis as a “market correction”, during which inefficient banks should be allowed to go to the wall. When free market economists argued for this, politicians rounded on them, painting them as basket cases whose objections were putting the world economy at risk.

However, this rejection of free market orthodoxy did not last long. In handing over billions of pounds of public money to the banks, anyone with half a brain would have at least ensured the money was invest-

ed in the economy, not just used to line bankers’ pockets. But Brown and Darling stuck to the free market rule that the state should not interfere in the workings of the financial markets. They even refused to cap bankers’ bonuses, arguing that high bonuses were needed to attract the most talented people.

Not surprisingly, banks used this public money to boost profits and to once more pay out massive bonuses. The government could have nationalised the banks and used them to inject money into the failing economy; or, failing that, they could have simply ordered the

banks to use the money to unfreeze the credit markets. Instead, fearful of being seen to interfere in the markets, they were limited to asking – begging, more like – the banks to act in the interests of the economy as a whole.

collective memory loss

With signs of the economy starting to recover, the politicians are suffering a collective memory loss. All that talk of tough new regulation of financial markets is fading; it’s almost as if the crisis never happened at all. Nothing has changed; the banks remain unregulated; they are even beginning to trade in the very same financial derivatives that led to the crisis. Now, with the financial crisis over for the time being, and politicians having once more found their free market voices, all that can be heard are the calls for public spending cuts to lower government debt levels.

They act as if no other way of managing capitalism through a crisis has ever been put forward. In fact, in historic terms, the current ratio of government debt to GDP is not particularly high given that we’re in the middle of an economic crisis. So, following an alternative (“Keynesian”) approach, the government could have continued borrowing without the world coming to an end. It could then have invested directly in the economy by funding projects like new schools, hospitals and railways. This would have created more jobs and dragged the economy out of recession through increased, not reduced, public spending. With the resulting increased tax revenue the government could then have begun to pay off the debt.

That the main political parties reject such an approach is no surprise. The economy under capitalism is run in the interests of the rich, not for the benefit of the peo-

Realities and Possibilities

ple. And the role of politicians is to use state power as a means of protecting the rich. Therefore, free market “theory” is nothing more than a means to justify politicians’ actions in safeguarding capitalism. What’s more, free market ideas only apply to workers, not to the rich. The state is allowed to intervene in the markets when it hands over massive state subsidies to companies. Interference is only bad when used to limit profits and redistribute wealth.

state protection

The same is true of the present crisis. It’s fine to borrow billions to save the skins of bankers, but when it comes to borrowing money to save jobs, politicians return quickly to free market dogma and the need to cut public spending. There’s nothing new in this; it’s as old as capitalism itself. The media and politicians always support the interests of capitalism. They support the state handing over billions in subsidies, as well as the use of

armed force by the state to protect capitalist interests globally. But when it comes to protecting profits by cutting jobs or by driving down workers’ standards of living, the state must not interfere. The free market must prevail; there’s no choice and no alternative but for the working class to bear the cost. And this after the long promised trickle down effect that never came during the boom times.

Reality has been manipulated to suit capitalism until the point has come where we are simply presented with one sorry solution to the whole mess – savage cuts. Alternatives were never raised, never considered, never discussed. All are in agreement that there’s no other way out, so the argument moves on to where the cuts should be made and when they should start.

Nor should we doubt the size of the planned cuts. It’s estimated that £90 billion will have to be cut in the next few years, dwarfing any cuts made by Thatcher, and causing

massive unemployment. Some economists even argue that the moderate £13 billion cuts proposed by the Tories will leave 5 million unemployed. There’s every danger that cuts of this magnitude will drive the economy into a downward spiral of rising unemployment, leading to falling demand, leading to yet more unemployment.

a nasty shock

Despite the problems the politicians seem positively pleased with themselves. They’ve managed to convince each other that the “public” are ready to make sacrifices. Well, they’re in for a nasty shock. It’s one thing to give away vast sums of money so large that the amounts become incomprehensible and valueless. However, the planned cuts will be very real, bringing real misery to millions of working class people and causing real anger. If that anger is channelled and organised there will be a powerful fight back capable of shaking capitalism to its very foundations.

As activists, our aim is to turn working class anger into action. We have one clear message – this mess was caused by the rich and powerful and it’s they who should be made to pay for it. And the only way to do that is through coordinated strike action involving all public sector workers. We should not be diverted from this by the trade unions. Instead of waiting for the unions we should campaign now in our own workplaces and build links with workers in other unions and other sectors. A strike movement built from the bottom up is capable of not only smashing the government’s attempts to impose these cuts but also of starting to map out an alternative to capitalism based on the idea that the economic system can be run for the benefit of all of the people, not of the wealthy few.



Brendan Barber, TUC General Secretary, predicted “riots on the streets” in response to spending cuts. Just scaremongering?... or continuing a long and ignoble tradition of the TUC ignoring the strike weapon against attacks on us by the state and bosses?

Hugging

the rehabilitation of thieves

WITH THE WORLD STILL IN THE GRIP OF ECONOMIC recession you'll be glad to hear that bankers have had to make sacrifices just like the rest of us. The poor things have had to face real financial hardship over the last year or so. In 2008, during the height of the crisis, bankers in London had to get by on bonuses that totalled just £7.6bn – a 40% cut compared to the previous year. Merrill Lynch, which lost \$27bn in 2008, could barely afford to pay bonuses to 700 staff in excess of \$1m each. Meanwhile, at insurance giant, AIG, 377 members of the financial products division, which managed to run up losses of \$40.5bn, had to survive on bonuses which only totalled a measly \$220m.

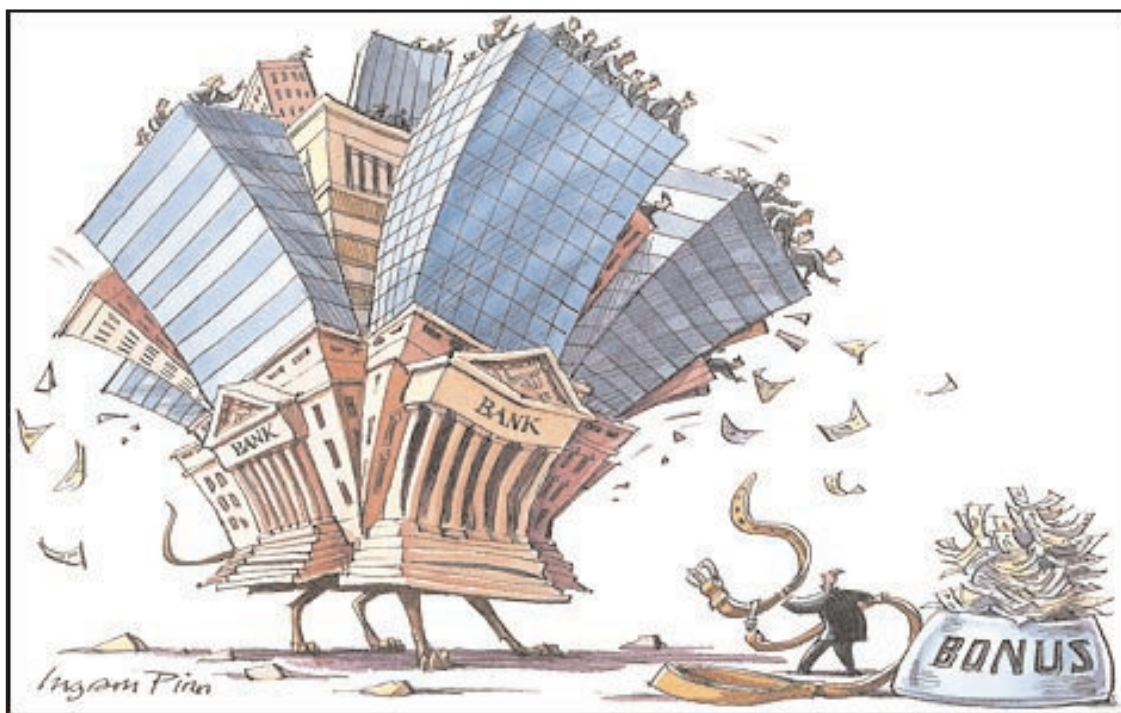
However, you'll all be pleased to know that this age of austerity for bankers now appears to be finally coming to an end. With trillions of pounds of public money having been poured into the world's financial system, banks are once again starting to make profits. Of course, all that hard work by bankers needs to be rewarded – after all it's no

easy matter to work out how to spend such vast quantities of public money – and thankfully bankers' bonuses have now started to increase. JP Morgan recently announced that it would be setting aside \$11.4 billion to reward employees. Meanwhile Barclays has announced £30m of guaranteed bonuses for a small group of new

employees in return for doing nothing more than agreeing to join the firm.

politics of envy

Now, there may be one or two readers, no doubt trapped in the politics of envy, who feel that having got away with the biggest fraud in history, bankers are now being rewarded for their crimes in the form of increased bonuses. We would urge you to put such negative thoughts aside. After all, we should be in favour of rehabilitating criminals and, as such, we should rejoice that not one of the thieving bastards got sent to prison. Instead of punishing bankers, governments across the world handed over our money to bankers, with no strings attached, to raise their self-esteem and boost their low confidence levels, which had been preventing them from properly integrating back into society.



This “hug an investment banker” scheme has been a tremendous success. Bankers, bloated on our money, are now regaining their confidence and are slowly reasserting their control over the nation's economic policies. In recent months, bankers have been queuing up to denounce the high levels of government borrowing and demand that public services be cut in order to pay off the debt. What a welcome sign that

Bankers

and their narrow self-interest

bankers are once again at the top of their game, providing us with the leadership we've so desperately missed. And just in time too, because the building of new schools and hospitals was beginning to divert public money away from the vital task of rebuilding the financial sector.

mad cap idea

However, all of this hard work being put into rehabilitating bankers is now being put at risk. Those nasty right wing reactionaries, aka the governments of France and Germany, are demanding that bankers' earnings should be capped. Thankfully, our own socialist leadership, along with that wonderful example of humanity, President Obama, are bitterly opposed to such a mad cap idea. Prime Minister Brown has strongly argued that state regulation will only impede market mechanisms, delaying the time when the bankers can return to making massive profits and resume their rightful position as masters of the world economy.

The CBI has also rushed to defend bankers. They rightly point out

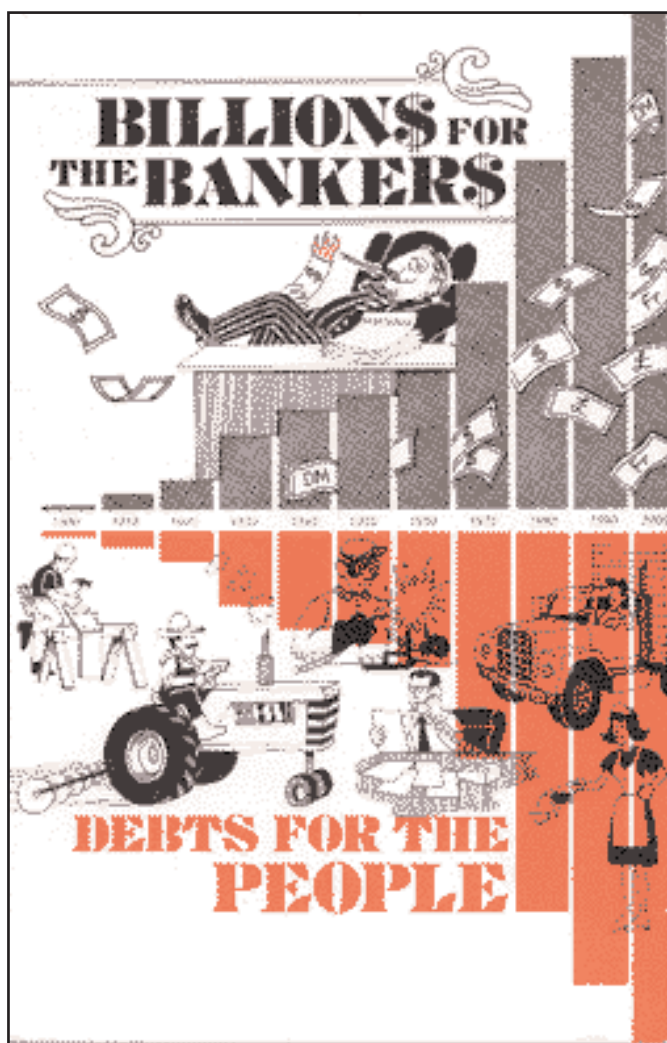
that, while the working class is innately lazy and therefore do not respond to financial incentives – precisely why they opposed the

attempt to restrict their ability to earn obscene amounts of money would be morally repugnant to bankers, leaving them little choice but to leave the country in search of increased earnings.

economic rethink

We must hope that sense prevails. Should the bankers leave, the City of London would lose its place as a leading financial centre with severe implications for the British economy. A declining financial sector would force a complete economic rethink. We might even have to start making products that are of some actual use, like wind turbines and other nasty manufactured goods. This could lead to our pathological obsession with high prices giving way to the idea that houses are places to live in rather than just being a means of borrowing money to buy more stuff. From there, things could get even worse and dangerous ideas about creating a sustainable economy based on need rather than greed could begin to take hold.

