Environ-mental
Thatcherism Down Under
Labour and Social Inequality
Derailed: Trains in Crisis
Cult of Celebrity
NHS...
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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 its 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 organisations 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 realise that not all opposition is economic, but can be based on gender, race, sexuality, or anything our rulers find useful. Unless we organise in this way, politicians and 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.

56a Infoshop
Bookshop, records, library, archive, social/meeting space; 56a Crampton St, London, SE17 3AE; open Thur 2-8, Fri 3-7, Sat 2-6.
AK Press
Anarchist books and merchandise of every description; PO Box 12766, Edinburgh, EH8 9IE; 0131 555 265; ak@akedin.demon.co.uk; www.akuk.com
Freedom
Anarchist fortnightly; 84b Whitechapel High St, London, E1 7QK; www.freedompress.org.uk
www.fibcom.org
Online libertarian community and organising resource for activists in Britain
Organise!
Working Class Resistance free sheet/info; PO Box 505, Belfast, BT12 6QW

Solfed/IWA internal contacts

National contact point:
PO Box 29, South West PDD, Manchester, M15 5HW
07984 675281; solfed@solfed.org.uk; www.solfed.org.uk

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<td>Preston SolFed: PO Box 469, Preston, PR1 8XF; 077 07 25 66 09; prestonsolfed.mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk</td>
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<td>South London SolFed: PO Box 17773, London, SE8 4WX</td>
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Friends & neighbours: contact us to get listed

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

Stuff your boss!
Anti-casualisation campaign in NW England;
stuffyourboss@lists.riseup.net; SYB, c/o PO Box 29, SW PDD, Manchester, M15 5HW

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

Kate Sharpley Library
Full catalogue: B Miami Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX; www.katesharpleylibrary.net

Radical Healthcare Workers:
http://radicalhealthcareworkers.wordpress.com/
The trend of celebrity performers taking up social causes such as world poverty and more recently global warming with the resultant mass concerts (Live 8, Live Earth etc.) serves to further reinforce our passivity as spectators of these events.

In fact, the whole approach of such campaigns invariably involves appealing to the most general audience, and the media is always ready to rise to the bait as it sells the megastars and the starving poor is patently obvious to anyone with an ounce of common sense.

Participation in such events and the positive publicity this brings is naturally good for their credibility, with increased merchandise and CD sales an obvious motivation.

In this carefully orchestrated charade, we are just required to turn up, sing along, cheer at the right time, and buy the wristband, DVD and T-shirt.

Then we can go home with our consciences well and truly salved, safe in the knowledge that our leaders cannot but fail to have been moved into taking robust action.

Meanwhile, in the real world, the poor still starve and the planet still smoulders.

Rejecting the cult of celebrity, confronting the banal rubbish which passes as entertainment and creating our own alternatives to these is a necessary part of transforming social relationships.

For even those who escape physical poverty cannot escape the present emotional poverty of everyday life.

The sooner the politicians, bosses, and their pathetic media spectacles are consigned to the dustbin of history, the better.

Direct Action Summer 2007

Labour: an anti-working class party

S o exit Blair and enter Brown; a change of leader, but Labour will carry on doing what it's become so good at - looking after the rich, and sod the working class.

Here at Direct Action this is no shock, but even yet there are so-called 'old Labour' diehards hoping and praying that Brown will bring a change in direction. A long wait that'll be.

It takes hardly any brain cells to work out that this Labour government has continued with the vicious free market policies first introduced by Thatcher and developed by later Tory regimes.

Labour's trick has been to repack these packages, giving them a gloss of caring concern. Unfortunately for the diehards Labour is now so awash with well-intentioned individuals, but never sought to challenge global capitalism.

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The overriding subliminal message is work hard, consume, know your place and shut up. (And for those aspiring wannabee entrepreneurs, programmes such as The Apprentice' provide the ultimate guide to climbing the slippery pole of cut-throat capitalism). The trend of celebrity performers taking up social causes such as world poverty and more recently global warming with the resultant mass concerts (Live 8, Live Earth etc.) serves to further reinforce our passivity as spectators of these events.

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Tors of these events. Charity and single-issue campaigns may, at best, alleviate some of the worst excesses of capitalism and raise some limited awareness. But by viewing these issues in isolation, they masquerate with the magistrates and the starving poor is patently obvious to anyone with an ounce of common sense.

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The Romans brought us

You don't believe this, do you? But what about the riff-raff, I hear you say? Well, they've got plastic cards so they don't have to queue at the post office for their dole which they can spend on dirt-cheap laser washed down by mayonnaise on chips.

What a wonderful world the ‘common market’ has brought to the ‘common man’ - and the common woman too, what with French knickers and Prada shopping bags. Also - a very continental word is also - just as in any true democracy the benefits don't just go to us.

The poor downtrodden bureaucrats also get a bit for a change: houses in the various European towns where they direct operations from; safe jobs and pensions they can pass on to their kids; they get to make up different rules each day and sit around in meetings with headphones listening to

Happy 50th Birthday EU

The ‘other state’ celebrates half a century of bureaucracy and screwing the European working class over

It’s been 50 glorious years since the European Union was born. The idea behind it was to stop the parasites of France and Germany from scrapping over iron and steel.

However, the growth of a ‘common market’ around Europe has brought loads of benefits to all of us - young and old, rich and poor, and those in between too.

You don’t believe this, do you? Well, just think. The Romans brought us bogs and baths (the bastards) but since the Treaty of Rome in 1957 we’ve been brought tomatoes, wine, lager, pizzas, bistros, and even continental groundhust! We can sup hinges for 24 hours a day, call in at sophisticated pavement cafes on the way home and eat croissants with fetid cheese and have a swig of latte coffee - all proper foreign stuff too.

We can scoop Volkswagen at 150 miles an hour in the fast lane with a line of coke on the dash and a mobile phone stuck to our lug.

The mass media bombard us with a myriad of ‘reality’ TV shows, soap operas, Hollywood movies, tabloid newspapers, sport channels, music videos, celebrity gossip mags, advertisements, computer games and so on.

These provide a range of idealised images for us to aspire to, roles to play and virtual worlds to escape into.

We live in a spectacular society. That is our whole life is surrounded by an immense accumulation of spectacles. Things which were once directly lived are now lived by proxy.

Once an experience is taken out of the real world into the spectacular world it becomes a commodity.

As a commodity the spectacular is developed to the detriment of the real. It becomes the substitute for the experience.

Modern capitalism has effectively overseen the destruction of natural community and systems of social interaction by a number of means.

One of the ways it has done this is through the mass media and its cult of celebrity. Now before we get too abstract and sociological, let’s look at the practicalities of this.

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This is an engaging anthology of writings from the Rebel Worker (Chicago) and Heatwave (London).

In an era of less-than-inspiring New Leftism, the collective dreamers behind these magazines were at the forefront of radical praxis.

Professing a deep connection with surrealism and the pleasure principle, these zines were further than the ascetic demands of the tradition left by advocating (and attempting to live) a total revolution of everyday life - because revolution cannot be a chore, it must be part of life lived joyfully and rebelliously.

These ideas are rooted in the wide-eyed, poetic and rebellious tradition of surrealism which precedes and inspired, the Situationist International.

What is most amazing is their reconceiving of an anti-work perspective with membership in (and praise for) the IWW. Such a seemingly ridiculous synthesis works because they emphasize the most liberatory aspects of the IWW, such as its longstanding connection to train hopping hobos and the rural unemployed (people just as wildly rebellious towards all social norms and institutions as anyone Crimethinc. writes about) and its support for wildcat strikes.

It is in relation to their IWW organizing that the Rebel Worker group was able to define themselves as ‘workers against work’. Among the most interesting pieces are the introductions by Rosemont and Radcliffe, who were involved with the Rebel Worker and Heatwave, respectively.

Their separate introductions put the anthology in historical perspective. Rosemont begins with his days as a young high school dropout turned card-carrying wobbly. He writes of his involvement in a free speech fight at Roosevelt University supported by high-profile radicals such as Paul Goodman; he reflects fondly of traveling to France with his partner Penelope and meeting surrealist Andre Breton and Guy Debord of the Situationist International; he recalls helping organize striking Michigan farm workers and rejuvenating a dying wobbly tradition; he tells of his brief (but important) time at the Solidarity Bookshop, a radical bookstore at the heart of the anti-capitalist milieu of 60s Chicago; he ends with the proud proclamation that after ‘the passage of many years not one of the characters in The Rebel Worker Story has defected to the side of Capital and the State’.

Radcliffe’s story of Heatwave, the sister journal of the Rebel Worker, is one of great interest as well. Heatwave grew out of the anti-nuclear, anarcho-pacifist British radical circles in the early 60s. Radcliffe and Diana Shelley, his partner and comrade, were involved with the anti-nuclear protests of the Committee of 100.

A common interest present in all of the issues is music, especially as it pertains to radical counterculture music (blues is held in especially high regard).

One issue even included a science fiction story written by a little kid. This motley assortment is a little bewildering, but makes for quite a remarkable read.

Heatwave was closely linked to other radical groups such as London Solidarity and Freedom Press. Radcliffe himself holds the distinction of being the only member of the Situationist International to quit in disgust (as opposed to being expelled in dismay).

Just like the Rebel Worker, Heatwave’s link to diverse radical groups gave the journal a probing analysis of political pronouncements and analyses for a small mimeographed zine produced by young twenty-something-year-olds.

The content of these journals ranged from madly revolutionary poetry to the dense yet readable Marxian theory; from wide-eyed utopian short stories to anarchist critiques of bureaucratism, capitalism, and the state; they featured provocative surrealistic artwork and some of the earliest pieces from the Situationists to appear in the U.S.

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Drummond in the United States (1964-1965) and France in 1966:

Penelope and Pinky are among those who were involved in organizing the 1965-1966 French general strikes.

So, after the general strikes of the 1960s, what happened to the IWW unions? The IWW was dissolved in 1917, but its legacy lived on in the form of smaller, more local unions.

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Why does the scum always rise to the top?

How society produces those that keep us in our place - and how revolutionaries can avoid reproducing the same kind of organisation

Those who most closely identify with the way our society is organised, and who seek to gain either individual power or maintain the power of the ruling class are the ones who become most ‘successful’ in society and reach the top.

Those seeking power quickly recognise the way society works and the most successful are those who can use the system to the best advantage for themselves. This can often mean being ruthless and single-minded in their approach and actions so every decision is made on the basis of how much advantage, in terms of money, power or influence (often all three), they will gain.

Even those who may start out with some altruistic intentions find themselves coerced and seduced by the trappings of power and rapidly lose sight of their original intentions and rationalise their compromises. How does this happen, and why?

Hierarchy

We live in a hierarchical society. We have all grown up in social structures - class, race, gender, sexuality, and so on - that are hierarchical in nature. These social hierarchies are multi-tiered, pyramid-like structures that have as an apex the centralisation of power.

Everyday institutions such as businesses, churches, armies, voluntary and community organisations and most political movements, are structured hierarchically where the few in the top position have more power than the many at the base.

The best expressions of this are capitalism and the state.

At the root of these hierarchical structures is the question of power. Those are somehow different to other workers (and form some sort of ‘precariat’).

This is doing the bosses’ job for them. In our work on casualisation, we seek to unite workers not divide them, and to do this in concrete terms by promoting organisation by workplace, not by type of contract.

