the Leveller
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Bury Capitalism



The death of Thatcher, British Prime Minister 1979 - 1990, was marked by celebration across the left and by working people everywhere. Members of the Belfast Local of the Solidarity Federation were certainly among those celebrating. Unfortunately the jubilation at her death all too often descended into sectarianism in the north - a figure despised by so many could have provided a focus for much working class celebration.

The 'Iron Lady's' record in power saw working class communities crushed, the miners not least among them, millions were thrown on the dole, in the north her policies amounted to nothing more than pouring petrol on the flames of the conflict.

Her legacy is still alive and well. In the 80s it was dubbed 'Thatcherism'. Interchangeable with 'Reganomics' this was the start of a capitalist global offensive against the gains previously made by working people the world over.

In more recent times this offensive has been called neo-liberalism. What it is is increasingly aggressive capitalism.

The bad old days of Thatcherism did not end when direct action against the Poll Tax forced her out of office. They have not faded to nothing with her death. The wicked witch may be dead but a very virulent form of capitalism is still with us.

The current 'recession' is part and parcel of her legacy. We are still suffering due to job losses, worse terms and conditions, a lack of funds for education, healthcare, benefits and services. Working class communities are still bearing the brunt despite the fact that it is we who create all of societies wealth.

Capitalism is getting back to basics - we need to do the same.

We've seen Thatcher buried. Now - while we still draw breath - lets bury capitalism!

the lack of A Woman's Right to Choose in Ireland



Anti-choice campaigners in Ireland like to insist that there is no 'need or desire for abortion in Ireland'. Except, not only are they wrong, but were they right, it does not mean it should be unavailable for those who do need or want it. According to official figures over 4,000 women and girls travelled to England and Wales last year to have an abortion, and more than 152,000 have done so since 1980.

This number is large enough, too large in fact, but when you consider that many women and girls will give a false address, either out of fear of reprisal or to reduce the costs, then this number grows again. Indeed many now travel elsewhere in the EU to receive this care. It's estimated that 1,470 travelled to the Netherlands between 2005 and 2009. Also, with internet access and online shopping being so widely accessible, many people will illegally get abortion pills delivered to their front door (so long as Irish customs don't seize the package).

Is access a problem then?

Perhaps we shouldn't worry about it so much. Women can still get abortions, they just have to travel elsewhere for it. Except that's not always true. It was significantly delayed in the X-case and resulted in the 14 year old girl miscarrying instead. Savita Halappanavar died when she was denied an abortion, even though the foetus was known to be unviable, being told at one point, "This is a Catholic country." Countless other women and girls have either had to receive dangerous, 'backstreet' abortions; or have tried to cause their body to miscarry as a result of heavy use of alcohol and other drugs, or have self-inflicted physical abuse; or carried the unwanted and potentially dangerous pregnancy to term because they felt they couldn't have an abortion due to pressure from their family, friends, community or church.

Another reason women and girls won't get an abortion is their inability to pay for it. Having an abortion is obviously a time sensitive issue and so arrangements need to be made at short notice, making them both difficult and expensive, from transport to accommodation, getting time off work or school and organising childcare, to the procedure itself. This means that paying for an abortion, something which should be free, safe, legal and local, is impossible for many working class women across Ireland.

Access to abortion is a class issue. This should be an important and uniting cause for those struggling for workers' rights in Ireland and beyond. In particular, anarchists, those fighting for total freedom from oppression, opposing state control and destruction of hierarchy in its many forms, see women being forced or pressured into pregnancy and motherhood against their will as something utterly detestable and in need of being remedied one way or another.

What is currently being done?

Recently Belfast saw the first sexual and reproductive health clinic, which provides medical abortions within the limits of current Northern Irish law. The reaction from the anti-choice and religious right was fairly predictable: wholly absurd hyperbole, exaggeration and outright lies teamed with conspiracy theories. Equally predictable was the response not just from those with disturbing placards and petitions, but from the politicians and parties as well. It resulted in hearings in which Marie Stopes International was somehow blamed for Northern Ireland's lack of regulation and oversight, and a last minute amendment being rather strangely tacked onto the end the Criminal Justice Bill.