But you mustn't panic; just take comfort from the fact that this nightmarish vision will only come about if people started to organise and take back control over their own lives. Just as long as this does not happen we can relax, safe in the knowledge that, at the end of the day, politicians will never do anything to endanger the capitalists' ability to make money and that their efforts to save the banks is working. Before long the banks will be back in charge and we can all place our futures, and the future of the planet, in the safe hands of thieves who don't give a toss about anybody or anything other than their own narrow self interest.



introduction of the minimum wage – bankers are a wholly different breed. According to the CBI, bankers, as free market fundamentalists, strictly adhere to the teachings of their prophet, Adam Smith, which demand of them that they devote their lives to being motivated only by pure greed and the relentless pursuit of wealth. As such, the CBI argues that any

Tilting at the Vestas workers' occupation,

IN LATE JULY, 25 WORKERS IN NEWPORT, ISLE OF WIGHT, occupied their wind turbine factory shortly before Vestas, the world's biggest manufacturer of wind turbines, was due to close it. A total of 525 workers were to be laid off at the blade manufacturing and research plant, and another 100 in Southampton. The absurdity of the situation was hard to miss, coming just days after the government had announced the need for a huge increase in green energy production. Although Vestas was making a healthy profit, capital could presumably be invested more profitably in Colorado, where the green energy giant is currently expanding production.

The occupation remained in the media spotlight, as Vestas workers, locals and activists from the mainland established a protest camp outside the factory and held regular demonstrations. When Vestas bosses tried to starve the occupiers into submission, supporters managed to break through security and police lines several times to get essentials to the occupiers. Realising the negative media image, the company then provided one meal a day, though some occupiers still had to leave because of malnutrition. Later on, Vestas bosses fired the occupying workers, effectively cancelling their redundancy pay.

blockade

On day 19, the workers chose to leave rather than be evicted, after an eviction order (initially delayed by a procedural mistake) was granted. Much of the left – and all of the

RMT – moved on to other causes, leaving the support camp populated mainly by environmental protesters. Focus switched to blockading the factory to prevent removal of turbine blades. A series of high profile, if ill conceived, media stunts – like invading Newport Job Centre and the temporary occupation of the ship due to transport blades from Southampton – were intended to back up the blockade but mostly ended in mass arrests and minimal national exposure.

Eventually, following a week of psychological manipulation by security, many of the blades were moved to Southampton on September 22nd, for export to the US. The orientation of the environmentalist majority in the camp towards nonviolent direct action instead of building popular support for the blockade proved costly, as the police (in tandem with security groups) took swift action to evict the blockade camp the day before.



In the south east, the Solidarity Federation was quick to organise support for the occupation. Many members went to Newport to take part in demonstrations. In Brighton, SF leafleted and raised funds, together with Anarchist Federation members and others. The funds raised were directly used to buy food for the occupiers rather than given to the TUC, with activists breaking past the blockade to deliver it. Later on, we helped set up a coalition of Vestas supporters in Brighton from across the political spectrum which has generally functioned well.

choosing action

While the closure of the factory was not a direct result of the economic downturn, the occupation was certainly linked to it. Given the high unemployment in the Isle of Wight, many workers emphasised how there had been little they could do but choose to take action:

We don't have any choice. If we lose these jobs, we won't find others here on the island. How are we meant to support our families then?

Windmills

climate change & class struggle

Yet it would be wrong to understand the Vestas occupation as a spontaneous response to the crisis. Workers Climate Action, a group with strong links to the trotskyist AWL, had been agitating on the island for three weeks before the occupation, handing out leaflets about the Visteon occupation. The extent of outside influence becomes clear when one discovers that one occupier, Mike Bradley, is a member of the SWP central committee. Due to their inexperience with industrial action, the Vestas workers had reportedly asked Bradley to join them in occupying the factory.

inexperience

In fact, the Isle of Wight has little tradition of class struggle and the Vestas workforce was largely non-unionised. This lack of experience with organised class struggle shows in some of the weaknesses of the Vestas struggle. The occupiers did not always communicate and engage effectively with supporters, who had to rely on the media. As a result, the overwhelming support from islanders for the occupation remained passive. More experienced workers might have set up a permanent stall in Newport to get locals involved. Even more importantly, there was little attempt to make contacts with other workers to spread the struggle. For example, no links were built with the neighbouring Gurit resin factory where an announcement of redundancies was expected too, since Vestas was a major consumer of resin.

The overall effect of the RMT involvement was therefore largely positive. Members of Portsmouth RMT branch were involved from the beginning of the occupation, and did much to improve the workers' confidence in their ability to



organise. Mass meetings were open to workers and RMT full timers, but not to activists or members of the local community. A stewards committee co-ordinated the support for the occupiers and the organisation of demos. Although the RMT full timers who turned up towards the end of the dispute managed to sideline the Portsmouth RMT members and push a peaceful protest angle, the Vestas workers did not lose control over their struggle.

positive changes

On the face of it, the Vestas workers and their supporters achieved little: 625 workers lost their jobs and the occupiers lost their redundancy pay. Nevertheless, there have been many less tangible positive changes. For many, the experience of solidarity has been transformative. Postal and bus drivers' strikes, previously rare events in the Isle of Wight, have happened since. And the workers' support groups that have formed are ready to mobilise when needed.

One lesson for the wider class struggle is that militant action

appears spontaneous only if you doesn't look close enough. In reality, it's usually the result of activists organising on the ground in preparation. A second lesson is the importance of spreading the struggle within the same industry. This becomes clear if we compare Vestas to the Visteon occupation, which won concessions from Ford – but only after they made links with workers in other Ford factories. Thirdly, occupations are infectious: Vestas workers were inspired by Visteon and the Lewisham school occupation (where parents had been inspired by Visteon). For anarcho-syndicalists these lessons reinforce the importance of our industrial networks which are always ready to initiate and spread direct action-based workplace struggle.

The Vestas workers' most important achievement is probably that they have demonstrated how we can step out of our usual role as workers, organise in solidarity and take direct action. At the next factory that closes, the Vestas struggle will be on the workers' minds because Vestas workers showed us that we **can** stand up to the bosses.

Scabs Are Rubbish

Leeds bin workers on strike against pay cuts

Striking refuse collectors in Leeds are, as we go to press, considering a deal to end their strike. Members of Unison and GMB, the strikers walked out in early September after Leeds City Council proposed massive pay cuts, under a new pay and grading structure, on the pretext of meeting equal pay legislation. Most of the workers, currently on £17k–18k per year, face a projected annual loss of £4,500, or 25%, according to council figures, while union leaders say some could lose as much as £6,000, or 33%. So, by even the most conservative estimates, Leeds bin workers are expected to wave goodbye to a full quarter of their wage packet.

This is totally unacceptable, as it would be for any worker. Mean-

while, senior councillors (with annual allowances of up to £45,000) and officials (earning over £100,000 a year) are not proposing to hand back any of their pay.

The council is using the equal pay legislation to attack these workers but other councils have managed to comply with the law without cutting wages. In 1997, councils signed up to the Single Status Agreement under which they undertook to end historic pay discrimination in local government. But pay was supposed to be equalised upwards, not downwards.

It is not bin workers in Leeds, or workers anywhere else, that have brought the economy to the brink of collapse. So why should they pay for the government's bailout of the financial sector? We can all expect many similar attacks – and we should all follow the example of the Leeds strikers, an example which may yet show the value of staying out on strike before the conclusion of any negotiations.



Councillor Richard Brett, leader of the Lib Dem / Tory coalition, has refused talks while the unions are on strike. He has evidently reckoned without the huge support the strikers are receiving locally. The council must be dragged kicking and screaming back to the negotiation table and Brett should be sacked for causing this strike and the piles of rubbish currently decorating the streets of Leeds.

Since the second week of the strike, the council has employed a private contractor, NMS, to scab on

Chronology

September 7: The strike begins.

11: Solidarity rally, Leeds Civic Centre – a large Anarchist Federation banner reading “scabs are rubbish – support the strike” brings a huge cheer.

14: Strike breakers, Preston-based Noblet Municipal Services (NMS), are employed to scab on the strikers.

15: Solidarity action – 16 bags of rubbish dumped at council leader Brett's house.

16: Solidarity rally, Leeds Civic Centre.

16: 6 people arrested, allegedly under anti-terrorism laws, for fly tipping bags of household waste at Brett's house.

17: The 6 are released on bail.

30: Brett admits scabs' dismal failure to meet collection targets

October 1: Talks begin in spite of council precondition of a return to work not being met.

15: Negotiations reach agreement on a deal to be put to a ballot in the following week.

the strikers. Such is their desperation to break the strike that, rather than resolve it through negotiation, they have wasted £100,000 in sending letters to all of the city's households explaining what to do with bins during the strike. Clearly, there is plenty of money available to **not** pay the strikers.

West Yorkshire SF have been active in supporting the strikers, circulating publicity for the strike and calling for solidarity action including, among other things, spreading the strike to other council workers and organising to prevent NMS scabs collecting bins.

Bridging the Great Divide

why fan power is challenging football's growing gulf in class

A cursory glance at football's top flight today reveals a world of astronomical (and frankly obscene) transfer fees, wages and billionaire owners. Contrast this with the lower echelons of the game where many clubs – and many of their beleaguered fans – face a day to day fight for survival.

A 2006 survey found the average premier-ship footballer's salary to be £676,000 per year. In the close season, Cristiano Ronaldo was sold by Manchester United to Real Madrid for a cool £80 million.

Meanwhile, their neighbours and premier-ship rivals, Manchester City, beneficiaries of the fortunes of oil rich sheiks, became overnight the richest club in the world, eclipsing even the excesses of Roman Abramovich's Chelsea. With premier-ship clubs doing their utmost to exploit the global market, income for the Premier League this season is set to top a record breaking £1 billion.

At the same time, in less glamorous climes, clubs like Livingston FC and Chester City have battled insolvency, surviving by the skin of their teeth only to be hit with the double whammy of big points deductions. Their plight has become

increasingly commonplace. Existing very much in the shadow of their opulent premier-ship counterparts, and deprived of their lucrative sponsorship and foreign TV deals, most lower league and semi-professional outfits are forced to scrape by on a relative shoe-string. As is the case in society at large, there is no discernible trickle down of wealth, only a growing polarisation. Success and excess is guaranteed only for the most wealthy and powerful. But the big clubs (in true parasitic form) would be nowhere without teams in the lower leagues providing the breeding ground for some of their most prodigious talent.

Recession hit supporters are paying the price as well. Virgin Money's index of football inflation (which factors in the combined elements of following your favourite team) found that costs for the average supporter have risen by some 29.6% since 2006. The cost of the most expensive season ticket at Arsenal this season

weighed in at a hefty £4,000. The cost of international games are also steadily rising, with the salary of England manager, Fabio Capello, not without coincidence, starting at £4.8 million.