Spain

The Spanish CNT held May Day actions in more than 30 cities. Besides increasing casualisation in Spain, the focus was also on worsening working conditions in general, including low pay, poverty, the situation of women, and the rising incidence of workplace accidents.

Spain has one of the highest rates of temporary employment in Europe, while casualisation is growing alarmingly in the public services. And new social security and labour market reforms are on the way that can only extend casualisation further, continuing a trend that goes back 20 years or more.

These reforms reflect a capitalist and neoliberal vision of work; they show up the almost indistinguishable position of the main union committee…[by] recycling trade unionists into politicians make the present union model one more institution of the system.

Organizations who now ask for the workers’ votes are managing the lists in the ‘negotiation’ the redundancies of 660 fellow workers.

Poland

ZSP (Związek Syndykalistów Polski - Union of Syndicalists of Poland) is a relatively new organisation with strong links to the IWA.

An example of this was described by the CNT union section at SEAT in Barcelona: the enterprise committees…[by] recycling trade unionists into politicians make the present union model one more institution of the system.

Organizations who now ask for the workers’ votes are managing the lists in the ‘negotiation’ the redundancies of 660 fellow workers.

Ideas & Action

On April 28-29, the Ideas and Action conference took place in Warsaw. Besides ZSP, people from the Anarchist Federation and Workers Initiative, among others from Poland, were present while there were also visitors mostly from the IWA, including comrades from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Serbia.

The main debates and discussions focused around ideas on non-hierarchical, radical anti-capitalist workplace struggle and on networking people interested in both promoting these practices and engaging in ongoing and new campaigns.

There were some interesting discussions based on personal experiences around the possibilities for organising internationally within multinational companies and reacting as a small organisation in workplaces dominated by larger unions.

More concretely, grounds were established for cooperation between comrades from Slovakia and Poland in both the IT and the car industries.

Some joint campaigns were preliminarily discussed with people planning to meet up in the summer to take things further.

The centre of the car industry will soon be in an industrial triangle made up of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia and people discussed ways of agitating and organising in the industry.
**May 1st 2007**

May Day commemorates five anarchist workers put to death in Chicago in 1886 in the struggle for the 8-hour working day. This year’s May Day statement by the IWA Secretariat* notes ‘how this hard won right, as well as many others, is slipping away...as the capitalist machinery tries to “liberate” itself from obligations that we imposed on it through our struggles and direct action’. This global ‘capitalist crusade...of coordinated attacks against workers rights’ includes, among much else, the increasing casualisation of the workplace.

To highlight the international nature of the attack, leading up to this May Day IWA sections have, once again, coordinated their anti-casualisation activities. Here we look back at some of these, and other May Day activities, in the UK, Spain and Poland.

* For Freedom and Equality: Direct Action and Solidarity! - see: http://www.iwa-alt.org/

**Britain**

In DA38 we covered some of SolFed’s anti-casualisation activities. This May Day’s activities included distribution of leaflets and the holding of information stalls to coincide with the IWA call.

Some SF groups have also been involved in a campaign around casualisation at Starbucks coffee shops. Below is an article detailing South London SF’s involvement.

**Starbucks Vs its workers**

For almost 3 years workers in Starbucks have been organising in their franchises in the USA under the banner of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

Starbucks have responded by waging a war of intimidation against the unionising workers. Already 5 employees have lost their jobs - Joseph Agins, Charles Foston, Evan Winterscheidt, Daniel Gross (Founder of the Starbucks Union) and Isis Snenz. This is a warning shot towards anyone attempting to improve working conditions.

However, Starbucks workers have fought back, winning 2 workers their jobs back and more than $2000 in lost earnings.

In New York City, workers have gained a 25% wage increase in just 2 years, with similar raises in other areas they have organised.

After talking to various people, South London Solidarity Federation decided to do something to support these sacked workers.

While workers are sacked all the time for organising, it’s not all the time that the company behaving this way has very public outlets that we can do an informational picket outside.

One of our members was involved in some high street solidarity during the 1980s, in a couple of disputes originating in Scotland. Arbroth, who supplied Laura Ashley, and Tricia Jennings, who worked for Burton.

From this, we learned that informational pickets can be instrumental in aiding workers in struggle, though they are not enough in themselves. In order to win, the workers need active solidarity from other workers, particularly in the same company or industry.

Since last year, we have been regularly picketing Starbucks stores across South London to highlight Starbucks’ attacks on its workers and show solidarity with the five sacked workers.

We have been joined by IWW and AF members, and non-affiliated people wanting to show solidarity with the fired workers.

We have also shown the Starbucks Union DVD produced by the IWW, hopefully to Starbucks workers.

Many of the Starbucks workers are casual - one of the prime initial demands made by the SWU in New York was for regularisation of working hours.

When they are disputed, those in power will seem to give way and accept some form of accountabili-

The values of the ruling class become the ‘common sense’ values of all, and a consensus is developed whereby the working class identify their own interests with the interests of those in power, thus helping to maintain the status quo.

**The norm**

These organisational forms and dominant ideology are accepted as the norm and rarely questioned, because everyone grows up with them. It may look like decisions are being made at the grass roots level but in reality there are limits on what can be done by the membership and the structure of the union leadership will not let that happen. The unions are dominated by professionals who control the purse strings.

Unfortunately this process inevitably leads to corruption and compromise of the original ideals and often of the individuals who gain power, as their interests become divorced from those who supported them in the first place.

The whole structure of society is such that those who seek to change it find themselves organising in the same way as those in control. They can be based on a common ideology such as anarchism and may have
For more about our ideas, visit www.solfed.org.uk, which includes ideas about how an anarchist society would operate.

www.direct-action.org.uk

www.solfed.org.uk

Anarchists in the Republic of Ireland, showing an alternative to hierarchichal ideologies

Picture: indymedia.ie

either open or closed membership.

The use of affinity groups dates back to 19th century Spain, where they were called tertulias or grupos de afinidad by Spanish anarchists.

A

erarchy.

autonomous.

Anarchist in the Republic of Ireland, showing an alternative to hierarchichal ideologies

Anarchists in the Republic of Ireland, showing an alternative to hierarchichal ideologies
Thatcherism Down Under

Over the past two years, PM John Howard has accelerated his attack on workers’ rights in Australia, and with an election looming, he’s showing no sign of slowing down.

Australians have eight states and territories, all Labour-controlled, and one federal government, which is more Thatcherite than Thatcher herself in her heyday.

But this is federal election year which, after a decade of the Liberal Party’s ‘Mr Charisma’, John Howard, seems like a golden opportunity for common sense to assert itself by kicking him out come November.

Two problems - the obvious isn’t always the outcome; and will Aussies be any better off anyway?

The parallels between Howard and Thatcher are uncanny:

- A total disregard for delivering a ‘well-managed economy’ and balancing payments, lowering unemployment, etc;
- An apparent ‘knack’ of the parallels between

Howard rivals Bush’s conviction that climate change is a fake commie vendetta against unions; etc.

Business is ‘booming’

The economy is riding on the back of the mining boom. China wants to buy everything, and more specifically, Work Choices included the following:

- Fair dismissal protections on bosses offering ‘Australian Workplace Agreements’ (individual contracts agreed outside union-employee bargaining agreements);
- Unfair dismissal protection was abolished for 90% of workers in private firms;
- ‘Green fields’ agreements (new companies can make up an agreement before employing any staff);
- Workers can lose their jobs gained through collective agreements a year after a business has been sold.

Since March 2006, Work Choices has had a marked and measured impact on the wages and conditions of low-paid and non-unionised workers - so much so that the government has tried to silence its own commissioned reviews of the effects.

All AWAs under Work Choices have cut at least one previously protected working condition, and across all industries non-managerial workers on AWAs earn less than those on collective agreements.

Bosss can offer an AWA at any time, allowing

AWAs with hatred

The main choice facing workers under this legislation seems to be ‘cansalis’ or ‘piss off’. More specifically, Work Choices included the following:

- Spending on things like roads, health and education has plummeted while taxes have risen, resulting in a ‘healthy’ economy!
- On environment, Howard rivals Bush’s conviction that climate change is a fake commie plan of some sort, and God wouldn’t approve of intervening.

This leaves the working class and the unions.

- After finally gaining control of both parliament and senate in 2005, Howard lost no time in following up previous attacks on workers with his ‘final solution’ - called Work Choices (without a hint of irony).

- A vicious personal vendetta against unions, etc.

AWAsh with hatred of working people, combined with a careful rhetoric that ‘champions the little guy’ - patronising? You’ve heard nothing yet…

- A narrow-minded hatred of working people, combined with a careful rhetoric that champions the little guy - patronising? You’ve heard nothing yet…

Why hedge funds have no actual use

John Arnold, the 33 year old founder of Centaurus Energy, earned $1 billion last year, heading the worldwide list of the top one hundred earners in the financial sector.

Some 27 of the top hundred are to be found in London, earning an average of £120 million each, compared with only £55 million in 2002; five of them took home over £500 million.

Of the top hundred, 93 are managers of hedge funds, the publicity shy unregulated sector of the financial industry which makes money by a sophisticated form of betting.

Mr Arnold made much of his $1 billion by betting correctly that the price of gas would fall last summer.

However, before dashing out and investing your dole cheque in a hedge fund, just remember that it’s only for the rich and powerful.

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The minimum investment in hedge funds is generally around $10 million, which just about counts out most ordinary mortals.

When the rich and powerful gather there’s always the stink of corruption, and hedge funds are no exception.

Before founding Centaurus, Mr Arnold was an investment manager at Enron, now a symbol of corporate fraud and corruption in the USA.

He only left when the company went bankrupt.

Fifth in the top hundred is Steve Cohen, who faced a lawsuit last year alleging that his company SAC made up faulty research to drive down the stock of another company.

In Britain the top ‘hedgeies’ for the second year running were Noam Gottsman and Pierre Lagrange, joint founders of GLG Partners, which was involved in controversy last year when its star trader was fined for market abuse.

Free market theory argues that hedge funds, along with currency speculation, private equity firms and the other obscene money making machines, are somehow vital to the running of the economy.

The argument goes that hedge funds provide the money that companies use for long term investment leading to the creation of goods, services and jobs.

What is truly immoral is that these people make fortunes from producing nothing of any value to society.

They form part of the funds amounting to trillions of dollars that constantly move round the globe in search of higher returns, often leaving economic havoc in their wake.

They contribute nothing to the real economy and are merely a means by which the super rich get even richer.

Real economic wealth is created by the working class who actually go out to work and create the goods and services that are vital to society’s well being.

If the trillions of pounds currently chasing higher profits around the world were ever to be actually invested in the real economy it could wipe out world poverty at a stroke.

But that will never happen under capitalism which is all about making money and nothing to do with improving people’s lives.
Labouring under delusions

The Labour Party claims it has successfully tackled child poverty. In this article Direct Action exposes the lie and the bankruptcy of the New Labour project for social equality, revealing the true legacy of Blair’s premiership to be an even more unequal society than when New Labour came to power in May 1997.

Labour’s claim that they remain the party for redistribution now rests solely on their boast to have significantly reduced child poverty. However, behind Gordon Brown’s spin, are these so-called redistribution policies really the success story they would have us believe?

On the face of it, Labour has cut the proportion of children in poverty from 33.9% in 1996/97 to 28.5% in 2002/03. Sounds good?

What it means is that some 4 million children are still living in poverty in the UK - and in 2005/6, the numbers actually went up by 100,000.

