

DIRECT ACTION

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Paper of the Solidarity Federation - The British Section of the International Workers Association

SIGNALWORKERS FORCE GOVERNMENT BACKDOWN

As we go to press it is emerging that signalworkers have gained a significant victory over the government and Railtrack. This is a bitter blow to the railway privatisation plans as well as to the government's public sector pay freeze.

We understand that Railtrack has agreed a £10.8million pay out made up of the following - a 2.5% annual pay rise back-dated to April (costing £2.1million); payment for future restructuring (£2.5 million); an interim payment consolidated into basic pay (£5.3million); and a lump sum of between £390 and £660, depending on grade, in exchange for accepting cashless pay and other changes in practices (costing £0.9million). This represents a major victory bearing in mind that the original 5.7% offer withdrawn in June would have cost £4.3million.

On top of these financial gains Railtrack have been forced to concede a 2 hour reduction in the working week to 37 hours. Importantly, Railtrack were forced to drop their demand of incorporating Sunday into the normal working week which, if achieved, they would have tried throughout the whole industry. Moreover, all other grades on the railways will now be pushing for a 37 hour week.

PRIVATISATION

Of course this dispute was never about mere pay and conditions. The government both set out to reverse its flagging popularity and defeat the union in order to pave the way for privatisation. The Tories had hoped to revive the floundering privatisation programme by selling off Railtrack before the next election, which would also have provided revenue for pre-election tax cuts. However, to succeed they needed to break the union organisation, especially in the most powerful group, the signalworkers. This, they have totally failed to do. Not only has RMT managed to recruit over 400 new signalworkers but the confidence and morale of railworkers and workers elsewhere can only be boosted.

The public sector pay freeze now looks to be facing difficulties in the months ahead as other groups of workers will seek to match the gains made by the signalworkers. The whole settlement is somewhat ironic since it was the government that raised the stakes in June by blocking Railtrack's original 5.7% offer and diverted the dispute from the issue of restructuring to that of the pay freeze.

The disarray that the Tories now find themselves in and the signalworkers' victory only reinforces what Transport Worker Network has been arguing for several years. If the RMT would only have the courage to organise and confront the anti-union laws railworkers have the power to defeat the government's privatisation plans. It can be no co-incidence that the strike was settled days before the prospect of co-ordinated London underground and rail strikes. Again Transport Worker Network has argued consistently that rail, bus and underground workers should join together in defiance of the law against the government. The signalworkers' dispute proves again that gains can only be made, not by the new realism of the TUC and the Labour Party, but by organisation, direct action and solidarity.

BANG UP CAPITALISM

Doesn't it make you laugh? To listen to these foul-mouthed politicians and commentators ranting on about the increase of crime in society and the responsibility of parents/schools/videos/films/computer games/lefty councils/T.V etc. (delete at will).

The truth is that most of the crime we suffer is a direct result of policies which give free rein to the bandit-like individualism of capitalism but you will be hard-pushed to find this being debated at any length anywhere in the media, where there is an acceptance of the values of capitalism as though they were as indispensable as the air we breathe. Not that this is surprising given the nature of the press and TV.

Crime is an integral part of the system. It is as inevitable in relation to capitalism as unemployment, exploitation or profit and is frowned upon only when it looks like affecting the profit-makers, cannot be turned to advantage by them or becomes so blatant that it refuses to be ignored by the citizenry. Crime is necessary within this sick society as a means of putting the frighteners on the working class, who are the main victims of crime. That's one reason for there being so much of it on the mindsucker in the corner of the room.

The much-vaunted concern shown by politicians and pundits over violent crime against the individual is a diversion, false indignation exuded for the headline and the evening soundbite. This is not to minimise

attacks on individuals by vicious scumbags but to recognise that so long as capitalist individualism is the guiding philosophy then some individuals will follow the example set by the power-brokers who themselves stop at nothing to achieve their aims and who kill and maim in a more indirect manner. The bank robber is simply an aspiring capitalist - using a more direct means of obtaining the surplus value of someone else's labour.