The rape of the "beautiful game" by greed and commercialism



echoes what is happening in society at large. Clubs survive recessions, unlike some other businesses, because their loyal fan bases tend to cushion them from the worst excesses of supply and demand. On an optimistic note, realisation of this has inspired supporters into reasserting their collective influence. Clubs like

Ebbsfleet United and FC United of Manchester are now fully owned by their members on a one member one vote basis, and fan forums and trusts are springing up at all levels of the game. In Europe, some

clubs have taken on a more overtly political edge, with clubs like AEK Athens enjoying a strong anarchist / anti-fascist hard-core, building political alliances with supporters from other countries.

With fan power growing daily, the forces colonising the game in the name of profit and prompting the growing wealth divide, certainly aren't having things all their own way.



The Last Bastion of the appalling state of care for older people

IT IS OFTEN SAID THAT THE TRUE MEASURE OF A SOCIETY is the way it treats its most vulnerable citizens. And a quick glance at elderly care in Britain today paints a very sorry picture indeed. So sorry in fact, that the government's very commitment to upholding basic rights for older people is surely in serious doubt. Now, with the economy well and truly up the Swanee, the future of what is already inadequate elderly care system, as outlined in a Department of Health green paper, looks considerably less than rosy.

A Panorama investigation, "Britain's Homecare Scandal", screened in April this year, unearthed serious deficiencies in the standards of care provided to people in their own homes by private agencies. Undercover reporters discovered a litany of bad practice – missed calls, rushed visits, general neglect and other systemic failures. Staff employed by the agencies endured low wages, inadequate training and support, and impossible work schedules.

Quite how this state of affairs came about is not difficult to explain. The programme makers found that since the 1990s a huge push by government to privatise homecare has resulted in some 70% of services now being provided by the independent sector. Contrast this with 1992, when only 2% of services were in private hands. Marketisation has been clearly financially driven, with private sector costs approximately half of that of local



authority providers. Quality of care, however, seems to be of distinctly secondary importance to realising cost savings. In one case, that of South Lanarkshire, Panorama found that a private agency had been selected to deliver homecare services by an online auction where the cheapest price won the contract. This organisation was one of many later implicated in systemic poor practice.

But the story does not end there. An analysis by Age Concern and Help the Aged, published in June,

indicated that almost two-thirds of councils ranked as "excellent" by the Commission for Social Care Inspection are failing to provide any care at all to vulnerable elderly people who cannot carry out basic daily tasks. This, they said, was due in large part to the tightening of eligibility criteria by the government. The Director of Help the Aged commented "The reality is that even the best local councils are leaving many older people to struggle without the care they need,

slowly stripping away their dignity and independence".

To compound this, the appalling treatment of the elderly has also been highlighted in the NHS. Various whistle-blowers have exposed poor treatment and malnourishment of patients in some NHS hospitals. Then we have the hospital super bug epidemic – another symptom of cutbacks and privatisation by successive govern-

ments. Well documented also, is the fact that many sick older people are being unlawfully forced to sell their homes to pay for nursing and residential care. (Panorama "The National Homes Swindle: A Growing Scandal", 2006).

And now the government's latest vision for the future of elderly care has been outlined in a new green paper. However, one way or another, all this document does is lay out plans for older people to pay their way out of the costs of ageing. As far as elderly people today are con-

Ageism in Britain



one company featured on Panorama assigned carers their jobs in a car park every morning

cerned, the founding principles of the welfare state – a service free at the point of delivery and available from cradle to the grave – have gone well and truly out of the window. Paying tax and national insurance all your working life is no longer enough, it seems.

Government is the last bastion of ageism. That people are living longer and more fulfilled lives is seen less as a cause for celebration and more as a “demographic time bomb”. We now regularly hear government officials mooting the inevitable need to extend the working age beyond 65 to address the pensions crisis, a crisis ostensibly caused by a mixture of financial mismanagement and market instability. More worryingly, with a massive budget deficit looming, wholesale cut-backs in already tightly rationed services look inevitable.

In the final analysis, we must recognise that a system that prioritises profit above people will always leave the most vulnerable in society susceptible to attack, especially at times of economic downturn. Older people should be revered and respected, not viewed as some sort of financial burden. The underlying need to remove exploitative class relationships and market forces remains a compelling necessity in the fight against ageism, and all other forms of oppression, for that matter.

Grey Power!

The Grey Panthers, conceived in the US in 1972, provide an inspiring model of resistance and organisation by older people that still strikes a chord today. Born on the back of 1960s radicalism and more established elder advocacy groups, the Panthers organised through a system of locals and networks loosely tied to a national office. Founding member, Maggie Kuhn, explained their vision: “Grey Panthers are out to make old a beautiful thing, not something to be hidden, but something to be declared and affirmed”.

Numbering only 5-6,000 at their peak in the 1980s, the movement was comprised of committed activists exerting influence way beyond the confines of their modest membership. They pushed for reform of nursing homes, employment law, care insurance and services to enable the elderly to lead better lives. They pressed established groups like the much larger American Association for Retired People into more radical action.

The Panthers’ activism was founded on intergenerational mutual aid and a vision of a new society in which older people could achieve greater control over their lives. Moving beyond the confines of a mere “interest” group, they sought to challenge established social assumptions as to how the elderly should live their lives, forging connections between diverse but related struggles such as the anti-war and anti-racist movements as they did so. They also transcended traditional nuclear family structures, emphasising voluntary congregate liv-

ing arrangements and shared housing. Their influence is still felt today in the US as well as within other activist groups like Grandmothers against the War.

So could the Grey Panthers or something similar emerge here or internationally? Well, parallel groups have already coalesced in Germany and France. Britain’s ageing population is growing daily, and older people are being hit especially hard by the recession and retrograde government policies. This summer, the European Commission found that the UK has the fourth highest level of poverty among the over 65s in Europe. Rising fuel, food and council taxes, the complexity of the benefits system and static pensions have all been cited as contributory causes.

At the moment, sympathetic public figures, pressure groups, NHS whistleblowers and documentary makers all play an invaluable part in advocating on behalf of older people. Helpful and well intentioned as these groups and individuals undoubtedly are, all have foregone the need for older people to engage in the best form of advocacy there is – self-advocacy. The longevity of the Grey Panthers in the US has relied on precisely this, as well as a shrewd organisational model and a radical vision of the society of the future.

These elements may not only help to challenge existing social and economic barriers (winning significant reforms in the process, as the Panthers have done in the US) but also to innovate and create new ways of living beyond them.

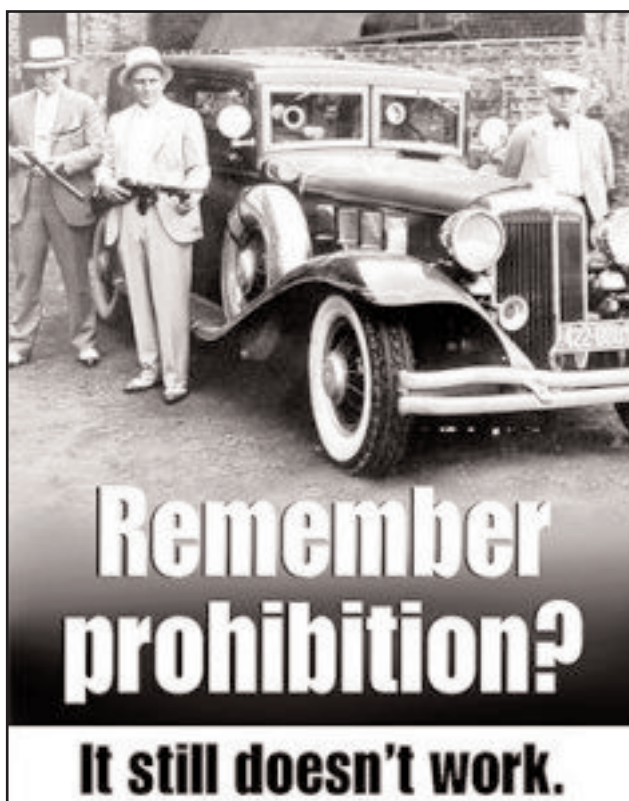
The Drug Laws

how prohibition stimulates a

If one social policy definitively symbolises the complete ineptitude of politicians and flawed logic of capitalism, it is the “war on drugs”. The word “drugs” in this sense refers to recreational, mind and mood altering substances such as cannabis, cocaine, LSD, ecstasy and heroin. At the outset, it should be stated that many of the arguments used by the powers-that-be to justify the continued prohibition of drugs are flawed, unscientific and politically motivated. Not only are prohibition policies plainly failing – costing taxpayers a fortune in the process – they also stimulate a whole range of social problems that on closer inspection have far deeper economic roots.

Drug prohibition policies are laced with hypocrisy and double standards. Cigarettes and alcohol are not only highly addictive and lethal, contributing to the premature deaths of some 140,000 Britons a year, but they are also perfectly legal. Deaths from illegal drugs amount to a mere drop in the ocean in comparison, and this does not even begin to factor in costs to the NHS in terms of alcohol related violence and accidents as well as deaths and injuries from drink driving. The tobacco and alcohol industries are powerful lobbies who would stand to lose millions in profits if consumers had the right to choose – a right which many exercise anyway in defiance of the legal penalties, penalties which, it must be said, only serve to mystify the appeal of illegal drugs.

Just as prohibition of alcohol in the US in the 1930s gave rise to Al Capone and the Mafia, the lucrative trade in illicit drugs today has coincided with escalating gang violence in our inner cities. In fact, from Colombian drug cartels to gangland



Britain, drug related turf wars are now a growing global social disease, made worse by the recession.

Adulterated drugs are another consequence of prohibition. In a bid to make a fast buck, dealers right the way down the supply line will “cut” drugs with a whole array of other substances in order to make them go further. In many cases this means that the toxicity of the drug becomes greatly increased. The journalist Nick Davies makes a coherent and damning indictment of heroin prohibition, a summary of which is quoted here:

Black market heroin becomes poisonous and dangerous because unscrupulous dealers cut it with all kinds of pollutants to increase their profit. Black market addicts contract diseases, because they use dirty injecting equipment. Black market users overdose accidentally, because they have no idea of the purity of the batch they are using. Black market addicts are thin, not because the drug makes them thin, but because they have to give all their money to dealers. Black market addicts commit crime, not because the drug makes them immoral, but because they have no other way to fund their habit...The truth about the prohibition of heroin is that it creates the very problems it pretends to solve: causing the sickness and death which it claims to be preventing; provoking the crime and disorder it wants to stop.

Davies notes that in 2003, the US government spent \$19 billion on its war against drugs, a figure that has since increased. Transform, the Bristol based drug charity, estimate that for every pound spent on drug prohibition by the government, £4 worth of crime is generated.

ain't Working

whole range of social problems

Transform have also highlighted the tendency of street drugs to grow stronger over the years. Again, this is a direct result of the lack of supply regulation. Just as the prohibition of alcohol produced moonshine, so the prohibition of cannabis and cocaine produced the more harmful derivatives, skunk and crack.

Cannabis is, in itself, an interesting case in point. Earlier this year the government caved in to right wing tabloid hysteria and reclassified the drug from class C to B. This was in direct contravention to advice given by its own advisory body, the chairperson of which reported that all the available evidence suggested that alcohol was at least, if not more, psychologically harmful. The press, however, failed to make mention of this as a politically motivated policy, designed to appease middle England, was pushed through unopposed.

Prohibition denies personal freedom, open debate and informed choice, needlessly criminalising citizens in the process. The prohibitionists' argument that legalisation would produce a mass drug crazed free for all is simply not borne out by evidence. In Holland, and more recently in

Portugal which decriminalised illicit drugs in 2001, drug usage and associated behavioural pathologies were found by the Cato Institute to be among the lowest in the EU – especially when compared with nations with more hard line prohibition policies. We are not in the business of solving capitalism's problems for it, but drug prohibition demonstrates how the system

global warming, poverty or war. But this standpoint underestimates the scale of the misery caused by drugs, including alcohol and tobacco, and overlooks the deeper social factors driving supply and demand; factors that are integral to capitalist society, like boredom, poverty, mind numbing work, unemployment and so on. Notably, when the British mining industry collapsed

in the late 1980s, heroin dealers moved in to plague erstwhile tight knit and vibrant communities.

Dispossessed aboriginal peoples in many corners of the globe have suffered similarly as their communities have sunk into decline.