In fact, we don’t have to look far beyond the headlines to find that Labour’s rather feeble attempts at wealth redistribution mask the true realities of life under Labour.

Child poverty may have fallen marginally, yet overall inequality has increased since Labour came to power.

Indeed, income inequality in Britain is still higher than at any time in the previous 18 years of Conservative rule - and probably for at least 20 years before that.

Under Labour, the top 1% has increased their share of national wealth from 20% to 23% and the top 10% of the population’s share of the wealth has increased from 47% to 54%.

Meanwhile the wealth of the poorest 50% of the population shrank from 10% in the Thatcher years, down to 7% in 1996 and now sits at just 5%.

Under Labour, the biggest movers have been the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.

Neither has Labour done anything about racial and women’s inequality.

Women are still paid 42% less than men and make up the bulk of the labouring under delusions

IWA: Solidarity with Colombian workers

The International Workers Association Congress in Manchester last December agreed that sections should hold actions targeted at Colombian embassies/consulates and business interests coordinated for July 20th, Colombia’s ‘National Day’.

At the request of the Colombian ‘Friends of the IWA’, the day of action was called to highlight the ongoing war waged by the Colombian state on trade unionists.

Among the world’s most repressive states, the US-backed regime of Álvaro Uribe Vélez continues to allow transnationals (for instance Coca Cola and the banana multinational Chiquita Brands International) and home-grown business interests alike a virtually free hand to snuff out opposition.

Indigenous tribespeople, the Afro-Colombian communities as well as human rights activists have all been severely hit.

Likewise, for trade unionists death, direct threats and displacement are a daily reality.

As one of the sources of strongest opposition to neo-liberal economic policies, union activists are targeted by government security policies.

The Ministry for Social Protection is supposed to stimulate employment but in practice it monitors, hinders and restricts union activity, devoting its efforts to curbing union rights, to constantly trying to have strikes declared illegal, and to encouraging public authorities to harass organised workers and other protest movements.

Beyond this, paramilitary organisations regularly issue death threats and carry them out, often in collaboration with the Colombian military.

These paramilitary groups have been set up by politicians, businesses, drug traffickers, members of the rural and military elites and representatives from foreign transnationals to protect their vested interests from ‘subversives’. For example, according to the International Centre for Trade Union Rights (ICTUR - www.ictur.org), at least 72 members of trade unions were assassinated in Colombia during 2006, an increase on the previous year.

The Colombian government always denies responsibility despite its well-known connections with the paramilitary groupings which carry out these executions in the name of ‘national security’.

Although the state has recently encouraged paramilitaries to demobilise, human rights groups and others have severely criticised this measure because they can escape without being charged for loads of their past crimes.

At its April national conference, the Solidarity Federation reconfirmed its support for the IWA’s call for a day of action on July 20th.

SF’s activities will be coordinated by South London SF (southlondonsf@solfed.org.uk) and North & East London SF (nels@solfed.org.uk) who may be contacted for further details.

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The Seacroft estate in Leeds, one of the poorest areas in the UK.

The true legacy of Labour rule

Left-over solutions

As the social failures of the New Labour project have become increasingly clear, the left have typically argued either for ‘winning back’ the Labour Party to socialism, or trying to create a new socialist party to replace it.

One in ten of us are now on temporary contracts, with two in five men unable to find permanent jobs.

While the super rich live in ever-more obscene luxury, the relatively poor suffer from poor mental and physical health, inferior housing, increased crime, high levels of drug and alcohol addiction, low self-esteem and are virtually excluded from a decent education.

Growing inequality is having a catastrophic effect on the people who can least afford it.

People join organisations such as SolFed because we have principles such as direct democracy, direct action and the maintenance of a non-hierarchical structure.

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Why we need more action

In 1911, it was estimated that the wealthiest 1% of the population held around 70% of the UK’s wealth. By 1936-38, this proportion had fallen to 56%, and it fell again after World War Two to reach 42% in 1960.

The share of the wealthiest 1% continued to fall through the 1970s to a low of 17%. However, the trend towards greater equality came to an abrupt end with Thatcher’s defeat of the organised working class.

Since that time, capitalism has been on the offensive. In the nineties, this led to rising profits and rapidly increased personal wealth for the super-rich.

In the noughties, with industrial action at an all-time low, workers have been left to rely on Labour to challenge capitalism – the maximum means-tested benefit and tax credit award for a single person aged 25 or over rose by just 1% in real terms, with extra money being diverted to help fund the rise in benefits for lone parents. Labour was at it again in their last budget, with the scrapping of the ten pence tax allowance, hitting the income of low paid childless adults - a group who have already suffered throughout Labour’s reign.

Quite sickeningly, rather than the rich paying for the little wealth redistribution that has been attempted, Labour has resorted to robbing the poor.

Getting the goods?

So, where to from here? Firstly, the 20th Century trend towards more equality ground to a halt under Thatcher and has continued to reverse under Labour, as we apparently head back towards the early 19th Century. Even worse, Labour’s pitiful record has been made during a prolonged economic boom. Given climate change bite, capitalism will take advantage of unemployment by protecting its profits and driving down the standard of living.

Large numbers of us, currently living on debt underpinned by rising house prices, will be plunged further into poverty.

Labour failed to do anything significant for workers in the boom times; come the bust, inequality will erupt in a mushroom cloud of poverty. As a society we are set to become increasingly unequal, with ever larger numbers suffering the effects.

The answer does not lie in casting around for a more radical version of Labour. It is not politicians that Capitalism fears - it is working class action. Instead of putting our faith in political leaders, we have to rebuild a labour movement based on self-organisation, direct democracy and direct action.

Deeds and methods affect the doers. By organising ourselves and taking mass action to confront capitalism, we will also realise our strength once again. We will build our confidence, hope and sense of purpose, as well as our common purpose and community spirit.

This is both the antidote to an increasingly alienated and demoralised working class - and the ultimate antidote to poverty and inequality.

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So why is it happening, rather than the rich paying for the little wealth redistribution that has been attempted, Labour has resorted to robbing the poor.

Labour: robbing the poor

The nonsense of ‘trickle down’ is reflected in the fact that it is fiscal policy which determines any redistribution - not the rich.

Under Labour, this fiscal policy has been stag-geringly biased in its direction. As a result, it is not the rich who have paid for any alleviation of poverty through changes in taxa-tion; it is those just above the poverty line who have borne the brunt of increased taxes. Between 1997 and 2002, capitalism’s record of boom and bust, it won’t be long before recession hits. As recession and global capitalism’s record of boom and bust, it won’t be long before recession hits. As recession and global
be clearly held responsible and blamed if services are not provided for people who need them.

Any attempt to attack the social wage by rationing NHS care can be clearly identified and vehemently opposed. However, once you split the NHS into lots of little parts, each with its own budget, all forced to compete with and buy services from each other, then rationing can be safely introduced without central government taking the blame.

"The reason we should oppose these changes is not because nationalised industries are inherently good, but because the government is using marketisation as a smokescreen to attack the social wage and health workers' jobs by eroding the basic principles of universality and comprehensiveness."

Any shorts are purely down to 'market forces', not deliberate policy. By leaving the market (which becomes less and less 'internal' by the day) to decide priorities for healthcare means from the government has essentially abandoned the original NHS principles of universality, comprehensiveness and free care at the point of use. The government, though still responsible for allocating funds to Primary Care Trusts, is now free to blame the market when this money becomes insufficient.

The working class has only our lack of care, as hospitals (with separate finances from their PCT) now have to do nothing following orders to maintain 'minimum waiting lists' because the PCT has run out of money to pay for services. Decisions about health care based on market forces also inevitably lead to cuts and closures of 'unprofitable' services which, in this context, generally means treat ment of conditions which are complicated, chronic and generally not suited to a conveyor belt system whereby hospitals treat one patient, take the money, and move on to the next. It is no surprise, then, that mental health and elderly care services are among the hardest hit by the constant rules of cuts over the last few years.

These cuts and closures are inevitably blamed, correctly, on mysterious 'market forces', but these forces have been deliberately unleashed by the government instead of providing the basic services that are so necessary, so essential. The constant cuts, closures and 'restructurings', which recognising what is worth paying for, means that more and more of us are forced to either pay or go without. This trend is already well advanced in dentistry and ophthalmology, as anyone who's tried to get on the books of an NHS dentist recently will be all too aware.

It seems, then, that the NHS is already disturbing to exist as anything more than a logo attached to some of the private providers in the future healthcare market.

A complete end to slavery may not be as oppressive as chattel slavery or bonded labour. While slaves are robbed of the full value of their labour, paid workers receive part of that value as wages.

One of the Labour Party's main sources of funding is through trade union political funds.

Without it, they wouldn't have the same resources to pay for all their election publicity and day-to-day running costs.

With it, they and the fatcat union leaders betray the members by giving their subs to the very people who are taking away workers' rights.

At a time when Labour are still reeling over the 'cash for weddings' scandal, all the attention is drawn to how, without members' consent, some of their hard-earned subscription money goes into the party's hands. While members can opt out of contributing to the political fund, most unions seldom mention it. Even once its creation, the Labour party has called on the trade union movement for financial support. This has declined proportionately over recent years but still constitutes around a third of Labour's income. There are, however, growing signs that trade unions are increasingly angry at handing over their money to such an openly anti-working class party as Labour.

In a number of unions, campaigns have been launched aimed at breaking the link with Labour. However, left groups such as Respect, the Scottish Socialist Party and Socialist Party (ex-Militant) try to hijack these campaigns, and argue that the money should instead go to them.

These arguments should be ignored. Workers are quite capable of organising campaigns for their own political aims without interference from Leninists and careerist social democrats who only use union work for their own personal gains.

The idea that economic and political struggle is somehow to be artificially split is rooted in the intellectual and patronising snobbery of most Marxist organisations. The working class has only ever achieved success through self-organisation and direct action. This is where our money should be directed, not towards undemocratic political parties that claim to speak on our behalf.

200 more Years of Slavery

200 years after Britain outlawed slavery there are still some 27 million slaves worldwide. Slavery takes different forms - bonded labour, human trafficking, forced marriage, commercial sexual exploitation as well as 'traditional' (chattel) slavery. Slaves are commodities, bought and sold, controlled and dehumanised, and forced to work by physical or mental threats, and outright violence.

Millions of children, mainly girls, work long hours as domestic servants with no access to education or recreation. Each year hundreds of children are kidnapped, sold by parents, or taken by force to work in sweatshops, agriculture and industry. You might ask: why don't they escape? Well, it's hard to avoid when you're locked up and beaten up, gang bosses tell workers they'll get jailed, tortured, and sent home, their English is generally very poor, and many have to pay off debts and travel costs. Capitalism exploits everyone who works. Wage slavery may not be as oppressive as chattel slavery or bonded labour. While slaves are robbed of the full value of their labour, paid workers receive part of that value as wages.

The International Labour Organisation estimates that 179 million children aged 5 to 17 years are in work harmful to their physical and psychological wellbeing. These are slaves in Britain too: servants, prisoners, bonded labourers and sex industry workers. Trafficking of women and children as prostitutes is best known, but there is also trafficking of labourers for sweatshops, agriculture and industry.

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Derailed: how the trains are in deep crisis

A nybody who has tried to organise a strike knows just how draconian Britain’s anti-union laws are.

First there is the non-sense of the compulsory postal ballot, conducted to a strict set of procedures to avoid a legal challenge.