So much of the response, especially from the politicians, was religiously based, with Jonathan Bell MLA standing in the assembly during the amendment debate attacking others and calling into question how good a Protestant they were, praying to his god for forgiveness, and making direct comparisons to the holocaust. It would be laughable if it wasn't having such a terrible effect on people's lives… but I guess that's just politics in general.

While the attempt to maintain women's lack of rights in Northern Ireland was going on, there was talk in England about reducing the term limits and Republicans in the US were rolling back 40 years of progress by either making abortion practically impossible or in some cases attempting to illegally make it illegal (I repeat, that's politics). Very recently legislation has been proposed in the Republic that, while clarifying the current law, would not at all extend it and would force women to essentially plead their case before a panel of 3 to 6 physicians.

While Sinn Féin helped to defeat the anti-choice amendment, they have also come out to say they are not a pro-abortion party. The DUP and SDLP all voted for the amendment, and the other parties, while they have spatterings of pro-choice members or may even have a pro-choice policy, tend to be so small in terms of elected representatives as to be nearly ineffectual. Of course all of this is null and void when we consider that we shouldn't be looking to politicians to sort out our problems for us.

So what can we do?

Groups such as Doctors For Choice, Alliance For Choice and Anarchists For Choice, have been pushing for change for many years now in various different efforts and campaigns, the latest of which are a petition for the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act and a letter of criminal admission. While usually wary of petitions, I think that this one is quite useful, because it dismisses this idea that abortion isn't wanted here, and likewise the letter (which is an admission of either having used the pill or having helped women get or learn about it, punishable by life imprisonment) does away with the delusion that it doesn't happen here.

There are also groups like Women On Web and Abortion Support Network who help women access medical abortions or help pay for, and get support during, an abortion in England. These people and actions can use all the support they can get, irrespective of how politicians feel they should vote to get re-elected. Get round the system and help your sisters.

COMBAT the BEDROOMTAX

With opposition to the Bedroom Tax growing across England, Scotland and Wales the Assembly have started the legislative process for the Welfare Reform Bill (NI) 2012. Including the whole range of Westminster's attacks on the poor and vulnerable this legislation is set to implement those attacks 'in parity' with the rest of the UK.

We need to organise and fight these attacks and we need to begin now by organising in solidarity with working people across the water to defeat the bedroom tax.

In the north there are over 24,000 claimants who would be classified as 'under occupying' their homes by one bedroom and around eight and a half thousand 'under occupying' by two bedrooms or more. Those with one 'spare' room will be taxed 14% of their housing benefit and those with two or more will lose 25%. That amounts to a cut in benefits of between £7 to £15 per week. People will simply not be able to afford to make up the difference! This is a policy that will make more and more people homeless!

Cold comfort for the poor is that they can avoid these penalties by 'moving house' - of course there is not the housing stock, social or privately rented, to accommodate this madness.

So how will they decide if you have two many rooms?

"One bedroom is seen as appropriate for

- a couple;
- a person aged 16 and over;
- two children of the same sex;
- two children under 10;
- any other child;
- a carer providing overnight care."

So if your under ten year old children have their own rooms you are 'under occupying' your house! And you will lose benefits. The poor will be expected to live in cramped conditions or on the streets while the rich keep their mansions and multiple empty properties.

U-Turn on Closures to Homes for Elderly

More than 360 elderly people faced being thrown out of their homes as the Health Trusts threatened to implement 'Transforming Your Care' – a policy which is supported by all the parties in the Executive at Stormont.

Mass opposition and protest has forced a partial climb-down for now. Public opposition to the cuts have forced the Assembly to back down on plans to close every care home in the Northern and the Western Trusts. They are still seeking to implement closure of 50% of Trust owned care homes and to manage this centrally through Edwin Poots' department. Among those supporting the Health Minister in implementing 'Transforming Your Care' is Sinn Fein MLA, and chair of the health committee, Sue Ramsay.