Dealers cut drugs and develop stronger strains in order to boost profit margins. Gangs fight turf wars to protect and extend their market share. This is all very much reminiscent of the behaviour of corporations and governments. People in poor regions of the world harvest drugs for people in richer regions. Addicts, denied access to legal heroin, share needles and rob their neighbours blind to fund their habits.

The undeniable fact is that while capitalism continues to blight our lives, the war on drugs is destined to be just another in the long line of lost causes.



operates contrary even to its own flawed logic.

It may be tempting to argue that the whole subject of drugs is not a pressing issue on the scale of, say,

(Not just) Opposing the

THE BRITISH NATIONAL PARTY (BNP) HAS EXPERIENCED growing electoral success in recent years and there has been much discussion about the significance of this growth. Moreover, with fears of “the rise of fascism”, many are also looking for answers on how to stop them.

The last issue of *Direct Action* carried an article discussing strategies for dealing with the BNP and advocated a policy of “no platform for fascists”. Indeed, there are serious issues at stake when the BNP are growing and there is certainly a time and place for “no platform”. However, the problem that the BNP poses is quite different from the often cited fear of fascist gangs attacking opponents and requires a more complex response than just promoting “no platform”. The real danger of the BNP is not in their return to the streets but in the significance their politics could hold for the working class in Britain.

the BNP yesterday and today

The BNP have come a long way since their formation in 1982. Originally a merger between leading fascist John Tyndal’s New National Front and a faction from the neo-Nazi British Movement, the BNP have since moved away from aggressive and explicitly racist street based activism. This move was inspired more by self-preservation than any change of heart: their 1994 promise of “no more marches, no more punch ups” was without doubt inspired by the thorough pastings they received at the hands of anarchists and socialists organised in Anti-Fascist Action (AFA).

Unable to maintain their presence on the streets, the BNP have pursued the electoral road. This shift in tactics has seen them go from a rag-tag bunch of Hitler worshipers

to a slick political party with the ability to win votes. This has only been possible by ditching the explicit fascism. The BNP we see today is not the same BNP of twenty years ago.

In both their method of operating and political language, the BNP have moved away from traditional fascism, now functioning as a hard right populist party (modelled on similar parties in Europe). Their policies are often little more right wing, racist or authoritarian than the opinions advocated in *The Sun* or *The Daily Mail*. The right wing media, with their massive resources and coverage, have encouraged far more racist, anti-immigrant sentiment than the BNP. Similarly, where the BNP have been all talk, the Labour government has taken the initiative in persecuting migrants with deportations and the expansion of immigration detention centres.

The BNP, positioning themselves just to right of the centre right, have moved away from the fascist tactic of intimidating opponents through violence. Of course their activists probably celebrate news of racist violence and many may even take part themselves. However, where in the past the BNP was directly attacking political opponents and “undesirable” ethnic groups, today they attempt to harness racial tension in order to win votes. But the BNP is not the source of racism in society; capitalism is,

and even with their (undoubtedly overestimated) maximum of 10,000 members, they are no match for the right wing press when it comes to propagating racist politics. This is demonstrated by the existence of racial tension and violence in areas where BNP activity is minimal and even non-existent.



The real danger of the BNP lies not in the threat of armed gangs attacking opponents or seizing power but in the role which they fulfil for white working class people in Britain. With the collapse of the workers’ movement in Britain, the real risk of the BNP is in them capturing working class discontent with capitalism and channelling it down the dead end of right wing nationalism. Where once workers, dissatisfied with their lot, turned to the labour movement; now such a movement does not exist. The lack of a working class opposition to capitalism has left a void; the BNP hope to fill it.

no more “no platform”?

Of course, the shift within the BNP outlined above does not mean a wholesale rejection of “no plat-

British National Party

form". Certainly, there are those pursuing a "street politics" strategy and should the activities of groups like the English Defence League develop into 1970s style NF marches, then "no platform" will again become pivotal. Equally, in areas plagued by racist violence, physical confrontation could be part of a relevant response. However, whether it would be used against actual fascists or just violent racists in the community with no political affiliation would be entirely dependent on the context.

"No platform", however, in many areas is just completely unrealistic. In Barking and Dagenham, for instance, they have a platform – in council meeting rooms. Likewise, apart from disrupting rare public events, anti-fascists are unable to shut down the majority of BNP activities, as they often happen without prior warning and in places where anti-fascists are thin on the ground. Though there is no problem with Nick Griffin abandoning a press conference under a hail of eggs, it's not going to stop the BNP.

This is mostly for the reason that anti-fascism – even in its most militant form – offers the working class no alternative to the BNP. Anti-fascism is purely negative ("Don't vote BNP") and proposes no solutions to the problems which attracted people to the BNP to begin with. It does, however, raise the question "who do I vote for?". Perhaps one of the parties not meriting a "Don't vote for..." campaign.

The old AFA tactics cannot beat the modern BNP; anti-fascists cannot hand out beatings to the material conditions that make people support them. There is a reason that one million people voted BNP, and

small numbers of anti-fascists trying (and failing) to "no platform" them is not going to stop it, let alone make these conditions go away.

against the pantomime villains, against the real ones

What separates anarcho-syndicalists from liberal anti-fascists is not just that we will give BNP activists a slap. It's that we view the problem as being far bigger than just them. Racism, nationalism and authoritarianism are all sustained by different institutions in capitalist society. When workers organise together as workers, such ideas become less appealing; when such organisation does not exist, working class anger falls back on them.

The success of the BNP is the result of working class dissatisfaction with capitalism being turned against itself. Those of us wanting to reverse the BNP's recent fortunes should concentrate on rebuilding our class to provide an alternative to the solutions they are providing. As a prominent anarchist of the Spanish Civil War, Buenaventura Durruti, said:

We syndicalists, we are fighting for the revolution (...) We are giving Hitler and Mussolini far more to worry about today with our revolution

than the whole Red Army of Russia. We are setting an example to the German and Italian working class on how to deal with fascism.

The most effective way to fight fascism is for workers to assert our needs as a class. While presenting the BNP as racist politicians with more empty promises for the working class, we must also oppose the real villains of the piece and their attacks on our living standards. Without a positive alternative, merely opposing the BNP will continue to be as meaningless as it is unsuccessful, leaving the original problems bringing people to the BNP unsolved.



EDL in Manchester, October 10th: protected by a heavy police presence and outnumbered by anti-fascists, a national mobilisation of 200-300 EDL supporters were denied the platform to peddle their bigotry to anyone but themselves

Community Unions - Two Birds with One Stone?

A RECENT ARTICLE IN *RED PEPPER* MAGAZINE (KEIRON Farrow, *Anti-Fascism isn't Working*, 26th August 2009) discussing how to combat the rise of the BNP came to a strikingly anarcho-syndicalist conclusion: community unions. Anarcho-syndicalists have a long history of community organising and militant opposition to fascism, so it is always welcome to see people from other political traditions come to similar conclusions.

However, much like workplace unionism, community unionism is fraught with potential pitfalls of co-option and collaboration. Nonetheless, the need for working class people to organise to assert their needs outside the workplace is just as pressing as the need to organise at work. The fact that this organising can deny political space that the far right would like to occupy is a welcome side effect.

anarcho-syndicalists in the community

The need for working class organisation to assert our needs outside the workplace was one of the factors which led anarcho-syndicalism to develop out of the simple syndicalism that existed in the form of anarchist influenced revolutionary syndicalism and Marxist influenced industrial unionism in the early 20th century. The traditional syndicalist position can be found in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) *One Big Union* pamphlet:

When the industry of the world is run by the workers for their own good, we see no chance for the problems of unemployment, war, social conflict, or large scale crime, or any of our serious social problems to continue.

Traditional syndicalists sought to solve wider social problems by taking over industry. Anarcho-syndicalists rejected this approach as too narrow. While anarcho-syndicalists did want a social revolution to restructure

society along libertarian communist lines, thereby addressing problems across the social sphere, they also stressed the need to fight for working class needs in the here and now rather than waiting for a spontaneous revolution to come to the rescue. And these needs were never confined to just the workplace.

A rise in rents hits workers just as hard as a cut in wages. Poor living conditions, whether quality of housing, the environment, unemployment or crime are as detrimental to quality of life as poor working conditions. Consequently, in the 1930s heyday of the Spanish CNT, union activities

focussed not just on fighting the bosses in the workplace, but in the wider community too. Rent strikes were organised to beat the landlords and unemployed workers demanded a "sitting wage" from companies which laid them off or denied them work.

the pitfalls of unionism

In the workplace, one of the biggest dangers is that unions that begin as expressions of working class self-organisation become accommodated into the management structure as representatives of labour power, paving the way for class collaboration and reformism. Outside the workplace, this danger is arguably even more acute, with state policy centred on finding "community representatives" with whom to co-ordinate class collaboration.

A Solidarity Federation member who got involved with their local residents association found this out. The association was open to all residents, and had hitherto tended to concen-

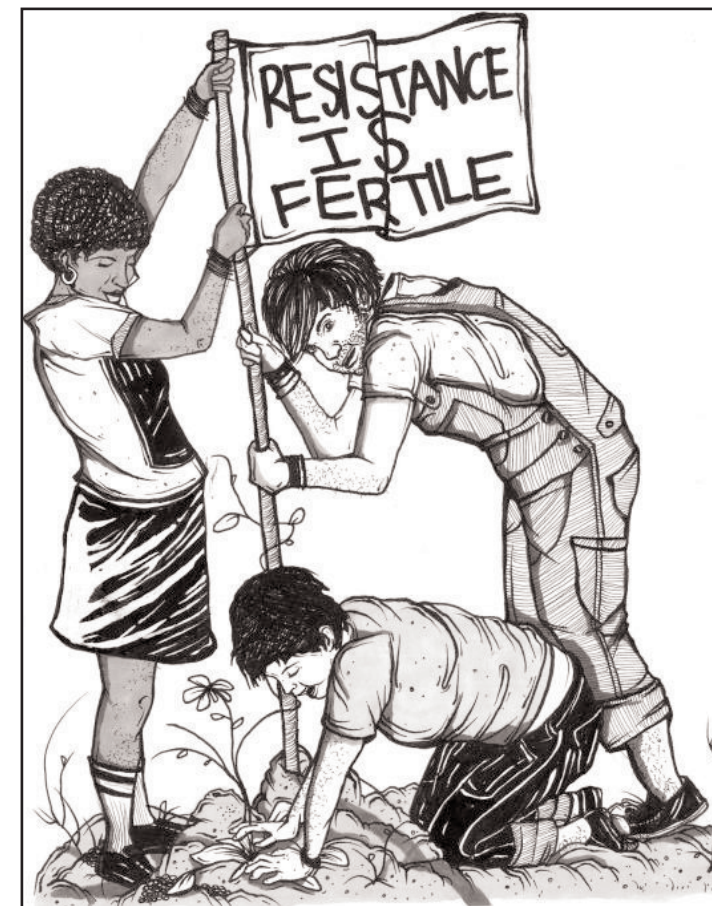
trate somewhat on parochial issues. The SolFed member involved managed to argue to shift the focus on to more class based matters, and also for the separate residents associations in his town to federate together. However, while the form was consistent with anarcho-syndicalism, this guaranteed nothing of the political content. Consequently, the initially parochial and sometimes outright reactionary concerns reasserted themselves, and the federation pursued a course of class collaboration, looking to the police to solve community problems.

towards a revolutionary community unionism

Anarcho-syndicalists have long rejected such collaborationist, reformist unionism, instead advocating revolutionary unions. Whilst organising workers on an economic basis, revolutionary unions are characterised by their political principles. Therefore, they do not seek to recruit all workers, but only those who agree with the aims and principles of anarcho-syndicalism. Consequently, since revolutionary ideas are not often widely held, anarcho-syndicalists often find themselves operating as a minority. How then do revolutionary unions relate to non-revolutionary workers, who are often the majority?

This is achieved through mass meetings open to all workers which control the struggle. This approach is just as applicable in the community as in the workplace. The revolutionary union argues within such mass meetings for class solidarity and militant direct action, but does not seek to control them. Mass meetings are not the union, they are a democratic means of organising all workers.

This contrasts with the approach advocated in Keiron Farrow's *Red*



Pepper article, which suggests:

...open membership union-type organisations... [Political] parties are too narrow to play this role under today's conditions – they exist on a different level – but there is no reason why they cannot play a role within these broader open groups.