Once the ballot is over there’s still the possibility of a court injunction oftentimes granted for the flimsiest of reasons by some doddering judge.

Having cleared all legal obstacles there’s nothing to stop the employers sacking striking workers by claiming breach of contract.

It appears, however, that these dictatorial laws don’t apply when capitalists take industrial action.

Recently the rail regulator decided to investigate the £175million earned each year by the train leasing companies which supply train operating companies, like Virgin, with rolling stock.

The regulator argued that three companies, controlling 90% of the total market, were abusing their near monopoly position to ‘prevent, restrict or distort competition’ and referred the matter to the Competition Commission.

The three companies were outraged. After all, Britain’s rail network has become such a source of profit for so many companies, why should they be singled out for such harsh treatment?

They immediately downed tools, refusing to fulfil a Virgin order for 106 carriages unless the government gave assurances that leasing rates would not be altered.

The biggest leasing company, Angel, also uttered dark threats about not guaranteeing new train leasing deals and the risk to future investment in rolling stock.

Hypocrisy

Now if this was workers taking action court orders would fly, funds would be sequestered and the papers would be full of stories about mindless militants.

Well, we’re not about to see headlines in the Mail about capitalist militants creating rail misery.

Nor are the government about to confront the leasing companies and force them to fulfil orders and reduce charges.

Especially not, given that we’re talking about powerful concerns like the Royal Bank of Scotland, which owns one of these companies.

All of which leaves leasing companies in a powerful position.

As things stand, a chronic shortage of rolling stock already threatens to throw the industry into crisis. The leasing companies’ action has only worsened the situation.

The shortage has forced the government to tell the bidders for the lucrative East Midlands and West Midlands franchises to cut planned services, with the Cross-Country and East Coast Mainline franchises, also due for renewal this year, likely to be similarly affected.

Free from government sanctions the leasing companies have the whip hand.

With passenger complaints about overcrowding hitting an all time high and passenger numbers expected to rise 30% rebranded as the ‘Purchaser-Provider split’.

This act completely altered the planned nature of the NHS by splitting it into purchasers (health authorities, some GPs, and more recently Primary Care Trusts) who are given money to buy services on behalf of patients from providers (hospitals).

Hospitals became independent ‘NHS Trusts’, with their own manage-ments and balance sheets, essentially competing against each other for ‘purchasers’ money.

Adding to this waste are the PFI (private finance initiative) schemes and the huge accounting costs which go with the NHS being forced to buy its services from different parts of itself.

Further marketisation is found in the switch to ‘foundation’ status, as described in DA38, in which the obligations that individual NHS trusts had to the wider health service and the population as a whole are being dismantled in favour of outright privatisation.

The plan is for all hospitals, NHS or otherwise, to eventually become foundation trusts, operating as independent financial entities competing with one another under the supervision of ‘Monitor’, an independent regulator like those which oversee other privatised industries (see diagram). (Note that the ‘purchaser-provider split’ has been reversed in Scotland, where the NHS is run once again as a single, planned entity.

Nevertheless, the reason we should oppose these changes is not because nationalised industries are inherently good, but because the government is using marketisation as a smoke screen to attack the social wage and health workers’ jobs by eroding the basic principles of universality and comprehensiveness.

History shows that state-capitalists are no better than private ones.

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Within an integrated NHS the government can
Rationing by stealth

How market forces in the NHS attack our social wage

Following last issue’s article about Foundation Trust hospitals, we further the NHS structure and the changes are occurring within it. This is to more fully explain the true driving forces behind the current stream of attacks on NHS workers and users.

The argument is essentially that the current ‘privatisation’ and ‘pro-market’ reforms are in essence a disguised form of rationing through which jobs, pay, conditions and health cover for the working class are all being cut.

The NHS, from when it was set up in 1948 until the Tory reforms of the early 1990s operated as a fairly coordinated single national system run, in theory at least, according to three basic principles: universality (available to all); comprehensiveness (including all services); and being free (not involving payment at the point of delivery).

Different areas were, again in theory if not always in practice, provided with resources in a planned way according to the needs of the local population, with different service providers all working together as a unified service.

Of course it was never the idealistic, egalitarian organisation it is sometimes made out to be and, just as with any other capitalist institution, the ruling class has always exercised ultimate control.

One manifestation of this was the consistently greater resources which went to well off areas, particularly in and around London, in comparison to the rest of the country.

So a government climb-down is in the air with hints that any investigation into train leasing companies would take at least two years and would in no way be binding on the government.

The signs are that the threat to disrupt the supply of rolling stock has succeeded and leasing companies will be allowed to get on with making a healthy return on their investments.

However, this dispute goes beyond the excess profits of three train leasing companies to the very heart of the problem - rail privatisation.

The leasing companies are so powerful because they hold a monopoly. To break that monopoly the government would have to not only confront these companies but also find alternative providers of rolling stock.

And given the vast sums of money needed - leasing companies have invested some £5 billion - the only realistic alternative provider would be the train operating companies who could purchase their own rolling stock instead of leasing them.

This would create numerous problems. The leasing companies would be up in arms and the train operating companies would no doubt demand greater subsidies; but it doesn’t end there.

The operating companies would also demand that the period they hold franchises be considerably extended to justify the investment in trains. However, handing routes to companies to operate for decades would give them a monopoly with which they would certainly force higher state subsidies and ticket prices - precisely the practice the train leasing system was introduced to stop in the first place.

Monopoly

That this has only led to a leasing company monopoly is no surprise. The simple truth is that the railways, by their very nature, cannot be run according to free market principles.

No matter how you try to inject competition into the railways you always get monopolies using their position to extract ever larger amounts of government money.

The sensible solution would be to accept that the railways, like health and education (but for different reasons), are better run by the state than the private sector, and take the system back into public ownership.

This, however, would mean Labour dropping its ideological commitment to the all conquering market forces and confronting the companies currently running the system.

This Labour is loath to do. Instead it continues pouring in public money to pay private companies to run a system that isn’t working.

This strategy was inherited from the Tories who privatised the railways purely on ideological grounds without any real idea of how it was going to work.

In fact, this lack of a joined up strategy for how a privatised railway would work held the
“It should be remembered that privatisation for the Tories was as much about breaking the organised working class as it was about setting the public sector free of the ‘dead hand of the state’”

Tories back from privatisation for many years. Had the rail unions posed a threat there was little doubt that privatisation would have come far earlier. It should be remembered that privatisation for the Tories was as much about breaking the organised working class as it was about setting the public sector free of the ‘dead hand of the state’.

Thatcher had already, by the mid 1980s, inflicted a number of defeats, severely undermined union organisation on the railways. She had been able to shut the train manufacturing arm of British Rail (BR) with over 100,000 job losses, helping to halve rail union membership.

Within a few years. Had she not been ousted within a few years.

Some Tories wanted to reduce the network to just the West and East Coast Mainlines and the south-east commuter lines.

But with the menace of the organised working class out of the way, privatising the railways on ideological grounds with a clear idea of how it could work made even Thatcher hesitate.

It took John Major to go where the ‘Iron Lady’ feared and privatisation went ahead in 1993 with the first privatised train entering service in 1996.

The proud Tory boast was that, once privatised, the railways would no longer need public subsidy. This was little more than ideological pig-headedness based on a simplistic belief that market forces would make the railways highly profitable and much more efficient. As privatisation went forward it often seemed the Tories were making it up as they went along; with disastrous results.

Soon the government was forced to throw large sums of money at the railways trying to get the ill-conceived plans to work.

In the first 18 months of privatisation, take on the railways, BR managers rushed to cash in. To hide any failings, an army of slick marketing people were rushed in to bang on about rebranding and customer care in a reorganisation exercise based on gloss over substance.

The hope seemed to be that making staff walk about with fixed smiles, dressed in a clown’s outfit of a uniform, would fool passengers into accepting deteriorating services.

This was a transitional period, however. As the profit potential becamestandards plummeted. A string of high profile crashes was the downfall of one company but failures publicised was the abysmal performance of the operating companies.

On the East Coast Mainline, profitable under BR, the GNER soon demanded a subsidy of £400 million a year just to keep the service going. In 1999, two years before privatisation, BR got 90% of arrivals on time; by 2004 this had dropped to 80%.

Naive theory

Naive free market theories that market forces would make the railways more cost effective simply don’t work.

On average, costs have doubled under privatisation compared to nationalisation. Some costs have rocketed even higher.

Modernising the West Coast Mainline costs £16.68 million per mile, compared with only £1.8 million per mile, in today’s prices, for the East Coast Mainline under nationalisation.

The multinational construction companies which have taken over from BR are making money hand over fist. Just how much can be judged from the fact that it only cost the French state run railways £10.84 million per mile to build a brand new high speed line.

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The discussions around casualisation also included issues around claimants and disabled workers; the campaign against Starbucks (see page 7); as well as local preparations for the IWA week of action against casualisation in the run up to May Day (again, see page 7).

The conference also resolved that SF will organise a national ‘Weekend School’ later this year. An associated web page will be set up and tickets to the event will be available in the coming weeks and months. More details will appear in the autumn issue of DA.

Meanwhile, anyone interested in finding out more can do so via the SF website or the SF National Secretary’s report that SF, although still a small organisation, has never-theless seen steady growth over the previous year.

On the home front we considered among others, issues, and the campaign against casualisation; an SF national weekend school and the production of more SF literature and other means of getting our message across.

In terms of our anti-casualisation work, the conference agreed that a web site would be set up as an additional means of spreading information.

Part of this will be an email service geared towards providing tips on organising and practical solidarity.

Readers interested in this development can make contact via Northampton SF (see inside back cover).

On the international front, the conference accepted a request from the IWA Secretariat, now based in Serbia, that SF ‘be geared towards resistance within the Secretariat due to potential political instability and its effects on the Serbian banking system. In addition two SF members were mandated to take part in an IWA electronic relations commission.

There was also discussion of action, called by the Colombian Friends of the IWA, on Colombian Independence Day, 20th July. This is to highlight the dire situation faced by Colombian workers, especially active trade unionists.

South London SF and North & East London SF will coordinate this (see article on page 7). Finally, the Spanish CNT, through its observers, passed on a message of solidarity with solidarity actions carried out in support of its members.
made and how. Unsustainable lifestyle choices which damage the environment may need to be rejected and dispersed with.

Decisions will have to be made collectively involving interconnected local communities on how best to manage scarce resources responsibly.

Extensive use of recycling, renewables and energy conservation will be required. Collective and individual ownership of resources will mean a reduction in consumption levels and in the damaging intensive production and farming methods of today.

To achieve this requires something more, and something other, than tinkering at the edges to create a ‘greener’ capitalism. It is only through ditching the bosses and building a world based on solidarity, not greed, that the future of our planet can be assured.

In the last decade of the 20th Century, 99 out of every 100 people killed in climate related disasters lived in poorer countries, and three quarters of greenhouse gases come from the rich industrialised world. (Friends of the Earth, 2006)

New Labour REACHes new depths

The medical journal, The Lancet, has called for the EU’s draft regulation ‘Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals’ (REACH) to include protection for unborn children against brain-development disorders caused by industrial chemicals.

The screening process chemical manufacturers and importers produce health and safety tests for around 30,000 of the 100,000 chemicals currently used in Europe.