At all costs the lie must be maintained that the economic system plays no part in crime and the myth propagated that it's all down to 'bad influences' in a 'free' society which, according to supporters of the system, is actually too free. They therefore divert attention from the major sources of crime (the inevitable greed of politicians, directors, dominant share-holders, the military hierarchy and media moguls) and insist that greater curbs are required on the liberties of the working class in order that this 'free' society can continue in the robbery of the majority by a minority and which (pause for a laugh here) goes by the name of "democracy."

How do we deal with crime? Increasing the number of police on the streets is a demand made by many but this simply strengthens the buffer behind which the legitimised criminals carry on even more rapaciously and it also means that Big Brother State can deal with you that much easier should you start to campaign seriously about anything. Legislation like the Criminal Justice Bill making its task that much easier. There are already proposals to privatise copers and for them to advertise the sponsors' products - they'll be quite unbiased in reacting to crime of

course. No, in the manner of the best medics we need to attack the cause not the symptom and this means *organising to remove capitalism* from our backs. For capitalism is the crime against humanity which spawns imitators wherever it puts down a suppurating foot and as those imitators develop they are received into the pantheon of the great and the good with past crimes being rewritten or ignored. History abounds with them.

Crime can only be defeated by communities taking direct action to deal with the causes but in doing so they will come up against the desire of the State to retain control over the limits of crime. Once the State is seen as being unable to fulfil its proclaimed role as guardian of its subjects then one more of the props which support it has been undermined. That's why the rednecks at the Tory annual knees-up are so orgasmic about the subject of crime. They are not interested in searching for the cause but in denying that anything which they pretend to believe in is in any way responsible. They know that the ice on which they are skating is very thin. It's up to us to break it.

We don't know what form crime will take in a free society but it is naive to assume that it will disappear on day one. However, we will have removed many of the causes once we have taken over the means of production and distribution and removed the cancers of capitalism and the State. If you are sick of crime then - Organise to remove the cause. Organise to build a future for everyone and don't forget to organise for the sheer pleasure of solidarity.

LABOUR'S WORN-OUT TORY BAGGAGE

The election of Tony Blair has surely killed off any lingering doubts that the Labour Party can be a force to bring about even the mildest "socialism". It has always been argued by those on the Labour left that the way forward was to stay in the party and attempt to change it from within. Historically this was always an optimistic scenario since every time Labour got elected they quickly moved to the right, but Blair's rejection of even Keynesian-style state intervention in favour of the free market must be the final nail in the coffin of any hopes of a socialist Labour Party.

Here at Direct Action we have always rejected Labour Party-style "socialism" arguing that at best it could only lead to an eastern block-style state socialism. It must now be questioned what, if anything, Labour has to offer in the struggle for working class emancipation.



BLAIR

COMMUNIST THREAT

The dominant force within the Party since WWII has always looked to control the market through state intervention and demand management. This idea is that as the capitalist economy goes into recession, the state can raise taxes and borrow money to finance spending through public works, etc to increase demand for goods and services and hence bring about a recovery. This was the cornerstone of Keynesian thinking and, it is argued, it prevented mass unemployment for most of the post-war period, but it certainly isn't socialism. Indeed Keynes himself set out, during the 1930's depression, to save the crisis-ridden capitalist system from the threat of communism.

The Blair-Brown axis made it quite clear during speeches prior to the Party Conference in October that the Keynesian approach was being dropped in favour of the dynamic of the free market. The shadow chancellor, Gordon Brown, stated that Labour was no longer a "tax-borrow-spend" party, rejecting any form of state regulation of the market. He went on to dismiss economic planning, the cornerstone of any form of socialist or communist system, whether anarchist or marxist-inspired. Having rejected even Keynesian-style intervention in the economy, where does this leave socialism and the Labour Party. The simple answer is nowhere. The Labour leadership has now moved to the right of the Tory governments of Heath and McMillan. They now see the only economic role of government as one of providing training and education, supplying a "modern, efficient" labour force to aid the workings of the market and capitalism.

FAIR-MINDED CAPITALISTS!