This seems to ignore the lessons of a century of anarcho-syndicalist organising and reproduce the organising model of revolutionary syndicalism, where unions rejected political criteria, which were left to political parties or anarchist political groups. Infamously lack of political membership criteria this led to class collaboration and reformism. The same danger is apparent in community versions.

Farrow says his community unions

"would be based around the self-identified needs and plans of those communities – which can only pit them head-to-head against the BNP". This seems as much an article of faith as anything. It is easy to imagine that the kind of communities where the BNP's opportunistic politics appeals – suffering from the material decay caused by the mainstream parties' policies and marked by racial tensions – self-identifying their needs as opposition to immigrant outsiders. Indeed, around a million

people voted BNP in the last elections, suggesting such views do have currency amongst sections of the working class.

Consequently, while mass meetings may well also reflect such reactionary views, it is imperative that any community unions retain revolutionary principles, operating as a minority if necessary. A revolutionary, community unionism is needed to both assert working class needs and deny the political space exploited and racialised by the far right, but we should heed the experiences of anarcho-syndicalism, not just repeat the errors of the simple syndicalism that preceded it. Revolutionary workers need to organise locally as well as industrially, but without dissolving themselves into the purely economic organisations.



rent strike in Glasgow, 1915

Interview with **Autonomy**

A MEMBER OF SOUTH LONDON SOLIDARITY Federation met up with Matt from Autonomy and Solidarity, an anarchist group which was established in the 2008-9 academic year at Goldsmiths College in New Cross, south east London.

SLSF: How did you get started?

A&S: There were 2 hand made posters put up in the University, asking "Does anyone want to start an anarchist society at Goldsmiths?" They were regularly taken down but it started something. It progressed on to informal pub meetings of around 6 or 7 people. Our first proper meeting was a public talk on anarchism. We got David Graeber (American anarchist anthropology professor) to speak in the students union. Fifty people turned up, which buoyed everyone up – Graeber was definitely a big pull.

From there we got about a dozen solid people and we started thinking about other things we could do.

SLSF: What was the first thing you got involved in?

A&S: Well we had attended a couple of demonstrations called by the SWP, Student Left and what not over various student issues but found their methods to be frustrating and their main aim to be recruitment. We were called upon to "occupy" buildings by student organisers a number of times, only for them to attempt to prevent a physical occupation at the last minute and then chastise us for "disobeying" them when we did it anyway!

The first real material thing we got involved in was the London Coalition Against Poverty. We had two members already involved in that (one in SE, one in Liberty and Solidarity). We did casework train-

ing and flyering and a couple of us took on casework. We stayed working on this and it has led to the formation of SELCAP in south east London with SLSF and other south east London based activists. We use a lot of informal working groups and don't define ourselves as a student group – for example we have not discussed the role of students in any formal way. The focus on practicalities has led to tensions in

responsible for vital tasks.

At the same time others got involved in supporting the Mitie cleaners. We did weekly cake sales to raise funds, which we sent to Konstantina Kuneva [Bulgarian migrant worker in Athens attacked with sulfuric acid because of her workplace activism], Visteon and the striking IWW truckers.

The group started off very male; some women were involved but it was dominated by loud voices. It was raised as an issue informally and we asked people to think about what they were doing. We now have four women members.

SLSF: Tell us about the occupation of Goldsmiths...[pictured below].



the group but these have taken time to come out.

Simultaneous to this, we attended the Palestine protests and then the Greek embassy.

We tried doing film nights but these weren't successful, but we did learn practical lessons from putting them on, like making sure someone is

A&S: There was an occupation of the university called by the SWP reps who were both running for union sabbatical posts. It was in support of a demand, originally from the Palestinian Student Campaign, for Goldsmiths to pay for scholarships for postgraduate students from Al Quds Open University. It happened around the

& Solidarity

time of the Israeli invasion of Gaza, when there was a wave of occupations. We wrote our own communiqué and tried to broaden the demands out to education generally. The SWP invited us in, mainly because they needed numbers. There was a meeting the night before to work out logistics and other work – A&S raised the idea of fees being included as a demand, because Goldsmiths as a university is very pro-fees. We met hostility to this idea from the SWP, the Palestinian Twinning Campaign and others. One guy said he was only there because he was an Arab and didn't care about "students" (although he was a student himself!). These tensions carried on into the occupation, but we introduced a social element and our argument was more accepted towards the end.

No matter how much you plan an occupation a lot will go out of the window. There were open occupation meetings 3-4 times a day. Once this was established as the body that ran the occupation the SWP types lost control. The meeting called for the Vice Chancellor to meet the whole occupation rather than just one or two people. He came in talking about how he'd occupied in his youth and ended up walking out. We set up barricades to stop management getting into their offices.

There was a day of talks in the occupation – there was a rep from the UCU (the lecturers' union) who talked about supporting the occupations' demands. Historian John Rose spoke and there was a debate between David Graeber and Guy Taylor of the SWP on "socialism versus anarchism", which included Taylor claiming that he "wasn't a state socialist".

There was potential in the struggle and what people took from it. The

important thing for us in the occupation was to express solidarity with the Palestinians – Goldsmiths tried to neutralise this but met the demands in the end, even including an extra night's occupation! This shows that occupation is a valid tool and that it is also a learning process. A&S is basically an "activist" group that is well aware of the critiques made of that kind of activity.

Things cooled down a bit during the exam period, but we got back together in the summer or assess-

SLSF: *What about student politics and the left parties?*

A&S: As a group we have some faith in student politics, things like May 68 and the recent rebellion in Greece, for example, were both influenced by students. There is space for politics outside the party mandate. When I was in Manchester I did very little because it was full of careerists. The problem was space for an anarchist group in Manchester; I now think if there had been a group like A&S it could have been done.



Paris, May 1968

ment term. This was when we were involved in launching SELCAP and doing the anti-poverty road shows in Lewisham, Woolwich and Peckham. The big thing was Lewisham Housing Options Centre where aggressive security smashed a camera. A passer-by called the police who came along and sided with the security and eventually one of us got arrested.

A&S now have a reputation with the police – on one march FIT photographers were overheard referring to "the Goldsmiths lot". Again we have not had any internal discussion on the role of violence.

For my generation, fees was the first issue we saw the National Union of Students (NUS) actually organise anything, hold marches and so on. The critique of the SWP and their approach is taken as a given – the radical space in student circles is closed to them because of their rigidity and lack of direct democratic practice. A&S made a conscious decision not to involve ourselves in petty student politics – the role of anarchists here is to be agitational. We've ignored student union politics and are bigger than all the other political groups. Because of its transient nature we see struggles here as part of a big-

ger whole. For example a strong student anarchist movement in London could impact positively on the wider anarchist movement here. Anarchism should be articulated in every sphere it's involved in.

We need to naturalise our concept of decision making – anarchists fall down as an alternative to the student left not in goals but on little things, like clearer decision making, local knowledge, etc. We've also not been sectarian – for example, in the Lewisham Bridge struggle, we have worked with people from other groups. It has been eye opening. We need to identify as anarchists.

Nationally, there are moves afoot to finally establish an Autonomous Students Network. This has been attempted before (in fact, supposedly there's already an anarchist group on campus at Goldsmiths, although they never materialised in person or did anything useful at all, seemingly limiting their activity to denouncing A&S on the internet!), but this time there seem to be cells of anarcho types emerging on various campuses willing to network and communicate in 2009/10. We've cooperated a little bit with the equally formative Autonomous Group at Queen Mary University.

SLSF: *Tell us about the workers rights sessions you ran?*

A&S: One of our members organised a workers' rights meeting on campus, with speakers from the IWW, the GMB and SF. Discussion mainly centred around the benefits of collective action in the workplace and the tools with which to achieve that.

Students either are, or will be, workers, and need to know their rights. Universities are getting more into workplace training schemes. There has been an issue with how a lot of students see themselves. We've not managed to make links with workers on campus so far – all have been fleeting.

SLSF: *What lessons can you draw out for anyone else who is starting at university?*

A&S: A sense of community and regular faces who are contactable help. We benefit from a shared sense of something beyond being just "Goldsmiths students". Use the energy and sense of belonging as a support network as well as an activist group. Be aware of limitations and be cynical towards student politics. Start informally; involve people looking to do stuff rather than a political organisation; don't be dogmatic or theorise outside of practice.



at the Serbian embassy in September - see p.24

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

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Capitalism Kills 1

Dear DA,

Blair and Brown's decision to send ill equipped soldiers to kill and be killed in Afghanistan is often justified on the basis of stamping out terrorism. But the occupation of Afghanistan by allied forces has only served to marginalise some Muslims thus making terror attacks here more, not less, likely. The growing death toll amidst a strategically inept campaign – in a country that has rarely been free of occupation of one sort or another in the last 100 years – is nothing but a tragedy and a travesty.

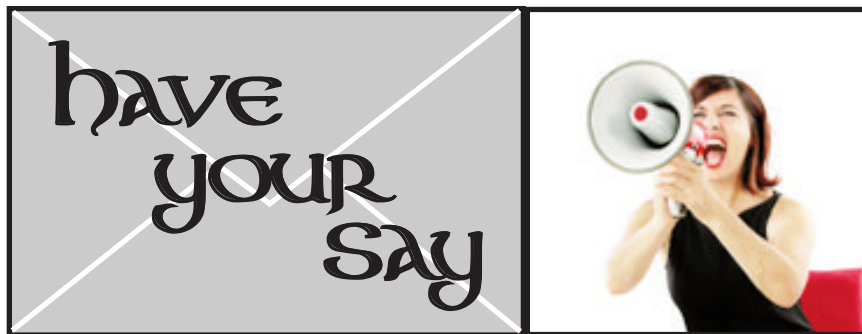


The last surviving World War 1 veteran, Harry Patch, said in his autobiography;

Politicians who took us to war should have been given the guns and told to settle their differences themselves, instead of organising nothing better than legalised mass murder.

These are words that ring as true today as they ever did.

In solidarity, AW



The Corner House & Friends

Dear *DA*,

The climate crisis and the financial crisis highlight the need to organise for social change – and also open unprecedented opportunities for doing so. But to prevent a

destructive return to business as usual, the roots of both crises need to be understood, together with the nature and limitations of elite responses to them. As a contribution to this discussion, 10 new

documents have recently been added to The Corner House's extensive collection of free books and articles on climate change and finance at:

www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/subject/climate

and

www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/subject/economics.

Best wishes from all at the Corner House.

Capitalism Kills 2

Dear *DA*,

A recent book by Tristram Stuart entitled *Waste* makes some stark and shocking observations about world hunger. A mere fraction of the food thrown away or otherwise left to rot in the rich world could easily feed the world's billion starving. Trouble is, feeding poor people is not good for business – it's simply not profitable enough. Profit is, after all, the reason why supermarkets overstock their shelves to make their products look more appealing and why poor countries are forced by corrupt governments to use much of their land to grow cash crops for export. That's the twisted morality of capitalism for you.

Yours, OL



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Serbia

Free our Comrades

Six members of SF's sister organisation in Serbia, the Anarcho-Syndicalist Initiative, are facing charges of "international terrorism" in connection with an attack on the Greek embassy in Belgrade. The six, Tadej Kurep, Ivan Vulović, Sanja Dojkić, Ratibor Trivunac, Ivan Savic and Nikola Mitrovic, have been imprisoned since early September, longer than the 30 day period, after which charges should have been made or the prisoners should have been released.

Our comrades have been targeted by the Serbian authorities because of their politics and the increasing visibility of their organisation. Despite the facts that negligible damage was caused and that responsibility was claimed by another group, *Crna Ilija*, the prisoners could face a further 6 months of detention before trial should the eventual charges hold a sentence of ten years or over. As we go to press the police are still dragging out the investigation and have only just held a reconstruction, which



should have occurred before the October 4th deadline.

These arrests, against a background of general political repression and vilification in Serbia, have not come as a surprise. Beforehand, Ratibor Trivunac had warned that he and others may be scapegoated after an earlier court order had been granted allowing the state security services to keep ASI members under surveillance. Moreover, all telephone and other conversations that the state has recorded can be submitted as evidence in the case.