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Lancet

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A British Rail train, pre-privatisation

The Lancet

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Direct Action

In the last decade of the 20th Century, 99 out of every 100 people killed in climate related disasters lived in poorer countries, and three quarters of greenhouse gases come from the rich industrialised world. (Friends of the Earth, 2006)

Of the most common chemicals in use in industry fewer than half have been subjected to a laboratory test. While politicians would have us believe they protect us from terrorism, crime and environmental dangers, we should pay more attention to what they do rather than what they say.

The British government originally supported REACH, but after intense lobbying by the Bush administration, fearing damage to US exports, it began denouncing it as ‘dangerously wrong’ and succeeded in sabotaging control of toxic chemicals.

The European Parliament initially supported the measure but British pressure brought about a final document so watered down as to be almost useless. Threats to our health and safety are not only a question for workers and workplace organisations; they also concern the community, the environment and a whole generation of children.

Some critics of anarcho-syndicalism suggest that we are obsessed with industry to the exclusion of everything else, but problems like the effects of toxic chemicals refute this. The threat is a serious one; it must be fought by both workers in the industry and the community at large; and it reflects how society itself is one huge factory in which we are all affected by all aspects of production.

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and mental retardation.

Their long term strategy is the same - keep throwing money at private companies based on a touching faith that in the end the private sector somehow delivers.

No doubt the government will get over its latest problem with the train leasing companies. But the storm clouds are gathering.

Even the more conservative estimates predict that rail costs will rise between 15% and 28% in the next few years. With passengers already sick to death of high prices and overcrowded unsafe trains, unrest can only grow.

Revolt

There is every chance of more passenger protests like the fares strikes that have already occurred.

Further, the RMT, though now numbering only 60,000 members compared to 240,000 before the Tory butchery, is a potentially powerful force as it has retained high levels of workplace organisation.

It’s not beyond possibility that rail workers will join forces with passenger groups to attack government policies.

Lastly, and tragically, the replacement of Railtrack by Network Rail has done nothing to improve safety and the system remains an accident waiting to happen.

So it’s quite possible that this or a future government will be forced to drop the free market dogma and renationalise the railways. This would be welcome, not least because it would further loosen the ideological stranglehold that free market policies have on so much of British society.

An integrated state run railway would also deliver a better cheaper and safer service as well as bring much needed job security to a workforce which has suffered too much since privatisation.

For anarcho-syndicalists, while we support renationalisation, it can never be an end in itself. It would improve working conditions but it would never end worker exploitation.

Further, the railways are central for an alternative transport system to the car. And if the catastrophic effects of global warming are to be avoided we require a far more radical shake up of the transport system than the state is capable of.

New vision

It will take a new vision of transport that can only come through imaginative economic planning of the sort that can be achieved under workers control.

As part of that vision the railways will be run to benefit society as a whole, and not for the individual gain of a handful of capitalists.
Why capitalism is destroying the planet

Direct Action explains why the bosses’ system is at fault for the acceleration of global warming, and how they have no real solutions for tackling the problem

You can’t open a newspaper these days without some scare story about global warming or the impending environmental catastrophe.

The body of evidence to confirm the reality of global warming is compelling, with many people experiencing first hand the resulting extreme weather conditions.

“75% of the world’s pollution comes from 25% of the world’s population” (Guardian Weekly, 2002)

Even the pillars of society seem concerned, with Al Gore’s ‘An Inconvenient Truth’ and papers like The Independent presenting a series of alarming statistics and emotive headlines.

There’s no doubt that the planet is under severe threat, as the recent UN Climate Change Panel Report confirmed. Years of ravaging natural resources combined with wanton pollution have taken their toll, with no sign of things improving.

Unsustainable economic growth driven by competition and the pursuit of profit is clearly the root of the problem, with 80% of the world’s industrial output now controlled by 1000 corporations (Shared Vision, 2003).

That growth is unsustainable is no accident. It’s part of the capitalist system, which serves the short term interests of the few and pays no regard to the long term survival of the many.

Half the world’s population survives on less than US $2 a day. The wealthiest 20% of the world’s population consume 86% of the world’s resources. (Guardian Weekly, 2002) 75% of the world’s pollution comes from 25% of the population. (Guardian Weekly, 2002)

Overconsumption is a massive problem in the western world, with estimates confirming that if patterns in Britain were replicated, we would require 3 planet earths. Behind this lies a litany of deforestation, intensive farming and pollution.

Globally, the poor are far more likely to be victims of environmental injustice.

In the UK, economically deprived areas are more likely to suffer the effects of industrial and traffic pollution.

Workers the world over are exposed to hazardous materials and unsafe practices, especially in areas where union activity is weak or repressed.

Conflict and the greed-fuelled pursuit of profit are the order of the day in the clamour for control of dwindling oil, water and other natural resources.

In addition to raping the natural world and increasing instability, global capitalism has also widened the chasm between the rich and poor; with some 24,000 people a day now dying of hunger, or hunger-related diseases.

The gap between the incomes of the richest and poorest countries was about 3 to 1 in 1820, 35 to 1 in 1950, 44 to 1 in 1973, and 72 to 1 in 1992. (United Nations Development Report, 1999)

Jonathon Porritt of Friends of the Earth wrote an essay published in The Independent in 2006 entitled ‘How Capitalism can Save the Planet’.

Other ‘liberal’ capitalists call for curbs and controls on corporations to persuade them to be more socially responsible.

Some hare-brained individuals think that all we need to do to save the planet is use energy-saving light bulbs, drive less and recycle our waste.

We harbour no such illusions, neither are we fooled by these reformists smoke screens.

We support grassroots solidarity with all those who stand against them.

The future we fight for has a system of production and exchange driven not by short-sighted profit, but by collective need and the full participation of workers and communities in deciding what gets.
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The British government, has called for the medical journal, The Lancet, to start with those produced in the highest volumes.

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and mental retardation are especially at risk.

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within a few years. Had she not been ousted as Tory leader, there would certainly have been more cuts and more jobs losses. Some Tories wanted to reduce the network to just the West and East Coast Mainlines and the south-east commuter lines. But with the menace of privatisation some Tories wanted to shut the train manufacturing arm of British Rail (BR) with over 100,000 job losses, helping to halve rail union membership.

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As privatisation went forward it often seemed the Tories were making it up as they went along; with disastrous results. Soon the government was forced to throw large sums of money at the railways trying to get the ill-conceived plans to work. In the first 18 months of privatisation, the state subsidy rose from £1bn to £2bn. This was not for obvious big companies that market forces would make the railways more cost effective simply don’t work. As far as new literature and booklets, take on the railways of BR and the British Rail operating companies running the railways grew so did their profits, as they extorted more and more money from the state. The state subsidy rocketed to £4bn by 2005 while efficiency and safety standards plummeted. A string of high profile crashes was the downfall of the Conservatives. But failures publicised was the abysmal performance of the operating companies. On the East Coast Mainline, profitable under BR, the GNER soon demanded a subsidy of £400 million a year to keep the service going. In 1993, the year before privatisation, BR got 90% of arrivals on time; by 2004 this had dropped to 80%.

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The discussions around casuallisation also included issues around claimants and disabled workers; the campaign against Starbucks (see page 4); as well as local preparations for the IWA week of action against casuallisation in the run up to May Day (again, see page 7). The conference also resolved that SF will organise a national ‘Weekend School’ later this year. An associated web page will be set up and tickets to the event will be available in the coming weeks and months. More details will appear in the autumn issue of DA.

Meanwhile, anyone interested in finding out more can do so via the SF website or the SF national contact point. As far as new literature is concerned, it was agreed to produce a handbook for new and existing members; an introductory pamphlet for wider circulation; as well as other basic propaganda like new and reissued SF stickers; leaflets, both introductory and on a range of topics; as well as flyers, postcards and bookmarks (advertising SF, DA, Catalyst, the anti-casualisation campaign, and so on). Issues related to our industrial strategy also featured. This included our participation, nationally and locally, within the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), a grouping of trade union activists launched in London last October with the aim of establishing a wider ‘rank and file’ type movement. SF’s participation is to be geared towards resistance in building the NSSN, and in defending it against union officialism and opportunist left parties.

Alongside the conference, we were getting together for SF members in education, and in health & social care. The Education Workers Network, revived during the previous 12-15 months, had brought in an issue of Education Worker in time for distribution at the conference (this is downloadable via the EWN website, or obtainable by contacting EWN direct - see inside back cover). Future plans include an EWN introductory pamphlet; another issue of EWN for September/October; and a national meeting in early October.

Social Care also met and agreed an initiative with a view to launching a Health & Social Care network in the future. Readers interested in this development can make contact via Northampton SF (see inside back cover).

On the international front, the conference accepted a request from the IWA Secretariat, now based in Serbia, that SF take on the treasurer role within the Secretariat due to potential political instability and its effects on the Serbian banking system. In addition two SF members were mandated to take part in an IWA electronic relations commission.

There was also discussion of a day of action, called by the Colombian Friends of the IWA, on Colombian Independence Day, 20th July. This is to highlight the dire situation faced by Colombian workers, especially active trade unionists. South London SF and North & East London SF will coordinate this (see article on page 18). Finally, the Spanish CNT, through its observers, passed a motion of support for solidarity actions carried out in support of its members.
Rationing by stealth

How market forces in the NHS attack our social wage

Following last issue’s article about Foundation Trust hospitals, we further the NHS structure and the changes are occurring within it. This is to more fully explain the true driving forces behind the current stream of attacks on NHS workers and users.

The argument is essentially that the current ‘privatisation’ and ‘pro-market’ reforms are in essence a disguised form of rationing through which jobs, pay, conditions and health cover for the working class are all being cut. We further the NHS structure and the changes are occurring within it. This is to more fully explain the true driving forces behind the current stream of attacks on NHS workers and users.

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However, this dispute goes beyond the excess profits of three train leasing companies to the very heart of the problem - rail privatisation.

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However, our creation did represent a significant improvement in the ‘social wage’, one brought about by significant real or threatened class struggle over much of the first half of the twentieth century. And there was also the need to keep the working class healthy enough to work and fight - 48% of potential soldiers had been unfit to fight in the Boer war. That improvement essentially extended National Health Insurance to the entire population - the ‘freedom from fear’ promised by Aneurin Bevan.

Working class people, previously unable to afford healthcare or health insurance, now knew that if the worst happened they would at least be looked after; and new jobs were created as health workers were needed to fulfil this pledge.

Many changes and restrukturings followed but government responsibility to provide planned healthcare to the entire population remained intact. Fast forward to 1990 and the ‘NHS and Community Care Act’ which introduced the NHS ‘internal market’. A Tory policy, like so many others, adopted wholeheartedly by New Labour, this has been
Derailed: how the trains are in deep crisis

A nybody who has tried to organise a strike knows just how draconian Britain’s anti-union laws are.

First there is the nonsense of the compulsory postal ballot, conducted to a strict set of procedures to avoid a legal challenge.

Once the ballot is over there’s still the possibility of a court injunction, often granted for the flimsiest of reasons by some doddering judge.

Having cleared all legal obstacles there’s nothing to stop the employers sacking striking workers by claiming breach of contract.

It appears, however, that these dictatorial laws don’t apply when capitalists take industrial action.

Recently the rail regulator decided to investigate the £175million earned each year by the train leasing companies which supply train operating companies, like Virgin, with rolling stock.

The regulator argued that three companies, controlling 90% of the total market, were abusing their near monopoli position to ‘prevent, restrict or distort competition’ and referred the matter to the Competition Commission.