We can force concessions but we need to organise ourselves in order to meet the challenge of defending our public services and benefits from further attack. We can tell that the Assembly have little stomach for a fight - they have pushed the worst of the planned £4.3billion cuts back to 2014 and 2015.

Working class self organisation, direct action and solidarity can ensure that cuts are not just delayed but stopped dead in their tracks.





Anarchy Cafe

Belfast SolFed held our first successful 'Anarchy Cafe' in the Warzone Centre aka Giros on Tuesday 29th of April. We met for refreshments, a bit of craic, and an informal chat about Thatchers legacy.

These events will take place regularly on the last Monday of each month - the nest topic is 'Anarchism and a woman's right to chose' which will take place at the Centre, Little Victoria Street, Belfast at 7.30pm on MONDAY 27TH OF May.

There will be a book stall, refreshments, snacks - all welcome.

All In This Together?
MLA Pay Hike Paid For By Us!

In an act of solidarity with the poor most of 'our' MLA's have accepted a recession busting pay rise of 11%. Generously the SDLP and Sinn Fein will be putting the extra money into their party coffers!

So MLAs are getting a £5,000 pay rise while we are faced with salary freezes in the public sector, cuts to benefits, attacks on the disabled and most vulnerable, job losses, 'austerity' measures and attacks on our living standards across the board.

As if this wasn't bad enough Stormont is costing us at least twice as much now in MLA's salaries as it did in 2001/02. Then the total salary cost was £4,881,835 in 2011/12 it had soared to £7,432,845. So, the folks up on the hill can lord it over the rest of us, telling us there is no alternative to recession and austerity while pocketing salaries most of us couldn't even imagine.

And as they, or 'in solidarity with the workers', their parties pocket these vast sums of money our lives become more and more of a struggle to make ends meet. More and more of a struggle to survive. And some of us don't even manage that. Working class people die every year due to fuel poverty, infant mortality and mortality rates in general are significantly higher in deprived working class areas. Our working lives are made longer and our pensions have been plundered. What little safety net that was provided is being cut away at.

Lets be clear - these politicians cannot even pretend to represent working class people or the poor. There lives are so far removed from the 'economic realities' that we face day in day out. The only justifiable cuts are to cut Stormont, Westminster, the Dail - cut government!





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West Yorkshire SolFed
Education Workers' Network
Unwaged Workers' Network
Private Sector Workers' Network
Public Service Workers' Network
Tech and Digital Workers' Network

For Locals without a listed email, and Networks, contact can be made via the Solidarity Federation website at: http://www.solfed.org.uk/

SOLIDARITY FEDERATION
SF
IWA
INTERNATIONAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION

At our recent Federal Conference, on April 27th, the Belfast Local was formally welcomed into the Solidarity Federation.

The Belfast Local had been set up as Local in formation by members of Organise! in Belfast and Lisburn. We had come to the position that the best way forward for working class anarcho-syndicalist organising across these islands would be best served in common with our comrades in the Solidarity Federation.

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

That society can be achieved by working class organisations based on the same principles - revolutionary unions. These are not trade unions 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 beyond - which arise from our oppression.

As such we are actively opposed to sectarianism, racism, sexism and homophobia and other tendencies used to divide workers and weaken our struggles for our common interests.

Revolutionary unions fully support and encourage organisation 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, hierarchy and exploitation in all forms. We are committed to building a new society within the shell of the old in both our workplace and 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 and Industrial Networks which seek to take on the functions of revolutionary unions - supporting our organising efforts where we live and work. Our activities are based on direct action - action by workers ourselves, not through intermediaries like politicians and union officials; our decisions are made through participation of the membership. We welcome all workers - including the unemployed, retired, stay-home parents and students - who will work within our Aims and Principles and seek to create revolutionary unions to fight the class struggle.