The treatment of the six has prompted a group of academics at

the University of Belgrade, together with people from the world of culture, to circulate an open letter expressing their concerns over the potential charges faced by the six comrades. They criticise the "political background of double standards" in this case. The duplicity of the Serbian authorities is illustrated through comparing their attitude toward this attack on the embassy of Greece, a state which has sided with Serbia in its various international confrontations of recent decades, with another incident in February 2008. Then, after the declaration of independence by Kosovo, the U.S. embassy was substantially damaged by fire and one person was killed. Nobody was accused of a serious crime in this case, yet damage to a window by 2 petrol bombs which failed to ignite becomes an act of "international terrorism". A marked contrast indeed.

Protests and pickets have been held at Serbian embassies and consulates across the world, organised by IWA sections, supporters and sympathisers. The Solidarity Federation has held two pickets at the Serbian embassy in London (September 11th and 28th), with support from the Anarchist Federation, Autonomy and Solidarity and others. Benefit concerts and other fund raising efforts are also under way to collect money for legal fees. If charges are made, there is expected to be an increased intensity of protests and fund raising.



Serbian embassy, London, September 11th

Ireland

Rising Class Tensions

The situation in Ireland could hold some lessons for workers in Britain. Over the last 12 months, the Irish government has introduced massive public spending cuts and has driven down wages in an attempt to make the working class pay for the effects of the financial crisis. However, Irish workers have been responding in growing numbers, with medical workers in County Tipperary, workers at the Health Services Executive and workers at the drinks company Coca Cola all taking action in recent months.

Occupations are also being increasingly employed by workers as a means to fight back against management. Following on from the occupations at Waterford Wedgwood, 28 workers employed by Thomas Cook occupied their workplace after they had been informed that they were going to lose their jobs. It was only after a dawn raid at 5am by police who forcefully removed the workers that the occupation came to an end. This was followed by an occupation by 15 workers employed by 4Home store in Mitchelstown, near Cork, after it was announced that the store was to be closed.

Meanwhile, as we go to press, a strike by dockers in Dublin is approaching its 100th day. The strikers are opposing attempts by the owner, Peel Group, to replace the current unionised workforce with lower paid labour. The dockers have received considerable support from the local population, with large demonstrations of several hundred being a regular occurrence. Support action has also included 300 protesters defying a court injunction in August by occupying the premises of a company that had employed scabs to replace the striking dockers.

A strike by over 3,000 Aer Lingus staff looks increasingly likely as the company continues to press ahead with its “transformation plan” which includes, among other things, the shedding of up to 700 jobs. Ground staff have already suffered a 17% cut in pay but the airline is now demanding that pilots and air staff take a similar cut in their wages.

The strikes are signs of the growing tensions between the Irish working class and the employers. The main employers organisation, IBEC, has demanded an across the board wage reduction of 10% and, not merely content with supporting the already massive cuts in public spending, has called for even deeper cuts. The situation in Ireland is a taste of what we can expect here as the government attempts to switch the cost of the financial crisis on to the backs of the working class. It is encouraging to see both the increasing use of the workplace occupation in the class struggle and the increasing willingness of workers employed in smaller workplaces to take action.

Spain



The Spanish anarcho-syndicalist union, the CNT, has launched a boycott campaign against the RIU Hotels & Resorts chain. RIU's UK partner is TUI Travel, which owns various brands in the travel business, including Thomson. The CNT are demanding the full reinstatement of a sacked member in the island of Formentera and an end to bullying and intimidation by management. The move came after our comrade was sacked for claiming compensation from RIU for psychological abuses. She had been subjected to a campaign of harassment and intimidation by management that had led to her suffering from depression. On filing her claim for compensation the company reacted by immediately sacking her.



“floating picket” by Dublin dockers

Report and Reflections on the 2009 UK Ford-Visteon Dispute: A Post-Fordist Struggle

Past Tense 2009

Atactic that anarchosyndicalists have long advocated is getting quite popular. Recently there have been a number of factory and workplace occupations – Visteon and Vestas, to mention just two. These have not received their deserved coverage in the press, but that's life. They are to be seen as part of a recent global wave of occupations including France, Ireland, South Korea, Argentina and elsewhere.

In France, there have been more occupations than we have seen since the heady days of 1968, the year that France stood on the verge of a revolution. Perhaps it is too much to hope that another pre-revolutionary situation is in the offing.

This pamphlet is no doubt the first of many on the current wave of occupations. Although it is useful in that it documents a particular struggle, it would have been a good idea to compare this with similar struggles in the world at large. Its main strength is as a narrative rather than as an analysis of the struggle. While union practice and structure are quite rightly criticised, in parts of the pamphlet ideas could have been more clearly expressed. A section dealing with

conflicts within the Unite! union between bureaucrats, shop stewards and rank and file members has been included at the very end of the pamphlet. This could have been discussed earlier with the points raised being given more space and developed further.

Anarcho-syndicalist ideas are again on the wing. The capitalist system is incapable of solving the current economic, social and ecological problems we face. Rather than having a public debate about real problems and finding real solutions we have politicians and pundits discussing where the cuts should fall, rather than what we, as a society, want and need.

The point of production is where our power, as a class lies. The way forward is to spread the idea that by seizing the means of production we can take over the running of society. Only then can society begin to decide what is useful, what is needed and what should

be produced. While capitalism profits from the socially and ecologically destructive, we believe production should be for human need and well being.

Direct action in the form of workplace occupations is a step toward transforming society into a truly human one where production is for human need not profit! Post-Fordism here we come!

'A Post-Fordist Struggle' is available for 2 stamps (1st or 2nd class) from:

c/o 56a info Shop, 56 Crampton Street, London SE17 3AE.

If you want a few copies to distribute drop us a line (a small donation is appreciated but not compulsory).



free weekly news sheet (donations welcome)

Produced in Brighton since 1994, *SchNews* is a weekly double sided A4 news sheet that surely represents one of the best sources of counter information in the UK today. While the main focus is on social and environmental issues – with emphasis on protest and direct action, autonomous of political parties – workplace struggles such as the Vesta occupation have received increasing coverage of late. Listings of key events, global and local action, contacts and even satirical graphics are all part of *SchNews*'s 'information for action'.

As well as producing their excellent web based free sheet, the collective behind *SchNews* have also released a series of films (*SchMovies*) and compilation annuals. With a presence at festivals and other events like the recent Climate Camp, *SchNews* has its finger well and truly on the pulse and is well worthy of its *Guardian* billing as "the newsletter of the British protest movement".

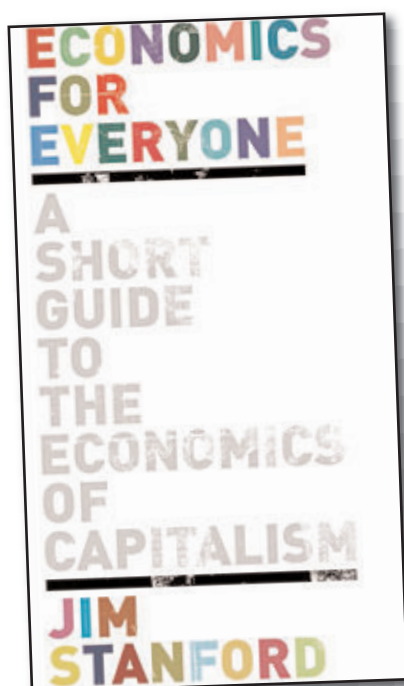
c/o Community Base, 113 Queens Road,
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Economics for Everyone

a short guide to the economics of capitalism - Jim Stanford

Pluto Press 2009 – 360 pages – £12.99 – ISBN: 978-0745327501



Economics for Everyone is a book about capitalism, how it works, its apologists and its critics. The premise is to provide people with the tools to analyse economic realities and challenge them intelligently. Far from giving capitalism the merciless thrashing, this book is measured and feels like the text book you wish you had at school.

Jim Stanford starts with the basics: what makes an economy, different economies, some history and some theory. He carries on in a building block fashion with chapters from “workers and bosses” to “employment and unemployment” and “inflation, central banks and monetary policy”. It’s all quite accessible, using illustrations, diagrams and info-boxes whilst breaking down the information into digestible chunks.

This is pretty useful when it comes to Stanford’s plan to have the book used as a grass roots educational tool. He encourages the reader to run their own economics course and provides material for it on:

www.economicsforeveryone.com.

This includes lesson plans and other resources that are well worth checking out.

The book has obvious merits as a teaching tool and is informative for the average reader, but if you’re looking to be thoroughly engaged it may not hit the spot. If Stanford got a bit more “Bill Bryson” with it, weaving stories in everywhere so you don’t know you’re learning, this book would get an A. Perhaps you have to do that yourself in your community / workplace lessons.

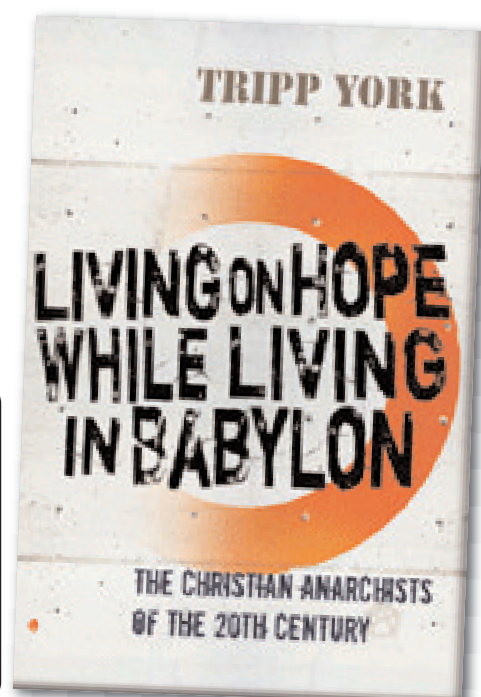
Living on Hope while Living in Babylon

the christian anarchists of the 20th century - Tripp York

Lutterworth Press 2009 – 140 pages – £19.50 – ISBN: 978-0718892029

In *Living with Hope while Living in Babylon*, York examines a few 20th century “anarchic” christians from varying traditions, including the Berrigan Brothers, Dorothy Day and Eberhard Arnold. Illuminating the anarchist sensibilities of Christian scripture, he argues that loyalty to Christ fundamentally undermines the pseudo-stereological myths of statism.

Tackling the not unproblematic task of fusing Christianity and anarchism, York attempts to weave a political theology worthy of the 21st century. As an antithesis to Bakunin’s *God and the State*, *Living with Hope* challenges many of the assumptions that Christianity and anarchism are innately incompatible, exploding the dogmatism of ideology in the process.



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Black Flame

the revolutionary class politics of anarchism and syndicalism

Michael Schmidt and Lucien Van der Walt

AK Press 2008 – 396 pages – £18.00 – ISBN: 978-1904859161

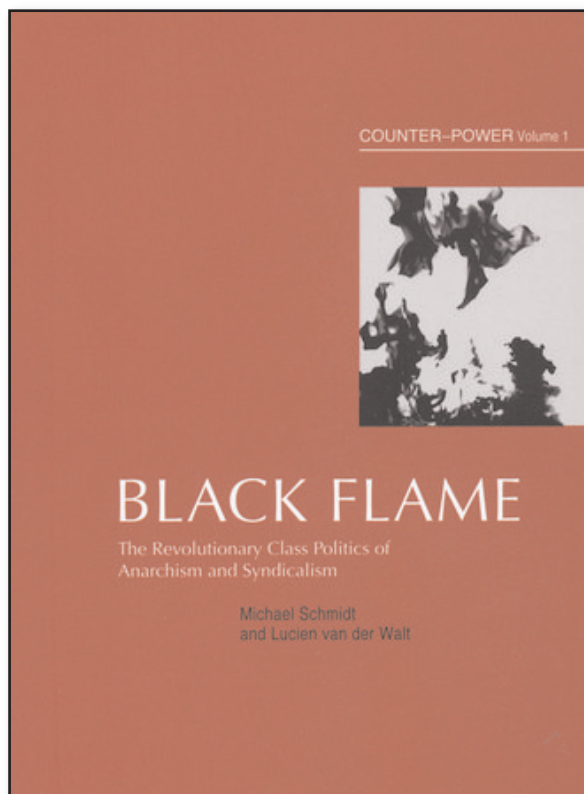
Recent AK Press publication, *Black Flame – The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*, contains much of interest for anyone interested in the history of class struggle anarchism. The book is painstakingly researched and full of fascinating (to those interested in the topic!) new information and the breadth which it covers is remarkable for its 300 pages. It firmly identifies anarchism as a revolutionary wing of the workers movement and draws a clear line between those such as the CNT or Bakunin who rooted their revolutionary politics within the struggles of the working class and those who do not take a class struggle perspective.