The three companies were outraged. After all, Britain’s rail network has become such a source of profit for so many companies, why should they be singled out for such harsh treatment?

They immediately downed tools, refusing to fulfil a Virgin order for 106 carriages unless the government gave assurances that leasing rates will not be altered.

The biggest leasing companies, Angel, also uttered dark threats about not guaranteeing new train leasing deals and the risk to future investment in rolling stock.

Hypocrisy

Now if this was workers taking action court orders would fly, funds would be sequestrated and the papers would be full of stories about mindless militants.

Well, we’re not about to see headlines in the Mail about capitalist militants creating rail misery.

Nor are the government about to confront the leasing companies and force them to fulfil orders and reduce charges.

Especially not, given that we’re talking about powerful concerns like the Royal Bank of Scotland, which owns one of these companies.

All of which leaves leasing companies in a powerful position.

As things stand, a chronic shortage of rolling stock already threatens to throw the industry into crisis. The leasing companies’ action has only worsened the situation.

The shortage has forced the government to tell the bidders for the lucrative East Midlands and West Midlands franchises to cut planned services, with the Cross-Country and East Coast Mainline franchises, also due for renewal this year, likely to be similarly affected.

Free from government sanctions the leasing companies have the whip hand.

With passenger complaints about overcrowding hitting an all time high and passenger numbers expected to rise 30% rebranded as the ‘Purchaser-Provider split’.

This act completely altered the planned nature of the NHS by splitting it into purchasers (health authorities, some GPs, and more recently Primary Care Trusts) who are given money to buy services on behalf of patients from providers (hospitals).

Hospitals became independent ‘NHS Trusts’, with their own management and balance sheets, essentially competing against each other for ‘purchasers’ money.

Adding to this waste are the PFI (private finance initiative) schemes and the huge accounting costs which go with the NHS being forced to buy its services from different parts of itself.

Further marketisation is found in the switch to ‘foundation’ status, as described in DA38, in which the obligations that individual NHS trusts had to the wider health service and the population as a whole are being dismantled in favour of outright privatisation.

The plan is for all hospitals, NHS or otherwise, to eventually become foundation trusts, operating as individual financial entities competing with one another under the supervision of ‘Monitor’, an independent regulator like those which oversee other privatised industries (see diagram). (Note that the ‘purchaser-provider split’ has been reversed in Scotland, where the NHS is run once again as a single, planned entity.)

The shortage has forced the leasing companies in a powerful position.

Whilst, for social democrats, the privatisation of a nationalised industry is self-evidently bad, libertarian communists may ask ‘who cares who provides these services and how ‘privatised’ they are?’

History shows that state-capitalists are no better than private ones.

Nevertheless, the reason we should oppose these changes is not because nationalised industries are inherently good, but because the government is using marketisation as a smoke screen to attack the social wage and health workers’ jobs by eroding the basic principles of universality and comprehensiveness.

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Within an integrated NHS the government can...
lose this form and send to your union HQ.

any shortfalls are purely down to 'market forces', not deliberate policy. By leaving the market (which becomes less and less 'internal' by the day) to decide priorities for healthcare, the government has essentially abandoned the original NHS principles of universality, comprehensiveness and free care at the point of use.

the government, though still responsible for allocating funds to Primary Care Trusts, is now free to bizarre the market whenever this money becomes insufficient.

at this point it is too confusing for all but the most dedicated to follow exactly who is at fault for our lack of care, as hospitals (with separate finances from their PCT) pay staff to do nothing following orders to maintain 'minimum waiting lists' - because the PCT has run out of money to pay for services.

decisions about health-care based on market forces also inevitably lead to cuts and closures of 'unprofitable' services which, in this context, generally means treat-ment of conditions which are complicated, chronic and generally not suited to a conveyor belt system whereby hospitals treat one patient, take the money, and move on to the next.

it is no surprise, then, that mental health and elderly services are among the hardest hit by the constant rounds of cuts over the last few years.

these cuts and closures are inevitably blamed, correctly, on mysterious 'market forces', but these forces have been deliberately unleashed upon the NHS by the government.

clearly, when this 'invisible hand' is left to decide which services will survive and which will go, it is unfair and undemocratic.

one of the Labour Party's main sources of funding is through trade union political funds.

without it, they wouldn't have the same resources to pay for all their election publicity and day-to-day running costs from each and every branch.

with it, they and the fatcat union leaders betray the members by giving their subscriptions to the very people who are taking away workers' rights.

it is important that we emphasise that our opposition is against the withdrawal of free healthcare from all classes, rather than being a social democratic defence of the NHS as some kind of socialist ideal.

we do not distance ourselves from the workers and users who grow increasingly angry at the constant cuts, closures and 'restructurings', who recognise what is worth defending in the 'universal, comprehensive and free' vision of the NHS set out in 1948.

this trend is already well advanced in dentistry and ophthalmology, as anyone who's tried to get on the books of an NHS dentist recently will be all too aware.

ultimately these attacks are simply another reason for the British working class to hate a capitalist system which cannot or will not provide for our basic needs - and an incentive for us to get organised and do something about it.

200 years more of Slavery

200 years after Britain outlawed slavery there are still some 27 million slaves worldwide. Slavery takes different forms - bonded labour, human trafficking, forced marriage, criminal sexual exploitation as well as 'traditional' (chattel) slavery. Slaves are commodities, bought and sold, controlled and dehu-manised, and forced to work by physical or mental threats, and outright violence.

millions of children, mainly girls, work long hours as domestic servants with no access to education or recre-ation. Each year hundreds of children are kidnapped, sold by parents, or taken by de-ception, and trafficked from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sudan to the United Arab Emirates as camel jockeys. Camel racing is big business in which children, often dependent on food and water, get injured and killed.

the International Labour Organisation estimates that 179 million children aged 5 to 17 years are in work harmful without members' consent, some of their hard-earned subscription money goes into the party's hands.

while members can opt out of contributing to the political fund, most unions seldom mention it. ever since its creation, the Labour party has called on the trade union movement for financial support.

this has declined propor-tionately over recent years but still constitutes around a third of Labour's income.

there are, however, growing signs that trade unionists are increasingly angry at handing over their money to such an openly anti-working class party as Labour.

in a number of unions, campaigns have been launched aimed at breaking the link with Labour. however, left groups such as Respect, the Scottish Socialist Party and Socialist Party (ex-Militant) try to hijack these campaigns, and argue that the money should instead go to them.

these arguments should be ignored. Workers are quite capable of organising campaigns for their own political aims without interference from Leninists and careerist social democrats who only use union work for their own personal gains.

the idea that economic and political struggle is somehow to be artificially split is rooted in the intellectual and political milieu of most Marxist organisations.

the working class has only ever achieved success through self-organisation and direct action. this is where our money should be directed, not towards undemocratic political parties that claim to speak on our behalf.

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With it, they and the fatcat union leaders betray the members by giving their subscriptions to the very people who are taking away workers' rights.

At a time when Labour are still reeling over the 'cash for cargos' scandal, full attention is drawn to how, with it, they and the fatcat union leaders betray the members by giving their subscriptions to the very people who are taking away workers' rights.

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The steady increase in 'pay beds' and other private services offered by NHS hospitals is reminiscent of the way 'voluntary hospitals' functioned before the NHS was conceived - expensive and luxurious private wings attached to a hospital which provided the best medical care available to the working class.

There are no 'postcode lotteries' for those who can afford it and NHS, as well as private hospitals, can take advantage of the fact that cuts to basic care essentially reflect variations in the 'universal, comprehensive and free' vision of the NHS as set out in 1948.

We do not distance ourselves from the workers and users who grow increasingly angry at the constant cuts, closures and 'restructurings', who recognise what is worth defending in the 'universal, comprehensive and free' vision of the NHS set out in 1948.

Ultimately these attacks are simply another reason for the British working class to hate a capitalist system which cannot or will not provide for our basic needs - and an incentive for us to get organised and do something about it.

Cut out this form and send to your Union HQ.
“Labour has supported the 'trickle down' theory; that wealth trickles down from the rich, enriching society as a whole.”

With disastrous results. Instead of curbing growing inequality. Labour has encouraged it, using the tired and bankrupt idea that allowing the rich to get richer will benefit us all. In so doing, Labour has supported the ‘trickle down’ theory; that wealth trickles down from the rich, enriching society as a whole.

The reality is; the rich get richer, allowing them to piso on the poor from an ever-increasing height. Labour has supported the ‘trickle down’ theory; that wealth trickles down from the rich, enriching society as a whole. The reality is; the rich get richer, allowing them to piso on the poor from an ever-increasing height.

Labour: robbing the poor

The nonsense of ‘trickle down’ is reflected in the fact that it is fiscal policy which determines any redistribution - not the rich. Under Labour, this fiscal policy has been stag-geringly biased in its direction. As a result, it is not the rich who have paid for any alleviation of poverty through changes in taxation; it is those just above the poverty line who have borne the brunt of increased taxes. Between 1997 and 2002, the maximum means-tested benefit and tax credit award for a single person aged 25 or over rose by just 1% in real terms, with extra money being diverted to help fund the rise in benefits for lone parents. Labour was at it again in their last budget, with the scrapping of the ten pence tax allowance, hitting the income of low paid childless adults - a group who have already suffered throughout Labour’s reign. Quite sickeningly, rather than the rich paying for the little wealth redistribution that has been attempted, Labour has resorted to robbing the poor.

Getting the goods?

So, where to from here? Firstly, the 20th Century trend towards more equality ground to a halt under Thatcher and has continued to reverse under Labour, as we apparently head back towards the early 19th Century. Even worse, Labour’s pitiful record has been made during a prolonged economic boom. Given climate change bite, capital-ism will take advantage of unemployment by protecting its profits and driving down the standard of living.

Large numbers of us, currently living on debt underpinned by rising house prices, will be plunged further into poverty. Labour failed to do anything significant for work-ers in the boom times; come the bust, inequality will erupt in a mushroom cloud of poverty.

As a society we are set to become increasingly unequal, with ever larger numbers suffering the effects.

The answer does not lie in casting around for a more radical version of Labour. It is not politicians that Capitalism fears - it is working class action. Instead of putting our faith in political leaders, we have to rebuild a labour movement based on self-organisation, direct democracy and direct action.

Deeds and methods affect the doers. By organising ourselves and taking mass action to confront capitalism, we will also realise our strength once again.

We will build our confidence, hope and sense of purpose, as well as our common purpose and community spirit. This is both the antidote to an increasingly alienated and demoralised working class - and the ulti-mate antidote to poverty and inequality.

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All unfit for consumption

Why all political parties have nothing to offer the working class

A decline in voter turnout; cash for honours; trade union members’ subscription money going directly to a party that supports the same organisations that are currently attacking workers’ rights, wages and working conditions: all signs of the increasing disillusionment with political parties.

So why is it happening, and why are anarcho-syn-dicalists against all political parties?

Many parties claim to act on behalf of the working class. Since its cre-a-tion, the Labour Party has been perceived as the main party of the working class.

Three in the same bed

However, their widening authoritarian streak (ID cards, anti-terror legisla-tion, tighter rules on immigration, to name but a few recent aspects of this), coupled with their continuing support for anti-union laws intro-duced by the Tories, has seen them all but lose this traditional label.

At the local level performance is as poor as ever.

When Labour-controlled councils aren’t doing what the Tories did in the 1980’s by privatising everything, the Tories and Lib Dems are doing it on a grander scale. Many councillors simply ignore questions from the people. One Lib Dem councillor in Lincoln even moved 30 miles out of the city to avoid questions, letters and phone calls.