It is somewhat ironic that, in dismissing the whole of Labour's ideology since the war, Blair and Brown argue that intervention and planning will not work because of the global nature of capitalism. How, then, do they hope to control the effects of their new-found global capitalism? For instance, how do they intend to entice capitalists to invest in the British economy when they can invest in Taiwan, India or Brazil, to name but a few, where wages are so low they can gain a massive profit on their investment in a much shorter time? Perhaps by appealing to the fair-mindedness of the capitalist!

In reality all that the new Labour Party is doing is abandoning any attempts to control capitalism and banking on an educated and trained workforce being able to attract investment in certain hi-tech industries. This is a highly dubious proposition, because progress in the Pacific rim economies, such as Taiwan or Singapore, has been so rapid that they are already providing a sophisticated workforce, but on much lower wages. Behind all this talk of free market dynamics lies a nasty agenda which has yet to surface. The Blair leadership strategy is based on the "tough love" approach of the Clinton administration. In order to finance training and education without raising taxes a future Labour government will slash the resources directed towards benefits and the welfare system as a whole. Already the Labour leadership is arguing that the welfare system has to be geared to the amount of wealth that the economy can generate and that the wealth-creating sector must take priority. This is exactly the same argument put forward by the Thatcherite new right in the 1970's.

For working class people, it seems, the next Labour Party government is promising more of the same medicine we've had over the last 15 years. However, this should not surprise anarchosyndicalists who have always argued that Labour will merely seek to run the capitalist system better than the Tories. Now, in their eagerness to convince the capitalists, they seem to be attempting to peddle Tory ideology better. This is a lesson that the Labour Party left needs to learn.

DIRECT ACTION

A BRIEF HISTORY

Although this is issue 2 of Direct Action, as an anarchosyndicalist publication we have a history that goes back to the end of WWII. Direct Action first appeared in 1945, published by the Syndicalist Workers Federation (SWF). During the next 3 decades the SWF had its ups and downs as a national organisation but in 1979 was one of the groupings that came together to form the Direct Action Movement (DAM). Thus a second series of Direct Action was launched. After embarking on an industrial strategy based on industrial networks, in March 1994 the DAM merged with 3 such networks in the education, public service and transport industries to form a new anarcho-syndicalist organisation, the Solidarity Federation (SF). Consequently we have started this, the 3rd series of Direct Action.

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"ILLEGAL" STRIKE ACTION IN SEFTON

Officials of UNISON met a torrent of abuse from demonstrators when they attended Manchester High Court to give evidence in contempt proceedings brought by Sefton Council, Merseyside, against Nigel Flanagan and Martin Murphy, branch officials of Sefton UNISON. Both had been summoned for flouting an injunction which Sefton had obtained to prevent "illegal" strike action against privatisation of council services. Although the branch asked UNISON to ballot when privatisation was first announced, the union declined, claiming it was too busy with the "check-off" campaign and that the council would take legal action. A subsequent branch meeting voted for a one day strike on June 28 in spite of a High Court injunction. Faced with industrial action, the council withdrew its privatisation plan but instituted contempt proceedings against the 2 branch officials. UNISON also declared that it repudiated the actions of the branch.

On 3 occasions around 500 supporters of the "Sefton 2 Defence Campaign" demonstrated outside the High Court. Both Nigel and Martin were determined not to apologise for carrying out their members' instructions or to give assurances that they would comply with future injunctions. Despite the fact that they faced imprisonment and unlimited fines, an Assistant General Secretary of UNISON, Keith Sonnet, told the court that Flanagan and Murphy were on their own as far as the union was concerned.

TOO NOISY

The first hearing, on July 19th, was adjourned as the demonstration outside was too noisy. On July 21st the judge adjourned again to think seriously and carefully before making a decision. On July 29th Nigel and Martin were both fined £1,250 and ordered to pay an eighth of the costs. Despite efforts to disassociate itself, UNISON was fined £5,000 and ordered to pay most of the costs. An application by Sefton Council for the injunction to continue was dismissed. The judge remarked in his summing up that he had been bound to take notice of the number of people assembled outside the court.