As opposed to works such as Peter Marshall's voluminous *Demanding the Impossible*, which attempt to find seeds of anarchism in thinkers or movements with any kind of libertarian views, the authors of *Black Flame* view anarchism as an explicitly socialist current. So, thinkers that are often identified as the theoretical founders of anarchism such as Max Stirner, Tolstoy or William Godwin are jettisoned. As the authors state in the introduction, “‘class struggle’ anar-

chism, sometimes called revolutionary or communist anarchism, is not a type of anarchism; in our view it is the *only* anarchism”. For this, they are to be applauded, and this is a view that finds much resonance with anarcho-syndicalists.

political-economic approach, and the essentially apolitical unionism of groups such as the IWW or early British syndicalists such as Tom Mann. At times, this is taken to truly staggering levels, with individuals who clearly fall outside of

anarchism such as Daniel De Leon being identified as part of the “broad anarchist tradition”. The authors even attempt to claim James Connolly of Ireland's 1916 Easter Rising fame due to his work within the IWW and the Irish Transport & General Workers Union (ITGWU). This comes as something of a shock to anyone with any knowledge of Connolly's statist, Catholic, frequently nationalist and occasionally sexist politics! As one prominent Irish anarchist (with politics close to the authors) commented, this “would pretty much mean no one on the Irish left would take it seriously”.



However, the book is far from faultless. The authors, members of the South African platformist group Zabalaza Anarchist-Communist Front (ZACF), seem to be attempting to fold all syndicalism into the “broad anarchist tradition”. While the differences between anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism are at times touched upon, the broad inference is that these are all part of one big happy movement. This is something which anarcho-syndicalists would reject, seeing a clear divide between our

While such faults at times can do great damage to the credibility of the work, they certainly do not invalidate all of the excellent research contained within it. It is certainly a valuable contribution for anyone who is interested in the history of anarchist thought, and an excellent antidote to many of the overly inclusive histories of ‘anarchism’ that exist. However, it is one which needs to be read critically and with the ability to ignore and move past some of the more outlandish claims.



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The Spanish Civil War & the British Left

political activism and the popular front

Lewis H. Mates

I. B. Taurus 2008 – 264 pages – £52.50 – ISBN: 978-1845112981

This book analyses the reception of the Spanish Civil War in the left in the North East of England over the years 1936-9. The various components of the left are discussed, mainly concentrating on the Communist Party, the Labour Party and the Trade Unions, especially the Durham Miners' Union. Mates tries to see how the question of Spain and the uprising by army generals in July 1936 against the established republican order was refracted through different social and political sectors of the working class in his chosen region.

As such, the book makes a useful contribution to the history of the "Aid Spain" movement during this period and presents an interesting analysis of the differences, both political and motivational, between different parts of the left. While the Labour Party, in general, in the North East was somewhat reticent in supporting the Republic beyond some meetings, letters of protest and the like, others made more political capital out of having gone to Spain to fight with the International Brigades. Most of these were Communist Party members or sympathisers, but not all were. What this fact allowed the CP was a small propaganda coup as the party that acted on Spain, from the perspective of actually fighting in Spain as

well as its political stance of support for the Popular Front. The Labour Party was more circumspect and sought to distance itself both from the events in Spain and from the CP, at least until the national leadership changed tack and opposed the Non Intervention Pact.

However, what is interesting in the book is the diversity of stances taken by different parts of the labour movement. Not all local parties obeyed or conformed to national directives and not all support in favour of the Republic was Communist-led or driven. Most support, however, was precisely that – in favour of the democratic Republic rather than in favour of the revolutionary movements that sought to take advantage of the

Independent Labour Party in the North East, but its influence was not strong.

In an interesting chapter on industrial direct action, Mates charts how some sectors of the unions and political parties explored this possibility in order to aid Spain. This would have taken the form of strikes, boycotts and refusing to load ships, for example. But such a tactic was never employed. There are lessons once more here: political parties tied by loyalty to their undemocratic centres or national committees and by loyalty to legality will simply not come up with the goods. If direct action had been employed, as Orwell later said, much more could have been done not only for the Republic but for the revolution in Spain. Mates is not particularly strong on anarchism in his book (probably because anarchism itself was no longer a significant force in the North East) but his chapter on direct action could have allowed him to explore much more fruitfully the legacy of syndicalism on the Tyne and in the North in general as a possible tactic to be employed by those labour organisations in the North East.



English Battalion, XVth
International Brigade,
Headquarters at Mondejar

coup by the military to instigate fundamental social change. Indeed, the CP believed this was not appropriate at the time, and the Labour Party, of course, did not stand for revolution. Some strains of dissidence on this front were evidenced in the stance taken by the

With a price tag of £52.50, this publication is clearly aimed at the academic market. Despite this, for those interested in the issues covered, ordering through your university or local library is a worthwhile exercise.

Creating a Culture of and Resistance

ANARCHO-SYNDICALISTS IN BRITAIN ARE NOT YET *strong enough to have formed our own unions. Many of us work in non-unionised workplaces; more are members of the social democratic unions to which we are opposed, because to be outside those unions would be to set ourselves in opposition to those workers where we work who at least see the need for unions. However, although we are members of such unions, we try to organise at work in a different way to the social democratic ideal. The anarcho-syndicalist approach to workplace organising is based on five principles: class struggle; workers' control; industrial unionism; internationalism and social revolution.*

class struggle, not partnership

The class war is the daily process of disempowerment by which we are put in our place by management and other authority figures. There is an obvious divide both at work and in wider society between those of us who pay for mistakes, including the mistakes of others, and those who are always insulated from their effects, if they are not forgiven, excused, or even rewarded for making those mistakes themselves. The recent treatment of the financial executives responsible for the present crisis is merely an obvious example of this. This is the real class divide, and the process by which it is established and maintained is the real class war. What should be a right for everyone – to be treated decently as a human being – is denied to

most of us in order to restrict it to a privileged few. If you aren't prepared just to be a victim of this war you have to organise to fight back.

The end result of this process is that workers are reduced from human beings to mere production

units. Employment law restricts or qualifies the rights of management to sack and alienate workers both because we are valuable to the business and sacking us may harm it, and because replacing us is costly. It is basically a mechanism for minimising costs and maximising performance through regulating management's relations with the workforce. Representation by social democratic unions is about the application of this law and is part of the regulation of management relations with workers, in the ultimate interests of the management. It is based on the idea that "good" management can solve all these problems, rather than an understanding that "bad" management is driven by economic and organisational pressures, and is not simply a product of ignorance or bad decisions. Ultimately, it is about saving capitalism from itself.



Just in case you still think that the boss, or your union's general secretary, values you as a human being, think about what they call the area of management which is based on employment law – *human resources*. It should tell you everything you need to know about the true nature of capitalism that in order to value workers management have to objectify us as resources. If you want to be treated as a human being, not

Class Consciousness in the Workplace

as a resource, you have to organise in a way that subverts this system. If you want to do something about it try analysing and publicising the underlying reasons behind management actions in your workplace. Go beyond the idea that a particular manager is simply doing this for personal reasons, because they're incompetent, lazy or prejudiced, even if they are all those things.

workers' control, not union representation

Good management does nothing to change the power relations in the workplace, or to change the economic pressures which cause those relations. Rather than ensuring management manage "well" and comply with employment law, the immediate purpose of union organisation should be to contest control of the workplace with management. This is in opposition to the social democratic idea of union representation, and is a means by which workers, *as workers*, organise together in a class confrontation with management. As workers we have to develop a collective consciousness of our situation and how we would like to change it, based on the understanding that workers and management have conflicting interests which cannot be resolved in a capitalist society. When there needs to be negotiation with management any stewards have to be transformed from being representatives, whose role is to reconcile workers' demands with the interests of management, into being delegates. Those delegates must be given mandates and decision making must lie, not with them, but with the membership at

workplace meetings or, where mass meetings are not possible, by visiting isolated workers to ensure everyone has a say. This will help to transform arguments between union representatives and management about procedure into a fight by workers against management.



In order to establish workers' control over a job, decisions have to be made collectively by the people who will carry them out. Meetings should be avoided where a decision is made but the logic of the situation is that the decision should be carried out by representatives, rather than by the workers ourselves. This means that the basic building block of organisation is

the workplace, and the basis of all decision making has to be the workplace meeting. Workers must decide collectively what we will do together, how we will confront and resist management collectively. This is the basis of direct action, action taken on our own behalf by workers who have decided what we will do together in our own interests. This kind of organising helps to develop class consciousness rather than a trades union consciousness based on representation.

Workers' organisation should also have a larger purpose, one of contesting control over society. The basic methods are the same, but the way our exploitation is approached should be shifted from contesting the terms of that exploitation to seeking to end it altogether. From seeking to influence how existing power structures operate to challenging those structures and establishing in their place structures controlled by the workers. By breaking the barriers which limit workers' consciousness we can go beyond trades union consciousness towards class consciousness.

industrial unionism

Developing class consciousness also involves breaking down the barriers which divide different groups of workers. These can include differences in occupation, specialisation or grade, of union affiliation or of employer. The basis of unity has to be the idea of the industrial union, one union for all grades and trades

of worker in an industry. However, this has to be a principled industrial union created out of struggle and will not necessarily be the only union in a workplace. Historically, the revolutionary idea of industrial unionism was diverted into the union amalgamation movement in Britain before and after the Great War, which brought us the likes of the NUR (now the RMT) and the AEEU (now Unite!). Recent union mergers have not broken down the barriers between workers which used to be formalised in their membership of different unions.

In Local Government, for example, these divisions were often based on union leaders or Labour Party activists playing one group of workers off against another, such as manual against white collar, in order to establish and maintain control over those workers. Since the creation of unions like UNISON were the result of bureaucratic manoeuvres designed to preserve the corporate interests of the unions, the divisions between different groups of workers were not resolved. Often these divisions have manifested themselves in particular cliques based on members of one predecessor union controlling branches, or in minority groups associated with a particular predecessor union leaving UNISON and joining smaller union branches they can control, often with the connivance of management and the Labour Party, especially where Labour controls the local authority.

A similar source of division is the myriad of different contractors and subcontractors, with different pay and conditions and levels of union membership, which now exist in many workplaces. This is a divide and rule tactic which has been rolled out from the construction industry and is now established across the public service sector. Multiple employers on site make it even more difficult to legally organise effective industrial action. Better paid, better organised workers with more clout often see the worse paid, poorly organised workers as a threat; a sign of what man-

agement would like to do to them and a tool by which they aim to do it. Historically, the struggle of better paid skilled male workers against the employment of poorly paid “unskilled” women was both unsuccessful and counter-productive. That opposition, and the often sexist arguments used against the employment of women, only served to reinforce the idea that they were second class workers who could and should be poorly paid, and paradoxically to increase their attractiveness to the bosses as a means of undermining the better skilled, more expensive male workers.