And coalitions between the main parties are no different. Parties in coalitions can conveniently forget manifesto pledges.

Quite sickeningly, instead of putting our faith in political leaders, we have to rebuild a labour movement based on self-organisation, direct democracy and direct action.

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Left behind

Having left a massive...
SolFed because we have principles such as direct democracy, direct action and the maintenance of a non-hierarchical structure.

Such principles arose, in the early years of the 20th century, due to the disillusionment of workers with newly elected MPs. In country after country newly enfranchised (mainly male) workers elected socialists to office for the first time only to find that, once in office, they were quickly seduced by the trappings of power. In a number of countries they were corrupted even to the extent of supporting the use of troops to put down strikes.

So revolutionary unions have adopted a firm anti-parliamentary line, rejecting electoral politics and taking up direct action methods of struggle to confront capitalism.

This experience is still relevant today. We must ensure that the working class is never fooled again into supporting a ‘socialist’ party, that once in power will soon ditch any thoughts of destroying capitalism and become part of the elite ruling over us in the same old way.

Growing inequality is having a catastrophically negative effect on the people who can least afford it.

While the super rich live in ever-more obscene luxury, the relatively poor suffer from poor mental and physical health, inferior housing, increased crime, high levels of drug and alcohol addiction, low self-esteem and are virtually excluded from a decent education.

This disgusting inequality is a disaster for the working class as a nation, we have never been so wealthy. Here lies the true legacy of Labour rule.

People join organisations such as SolFed because we have principles such as direct democracy, direct action and the maintenance of a non-hierarchical structure.

The Seacroft estate in Leeds, one of the poorest areas in the UK.

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Labouring under delusions

The Labour Party claims it has successfully tackled child poverty. In this article Direct Action exposes the lie and the bankruptcy of the New Labour project for social equality, revealing the true legacy of Blair's premiership to be an even more unequal society than when New Labour came to power in May 1997.

Labour’s claim that they remain the party for redistribution now rests solely on their boast to have significantly reduced child poverty. However, behind Gordon Brown’s spin, are these so-called redistribution policies really the success story they would have us believe?

On the face of it, Labour has cut the proportion of children in poverty from 33.9% in 1996/97 to 28.5% in 2002/03. Sounds good?

What it means is that some 4 million children are still living in poverty in the UK - and in 2005/6, the numbers actually went up by 100,000.

In fact, we don’t have to look far beyond the headlines to find that Labour’s rather feeble attempts at wealth redistribution mask the true realities of life under Labour.

Facts of life under Labour

Child poverty may have fallen marginally, yet overall inequality has increased since Labour came to power.

Indeed, income inequality in Britain is still higher than at any time in the previous 18 years of Conservative rule - and probably for at least 20 years before that.

Under Labour, the top 1% has increased their share of national wealth from 20% to 23% and the top 10% of the population’s share of the wealth has increased from 47% to 54%.

Meanwhile, the wealth of the poorest 50% of the population shrunk from 10% in the Thatcher years, down to 7% in 1996 and now sits at just 5%.

Under Labour, the biggest movers have been the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.

Nor has Labour done anything about racial and women’s inequality.

Women are still paid 42% less than men and make up the bulk of the Labouring under delusions workforce.

The Ministry for Social Protection is supposed to stimulate employment but in practice it monitors, hinders and restricts union activity, devoting its efforts to curbing union rights, to constantly trying to have strikes declared illegal, and to encouraging public authorities to harass organised workers and other protest movements.

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Although the state has recently encouraged paramilitaries to demobilise, human rights groups and others have severely criticised this measure because they can escape without being charged for loads of their past crimes.

At its April national conference, the Solidarity Federation reconfirmed its support for the IWA’s call for a day of action on July 20th.

SF’s activities will be coordinated by South London SF (southlondonsf@solfed.org.uk) and North & East London SF (nels@solfed.org.uk) who may be contacted for further details.

The IWA: Solidarity with Colombian workers

The International Workers Association Congress in Manchester last December agreed that sections should hold actions targeted at Colombian embassies/consulates and business interests coordinated for July 20th, Colombia’s ‘National Day’.

At the request of the Colombian ‘Friends of the IWA’, the day of action was called to highlight the ongoing war waged by the Colombian state on trade unionists.

Among the world’s most repressive states, the US-backed regime of Álvaro Uribe Vélez continues to allow transnationals (for instance Coca Cola and the banana multinational Chiquita Brands International) and homegrown business interests alike a virtually free hand to snuff out opposition.

Indigenous tribespeople, the Afro-Colombian communities as well as human rights activists have all been severely hit.

Likewise, for trade unionists death, direct threats and displacement are a daily reality.

As one of the sources of strongest opposition to neo-liberal economic policies, union activists are targeted by government security policies.

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Beyond this, paramilitary organisations regularly issue death threats and carry them out, often in collaboration with the Colombian military.

These paramilitary groups have been set up by politicians, businesses, drug traffickers, members of the rural and military elites and representatives from foreign transnationals to protect their vested interests from ‘subversives’.

According to the International Centre for Trade Union Rights (ICTUR - www.ictur.org), at least 72 members of trade unions were assassinated in Colombia during 2006, an increase on the previous year.

The Colombian government always denies responsibility despite its well-known connections with the paramilitary groupings which carry out these executions in the name of ‘national security’.

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Thatcherism Down Under
Over the past two years, PM John Howard has accelerated his attack on workers’ rights in Australia, and with an election looming, he’s showing no sign of slowing down.

Australia has eight states and territories, all Labour-controlled, and one federal government, which is more Thatcherite than Thatcher herself in her heyday.

But this is federal elections year which, after a decade of the Liberal Party’s ‘Mr Charisma’, John Howard, seems like a golden opportunity for common sense to assert itself by kicking him out come November.

Two problems - the obvious isn’t always the outcome; and will Aussies be any better off anyway?

The parallels between Howard and Thatcher are uncanny:

> A narrow-minded, heavy-handed approach to business and the unions.
> A narrow-minded, heavy-handed approach to producing the ‘right’ kind of climate change policy.
> A narrow-minded, heavy-handed approach to the poor.

Business is ‘booming’

The economy is riding on the back of the mining boom. China wants to buy everything, and more specifically, Work Choices included the following:

- A narrow-minded, heavy-handed approach to producing the ‘right’ kind of climate change policy.
- A narrow-minded, heavy-handed approach to the poor.

AWAsh with hatred

The main choice facing workers under this legislation seems to be ‘casualise or piss off’. More specifically, Work Choices included Work Rights agreements (without a hint of irony).

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Hedging their bets

Why hedge funds have no actual use

John Arnold, the 33-year-old founder of Centaurus Energy, earned $1 billion last year, heading the worldwide list of the top one hundred earners in the financial sector.

Some 27 of the top hundred are to be found in London, earning an average of £120 million each, compared with only £55 million in 2002; five of them took home over £500 million.

Of the top hundred, 93 are managers of hedge funds, the publicity shy unregulated sector of the financial industry which makes money by a sophisticated form of betting.

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Anarchists in the Republic of Ireland, showing an alternative to hierarchal ideologies

Anarchosyndicalism is an ideology that advocates the creation of trade unions that are independent of political parties and are not subject to state control. The trade unions are organized on the basis of worker participation and decision-making, and the working class is considered the only class with a future. The conflict between the worker and the state will be resolved through direct action, rather than through political means.

The use of affinity groups can be very effective when planning direct action. They can be very effective when planning direct action. Anan Group, formed in 1898, used these groups to establish alternative structures inside the present one, based on different kinds of organisation: equal, free and democratic, so that the dominant social norms can be challenged and the methods of working in a future society can be discovered and developed in the present one.

Anarchists in the Republic of Ireland, showing an alternative to hierarchal ideologies

Anarchosyndicalists put forward the idea of the revolution in the workplace, an autonomous organisation of the working class that rejects involvement with and interference from the state. It is not concerned with intellectual musing and obscure philosophising but in changing society. Its means and its ends are closely linked so it is organised non-hierarchically and controlled by its members.

Because of their lack of a formal structure, decisions are forced through by dominant personalities who become mouthpieces for the group and effectively take over the task of directing it.

The only thing that the group shares is a commitment to the idea of the revolution in the workplace, an autonomous organisation of the working class that rejects involvement with and interference from the state.

Autonomy

That is why anarchosyndicalists focus on the idea of revolution in the workplace, an autonomous organisation of the working class that rejects involvement with and interference from the state. It is not concerned with intellectual musing and obscure philosophising but in changing society. Its means and its ends are closely linked so it is organised non-hierarchically and controlled by its members.

Anarchosyndicalists do not back any political parties or any other group that seeks to act on behalf of the working class. They advocate a separation from the state.

For more information about the conflict between the worker and the state, visit www.selfed.org.uk, which includes ideas about how an anarchist society would operate.

Case study: Howard and building workers

In Australia, construction workers have maintained union structures and benefited as a result compared to those in the UK. Unsurprisingly, Howard has protected a particular kind of malicious attack on these workers. Hence, a special act of parliament created a Building Construction Commission (ABCC) to police union activities. The ABCC enjoys jurisdiction outside secret ballots and agreed bargain.

It also includes ten basic conditions, as opposed to Work Choices’ five. It merely tweaks Howard’s way of providing some marginal clarifications in workers’ favour.

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Anarchism and trade unions have been used to organise effective direct action campaigns. Anarchists in the Republic of Ireland, showing an alternative to hierarchal ideologies

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For more information about the conflict between the worker and the state, visit www.selfed.org.uk, which includes ideas about how an anarchist society would operate.
May Day commemorates five anarchist workers put to death in Chicago in 1886 in the struggle for the 8-hour working day. This year’s May Day statement by the IWA Secretariat* notes ‘how this hard won right, as well as many others, is slipping away...as the capitalist machinery tries to “liberate” itself from obligations that we imposed on it through our struggles and direct action’. This global ‘capitalist crusade...of coordinated attacks against workers rights’ includes, among much else, the increasing casualisation of the workplace.

To highlight the international nature of the attack, leading up to this May Day IWA sections have, once again, coordinated their anti-casualisation activities. Here we look back at some of these, and other May Day activities, in the UK, Spain and Poland.


Britain
In DA38 we covered some of SolFed’s anti-casualisation activities. This May Day’s activities included distribution of leaflets and the holding of information stalls to coincide with the IWA call.

Some SF groups have also been involved in a campaign around casualisation at Starbucks coffee shops. Below is an article detailing South London SF’s involvement.

Starbucks Vs its workers
For almost 3 years workers in Starbucks have been organising in their franchises in the USA under the banner of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

Starbucks have responded by waging a war of intimidation against the unionising workers.

Already 5 employees have lost their jobs - Joseph Agins, Charles Fostrom, Evan Winterscheidt, Daniel Gross (Founder of the Starbucks Union) and Isis Sznz. This is a warning shot towards anyone attempting to improve working conditions.

However, Starbucks workers have fought back, winning 2 workers their jobs back and more than $2000 in lost earnings.

In New York City, workers have gained a 25% wage increase in just 2 years, with similar raises in other areas they have organised.

After talking to various people, South London Solidarity Federation decided to do something to support these sacked workers.

While workers are sacked all the time for organising, it’s not all the time that the company behaving this way has very public outlets that we can do an informational picket outside.