These divisions can only be overcome through struggle; through the giving and receiving of solidarity between different groups of workers and through common struggles in the common interest. Just being in the same union is not the answer, nor is it always possible for all workers to be in the same union or even to be in a union at all. That poses us the challenge of how to organise across union boundaries. A good recent example of how to do this was the Workmates Council set up on the London Underground engineering contract run by Metronet, including workers employed by various subcontractors as well as by the main contractor. That extended organisation based on the RMT membership working for the main contractor to all the various groups of workers. While it did not last, it left a lasting

legacy of solidarity which helped stop the victimisation of RMT activist Andy Littlechild, one of its instigators, by Metronet early in 2009. We have to spread the idea that all workers have common interests and, therefore, should act in solidarity with others. For a start you should talk to the cleaners or other contract workers at your workplace. Find out about their conditions and problems and offer them advice, help and solidarity.

internationalism begins at home

Today the same arguments around the employment of “unskilled” women workers apply most urgently to migrant workers, skilled as well as “unskilled”. Many migrant workers are working illegally, or semi-legally – full time on student visas which only allow them to work limited hours each week, for example. Their employers know this, and use it to victimise them if they try to organise. The system of immigration controls undermines the ability of migrant workers to organise to improve their pay and conditions and, allied to the discourse about immigration in politics and the media, reinforces the idea that they are second class workers. Arguments based on nationalistic assumptions about the primacy of “British” workers are used to reinforce the idea that migrant workers should only be employed as a last resort, after

every “local” worker has a job. As well as providing an ideological justification for the rock bottom pay and conditions faced by many of these workers, this idea also distracts workers born in Britain from the need to act in solidarity with migrant workers. Stronger workers have to understand that the



London Underground workers taking action in June 2009

way to fight the erosion of their pay and conditions is to offer solidarity to weaker groups of workers, rather than thinking that they can do better by letting the bosses exploit the weak as they see fit and just defending their own narrow sectional interests. Class consciousness is ultimately about solidarity, regardless of gender, race, religion or nationality.

This year's Lindsay Oil Refinery strikes raised many pertinent questions. It was right to oppose the contracting out of work previously done in-house by workers who were being made redundant. It was also great to see workers taking illegal, unofficial strike action to defend their jobs. What was wrong was to look at it in terms of preserving the jobs of British workers. The Italian and Portuguese workers were kept on a ship and had to get their board and lodging from their employer, clawing back a chunk of their wages. They didn't choose those conditions – they would probably have lost their jobs if they hadn't been employed on that contract. In short, they were also victims of the bosses. They weren't taking British workers' jobs; the oil refinery was getting rid of those to cut costs and was the real villain of the piece. On the other hand, we must reject the idea that workers born in Britain do not have the skills to do the work, or are lazy or less productive than migrant workers. What's good for "the economy" means what's good for business, not for workers, whether British born or migrants. We have to argue that there is enough work for all; it is the bosses' need for profits which restricts our means of livelihood to the terms they want. The likes of Derek Simpson, posing with his *Star* babes, sell us the bosses' game, play-

ing us off against each other as we fight for what the bosses want to give us not what we need. We have to campaign for the regularisation of the immigration status of all



workers employed at our workplaces. As well as an organising tool against the main means of disciplining these workers, this can also be useful as an issue around which to recruit and organise them.

social revolution

The examples of working class resistance to the employment of women and migrant workers show how the prevailing social ideology undermines class consciousness. We need to fight that ideology with relevant propaganda rooted in or linked to our concrete experience as workers. For example, when people meet migrants face to face and hear about their actual circumstances and what they are doing to improve them, they begin to see them as human beings and fellow workers, not as villains. Similarly, management do not behave the way they do because they are bad people – although many of them are – but because of the pressures on them to make profits, to hit targets, etc. We need to draw out these reasons and to link the social relations in our workplaces to the wider social relations in society. We also need to contest those relations and to politicise that contest to turn it into resistance to

capitalism and the social relations it creates.

The underlying purpose of workplace organisation should be social transformation. A genuinely class based workplace organisation should not leave "politics" to political parties, but should address them itself. That means producing propaganda which doesn't restrict itself to "bread and butter" issues like pay and conditions. It also means unions which organise geographically across industries on a federal basis, and use that geographical organisation to tackle social issues outside the workplace. We reject not political organisation but separate political parties; we see unions as being political-economic organisations which must not leave a vacuum to be filled by opportunists. All organisations need leadership to function and it is a phenomenon which occurs "naturally", but we must oppose forms of organisation which reproduce the social relations of the society we live in or which are bound to establish new power relations through the way they operate.

There must be no permanent "leaders"; no matter how well qualified those groups or individuals who claim that leadership of our struggles is their right appear to be. Decision making power must always rest with the membership of the union, or with the working class, as a whole; those who are delegated to carry out those decisions must always remain in possession only of a mandate and hold no power to make decisions on our behalf. As well as a safeguard against tyranny, this principle has a practical purpose in the class struggle. In any struggle, initiative will very often come "from below", from rank and file workers holding no position in a union. Workplace organisation must be structured so that it does not stifle such initiative. Our aim is to raise the consciousness of all workers through participation in the class struggle, to break the barriers which restrict them to a "trades union" consciousness, and our methods of organisation have to reflect that goal.

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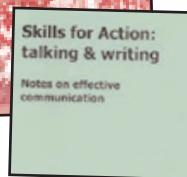
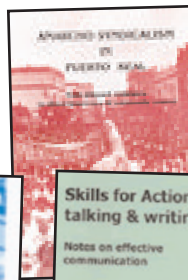
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Principles of Revolutionary Unionism

(continued from page 2)

4. Revolutionary unionism is opposed to all organisational tendencies inspired by the centralism of state and church, because these can only serve to prolong the survival of the state and authority and to systematically stifle the spirit of initiative and independence of thought. Centralism is the artificial organisation that subjects the so-called lower classes to those who claim to be superior, and that leaves in the hands of the few the affairs of the whole community, the individual being turned into a robot with controlled gestures and movements. In the centralised organisation, society's good is subordinated to the interests of the few, variety is replaced by uniformity and personal responsibility is replaced by rigid discipline. Consequently, revolutionary unionism bases its social vision on a broad federalist organisation; i.e. an organisation organised from the bottom up, the uniting of all forces in the defence of common ideas and interests.

5. Revolutionary unionism rejects all parliamentary activity and all collaboration with legislative bodies because it knows that even the freest voting system cannot bring about the disappearance of the clear contradictions at the core of present day society and because the parliamentary system has only one goal: to lend a pretence of legitimacy to the reign of falsehood and social injustice.

6. Revolutionary unionism rejects all political and national frontiers, which are arbitrarily created, and declares that so-called nationalism is just the religion of the modern state, behind which are concealed the material interests of the propertied classes. Revolutionary unionism recognises only economic differences, whether regional or national, that produce hierarchies, privileges and every kind of oppression (because of race, sex and any false or real difference), and in the spirit of solidarity claims the right to self-determination for all economic groups.

7. For the identical reason, revolutionary unionism fights against militarism and war. Revolutionary unionism advocates anti-war propaganda and the replacement of standing armies, which are only the instruments of counter-revolution at the service of capitalism, by workers' militias which, during the revolution, will be controlled by the workers' unions; it demands, as well, the boycott and embargo of all raw materials and products necessary to war, with the exception of a country where the workers are in the midst of social revo-

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lution, in which case we should help them defend the revolution. Finally, revolutionary unionism advocates the preventive and revolutionary general strike as a means of opposing war and militarism.

8. Revolutionary unionism recognises the need for production which does not damage the environment, and which seeks to minimise the use of finite resources, and wherever possible to use sustainable alternatives. It identifies the drive for profit, rather than ignorance, as the root of the present environmental crisis. Capitalist production must always seek to minimise costs in pursuit of an ever-increasing rate of profit in order to exist, and cannot protect the environment. In particular, the world debt crisis has accelerated the drive towards cash crops at the expense of subsistence farming. This is responsible for rainforest destruction, famine and disease. The fight to save the planet and the fight to destroy capitalism must go hand in hand or both will fail.

9. Revolutionary unionism asserts itself to be a supporter of the method of direct action, and aids and encourages all struggles that are not in contradiction to its own goals. Its methods of struggle are: strikes, boycotts, sabotage, etc. Direct action reaches its deepest expression in the general strike, which should also be, from the point of view of revolutionary unionism, the prelude to the social revolution.

10. While revolutionary unionism is opposed to all organised violence regardless of the kind of government, it realises that there will be extremely violence clashes during the decisive struggles between the capitalism of today and the free communism of tomorrow. Consequently, it recognises as valid that violence that may be used as a means of defence against the violent methods used by the ruling classes during the struggles that lead up to the revolutionary populace expropriating the lands and means of production. As this expropriation can only be carried out and brought to a successful conclusion by the direct intervention of the workers' revolutionary economic organisations, defence of the revolution must also be the task of these economic organisations and not of a military or quasi-military body developing independently of them.

11. Only in the economic and revolutionary organisations of the working class are there forces capable of bringing about its liberation and the necessary creative energy for the reorganisation of society on the basis of libertarian communism.

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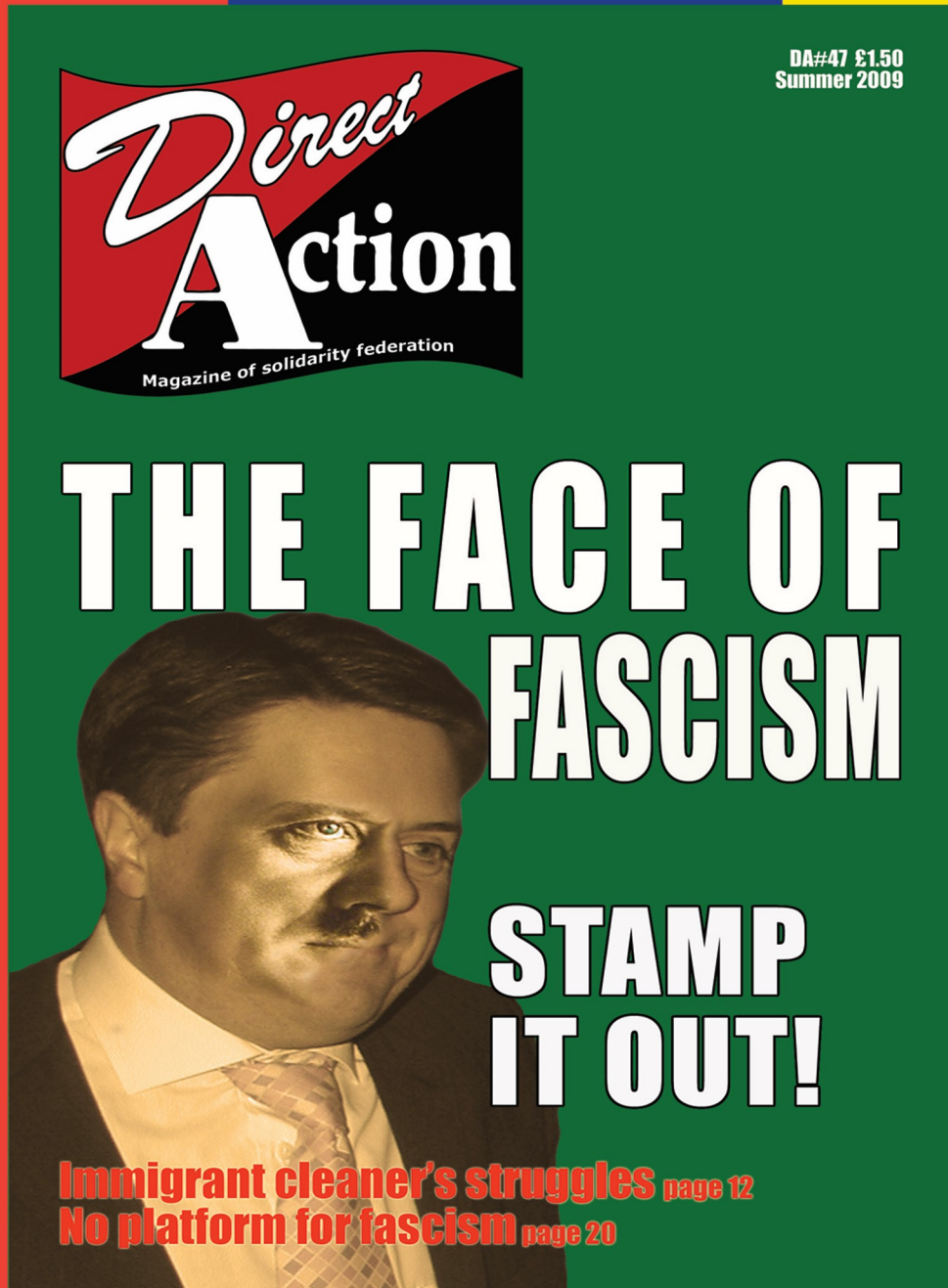
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