One of our members was involved in some high street solidarity during the 1980s, in a couple of disputes originating in Scotland. Ar chirde, who supplied Laura Ashley, and Tricia Jenkins, who worked for Burton.

From this, we learned that informational picketing can be instrumental in aiding workers in struggle, though they are not enough in themselves. In order to win, the workers need active solidarity from other workers, particularly in the same company or industry.

Since last year, we have been regularly picketing Starbucks stores across South London to highlight Starbucks' attacks on its workers and show solidarity with the five sacked workers.

We have been joined by IWW and AF members, and non-affiliated people wanting to show solidarity with the fired workers.

Many of the Starbucks workers are casual - one of the prime initial demands made by the SWU in New York was for regularisation of working hours.

However, in our work around this, we reject the idea that casual workers finding out what their colleagues are doing. Our next step is to set up a questionnaire for Starbucks workers.

We support this effort and have been talking to the IWW so that we don’t send out mixed messages. It should also be added that we think it’s important to be honest to the workers in coffee shops - by joining Baristas United they are forming a new union, with all the hard work and reward that entails.

We have also shown the Starbucks Union DVD produced by the IWW, hopefully to Starbucks workers.

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We have been involved in some high street solidarity during the 1980s, in a couple of disputes originating in Scotland. Ar chirde, who supplied Laura Ashley, and Tricia Jenkins, who worked for Burton.
Why does the scum always rise to the top?

How society produces those that keep us in our place - and how revolutionaries can avoid reproducing the same kind of organisation

Those who most closely identify with the way our society is organised, and who seek to gain either individual power or maintain the power of the ruling class are the ones who become most successful in society and reach the top.

Those seeking power quickly recognise the ways society works and the most successful are those who can use the system to their own advantage.

Hierarchy

We live in a hierarchical society. We have all grown up in social structures - class, race, gender, sexuality, and so on - that are hierarchical in nature. These social hierarchies are multi-tiered, pyramid-like structures that have as an apex the centralisation of power.

Everyday institutions such as businesses, churches, armies, many voluntary and community organisations and most political movements, are structured hierarchically where the few in the top position have more power than the many at the base.

The best expressions of this are capitalism and the state.

At the root of these hierarchical structures is the question of power. Those are somehow different to other workers (and form some sort of ‘precariat’). This is doing the bosses’ job for them. In our work on casualisation we seek to unite workers, not divide them, and to do this in concrete terms by promoting organisation by workplace, not by type of contract.

Spain

The Spanish CNT held May Day actions in more than 30 cities. Besides increasing casualisation in Spain, the focus was also on worsening working conditions in general, including low pay, poverty, the situation of women, and the rising incidence of workplace accidents.

Spain has one of the highest rates of temporary employment in Europe, while casualisation is growing alarmingly in the public services. And new social security and labour market reforms are on the way that can only extend casualisation further, continuing a trend that goes back 20 years or more.

These reforms reflect a capitalist and neoliberal vision of work; they show up the almost indistinguishable position of the main union federation compared with the employers associations; and they are proof yet again of the enormous gap between the interests of workers and those who would call themselves their “representatives”.

Indeed, another theme for the CNT in the run up to May Day has been the electoral circus associated with the ‘enterprise committees’. This from the CNT de León:

“The CNT de León: ‘Professional politicians and unionists...bombard us with all kinds of promises...’

“Professional politicians and unionists... bombard us with all kinds of promises...to grab as many votes as possible. When they get them and they are comfortably installed they forget your problems and their promises... While we continue to suffer workplace accidents, unemployment, casualisation, sackings...the so-called union representatives only worry about getting more time to free themselves from the alienating work that the rest of us do.’

An example of this was described by the CNT union section at SEAT in Barcelona: “the enterprise committees...[by] recyling trade unionists into politicians make the present union model one more institution of the system. Organizations who now ask for the workers’ votes are managing the lists in the ‘negotiation’ the redundancies of 660 fellow workers.”

Poland

ZSP (Związek Syndykalistów Polski - Union of Syndicalists of Poland) is a relatively new organisation with strong links to the IWA.

Though founded as recently as the end of March ZSP helped to host the ‘Ideas and Action’ Conference and other May Day events in Warsaw.

Some joint campaigns were preliminarily discussed with people planning to meet up in the summer to take things further.

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The main debates and discussions focused around ideas on non-hierarchical, radical anti-capitalist workplace struggle and on networking people interested in both promoting these practices and engaging in ongoing and new campaigns.

There were some interesting discussions based on personal experiences around the possibilities for organising internationally within multinational companies and reacting as a small organisation in workplaces dominated by larger unions.

More concretely, grounds were established for cooperation between comrades from Slovakia and Poland in both the IT and the car industries.

Some joint campaigns were preliminarily discussed with people planning to meet up in the summer to take things further.

The centre of the car industry will soon be in an industrial triangle made up of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia and people discussed ways of agitating and organising in the industry.
This is an engaging anthology of writings from The Rebel Worker (Chicago) and Heatwave (London).

In an era of less-than-inspiring Neo-Laissez-faire, the collective dreamers behind these magazines were at the forefront of radical praxis. Professing a deep connection with surrealism and the pleasures of the body, these zines were finer than the ascetic demands of the tradition left by advocating (and attempting to live) a total revolution of everyday life - because revolution can not be a chore, it must be part of life lived joyfully and rebelliously.

These ideas are rooted in the wide-eyed, poetic and rebellious tradition of surrealism which preceded, and was inspired, the Situationist International.

What is most amazing is their reconciling of an anti-work, anti-subsistence perspective with membership in (and praise for) the IWW. Such a seemingly ridiculous synthesis works because they emphasise the most liberatory aspects of the IWW, such as its longstanding connection to train hopping hobos and the rural unemployed (people just as wildly rebellious towards all social norms and institutions as anyone Crimethincw: writes about) and its support for wildcat strikes.

It is in relation to their IWW organizing that the Rebel Worker group was able to define themselves as 'workers against work'. Among the most interesting pieces are the introductions by Rosemont and Radcliffe, who were involved with the Rebel Worker and Heatwave, respectively.

Their separate introductions put the anthology in historical perspective. Rosemont begins with his days as a young high school dropout turned card-carrying wobbly. He writes of his involvement in a free speech fight at Roosevelt University supported by high-profile radicals such as Paul Goodman; he reflects fondly of traveling to France with his partner Penelope and meeting surrealist Andre Breton and Guy Debord of the Situationist International; he recalls helping organize striking Michigan farm workers and rejuvenating a dying wobblly tradition; he tells of his visit to the Solidarity Bookshop, a radical bookstore at the heart of the anti-capitalist milieu of 60s Chicago; he ends with the proud proclamation that after the passage of many years not one of the characters in The Rebel Worker Story has defected to the side of Capital and the State.

Radcliffe's story of Heatwave, the sister journal of the Rebel Worker, is of great interest as well. Heatwave grew out of the anti-nuclear, anarcho-pacifism of British radical circles in the early 60s. Radcliffe and Diana Shelley, his partner and comrade, were involved with the anti-nuclear protests of the Committee of 100.

Radcliffe, Shelley and Paul Garon were inspired to begin work on Heatwave after meeting the Rosemonts, and after Radcliffe and Diana Shelley, his partner and comrade, were involved with the anti-nuclear protests of the Committee of 100.

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A common interest present in all of the issues is music, especially as it pertains to radical counterculture (blues is held in especially high regard).

One issue even included a science fiction story written by a little kid. This motley assortment is a little bewildering, but makes for quite a readable read.
The Romans brought us a ‘common market’ around Europe has brought loads of benefits to all of us — young and old, rich and poor, and those in between too. However, the growth of capitalism has effectively overseen the destruction of natural community and systems of social interaction by a number of means.

One of the ways it has done this is through the mass media and its cult of celebrity. Now before we get too abstract and sociological, let’s look at the practicalities of this. The media bombards us with a myriad of ‘reality’ TV shows, soap operas, Hollywood movies, tabloid newspapers, sport channels, music videos, celebrity gossip mags, advertisements, computer games and so on. These provide a range of idealised images for us to aspire to, roles to play and virtual worlds to escape into. Advertising specifically, cons us into thinking that by buying certain commodities or brand labels we can emulate the glamorous celebrities endorsing products or, alternatively, buy into the exiting lifestyles they depict. Recent adverts for 4 X 4 cars present exciting images of off-road escapades into the world of desert, safari and swamp. The reality, however, is far removed from the façade presented to us. Most 4 x 4 vehicles never go off road (with the middle classes clogging up the roads on the school run, churning out huge quantities of CO2 as they go).

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intact.

First, they are intended to make us feel inadequate and sell us products which we don’t need and (judging by recent statistics on debt levels) can’t afford.

Second, they serve as a cheap diversion to hide the truth of what’s really going on (poverty, environmental destruction, war) and the causes (capitalism and transnational corporations).

Third, they serve to disempower us and feed us false hope that we too might one day win the Lotto, Fame Academy or Big Brother and enter the coveted world of celebrity - thus they preserve and legitimise a world where only the rich, famous and the corporate media moguls matter or can put their views across.

Fourth, and more generally, far from being neutral or apolitical they reinforce negative stereotypes and normalise the power relationships and selfish materialism of capitalism as the natural order of things.

The trend of celebrity culture to work out that this Labour government has continued with the vicious free market policies first introduced by Thatcher and developed by later Tory regimes.

Labour’s trick has been to repack these ideas, giving them a gloss of caring concern. Unfortunately for the diehards Labour is now so awash with Labour’s diehards hoping and praying that Brown will bring a change in direction. A long wait that’ll be.

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One of the Blair-Brown regime’s proudest claims is to have significantly slashed the number of children living in poverty. But behind this boast, the massaged statistics hide a much starker truth, a true measure of Labour as an anti-working class party.

Labour’s policies are set to be the order of the day for some time to come - and Brown isn’t about to change that. After all, he hasn’t spent these years just pretending to run the Treasury. He and his circle of favourites have been at the very heart of it all, planning and promoting many of the free market initiatives that continue to eat at the Labour’s trick has been to repack these ideas, giving them a gloss of caring concern. Unfortunately for the diehards Labour is now so awash with Labour’s diehards hoping and praying that Brown will bring a change in direction. A long wait that’ll be.

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One of the Blair-Brown regime’s proudest claims is to have significantly slashed the number of children living in poverty. But behind this boast, the massaged statistics hide a much starker truth, a true measure of Labour as an anti-working class party. For even those who escape physical poverty cannot escape the present emotional poverty of everyday life.

The sooner the politicians, bosses, and their pathetic media spectacles are consigned to the dustbin of history, the better.

For even those who escape physical poverty cannot escape the present emotional poverty of everyday life.

The sooner the politicians, bosses, and their pathetic media spectacles are consigned to the dustbin of history, the better.

It’s no surprise that French workers will show their traditional stomach for a fight. Readers with long memories will recall a time when that same reputation belonged to British workers.

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

We recognise that not all oppression is economic, but can be based on gender, race, sexuality, or anything our rulers find useful. Unless we organise in this way, politicians and 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.

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If you would like to help out or contribute articles or photos, work is entirely voluntary. We welcome articles of between 500-1500 words on industrial, social/community and international issues; on working class history; and on anarchist/anarchosyndicalist theory and history.

Articles may be sent as hard copy, on a disk or by email, and can only be returned if accompanied by a request (and SAE if appropriate).

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