Afterwards a delighted Nigel Flanagan hailed the decision not to imprison them as a victory and vowed he would do the same again. He added that the branch had taken on the court, Sefton Council and the UNISON leadership and had won. He called upon all working people to start fighting back with a renewed vigour and to get off their knees. Other speakers not only referred to the scandalous lack of support from UNISON, but also suggested that it was highly probable that UNISON would seek to discipline the Sefton branch.

Messages of support and donations should be sent to: Sefton 2 Defence Fund, 38 Crosby Road North, Waterloo, Liverpool,

TOSSERS - CHILL THE BILL

A brilliant day, a bad bill. The Criminal Justice Demo, London, Sunday October 9th 1994. On arrival in London there were people everywhere, bright colours, partying, music in the park. Almost revolting, in fact. (In the best sense of the word.)

And just as I arrived the Socialist Workers were unloading their banners - KILL THE BILL! Heading the demo in a blaze of publicity. And here is the truly revolting bit: (I mean this in the nauseous sense, mind) an army of Socialist Worker recruiters, all armed with identical clipboards picking out the prey from the crowd. Efficient, I must say. What better than to hijack a big demo and present yourselves as the True & Only Socialist Saviours (TOSSers) - infallible.

But what really makes me puke is that young people will be picked out first from the crowd, and this was a prime gathering for youngsters fighting against persecution, and here they end up being persecuted themselves. Its almost like Evangelists 'saving' people from the sinful world of the Church of England.

IGNORE THE ANTI-STRIKE LAWS

(LESSONS FROM THE SEFTON 2 CASE)

The contempt proceedings against Nigel Flanagan and Martin Murphy should fill UNISON and Sefton Council with shame. The case has shown, amongst other things, the extent to which freedom has been eroded by this vile Tory government. It is nothing short of a scandal that 2 trade unionists can be hauled up before the High Court because they went on strike. Not long ago it would have been inconceivable that strikes could be deemed "illegal". After all, British governments do like to brag a lot about freedom. It's only slaves, they say, who cannot withdraw their labour. Similarly, if the present Criminal Justice Bill is passed then mass demonstrations like that outside the High Court in Manchester will be illegal too.

The successive Employment Acts introduced by the Tories amount to nothing less than a scabs charter and a free hand for the bosses to screw working people. Their aim is to hamstring trade unions by making it virtually impossible to take lawful strike action. Not surprisingly the bosses are using these vicious laws and the courts to stick the boot into workers fighting back against crap wages and crap working conditions.

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However, the existence of such laws did not prevent the Timex strike last year or the wave of unofficial strikes in the Post Office this year. Nor did it prevent the strike at Sefton Council. The massive show of solidarity by signalworkers shows that anti-strike laws cannot prevent the railways grinding to a halt. What these struggles, and many others, show is that these laws, along with the Tories and their capitalist paymasters, can be beaten if working people are prepared to take direct action.

But we should not delude ourselves that it is the well-paid trade union bosses who are going to lead a fightback - their only concern is to protect the union coffers. In fact, some union leaders have been quick to realise the advantages of the law. They have become a convenient excuse for some unions to do nothing except fob workers off with the excuse that to take strike



action will be to invite legal action against the union. In the eyes of today's bureaucrats unions are less about defending and improving the living standards of the membership but more about damping down discontent in an effort to increase the Labour Party's appeal to the middle classes in the south of England.

If we are to make improvements in our daily lives working class people are increasingly going to have to take actions like that in Sefton in defiance of the law and the dictates of union leaders. This means more widespread organisation at shop floor and community level so that when action becomes necessary we can look to ourselves instead of union full-timers whose only concern will be to defuse the situation as quickly as possible, stabbing us in the back if necessary.

Many workers in this country have had enough of pay cuts and redundancies and the mood of workers is changing after having the boot pushed in their faces these past 15 years. As Nigel Flanagan said outside the High Court in Manchester, now is the time for all working people to get off their knees and to start fighting back with a renewed vigour.

GMB

GENERAL, MANAGERS AND BOSSES? UNION

The GMB is set to join a German-led consortium bidding to build the Channel tunnel rail link. This raises the prospect of GMB members working on the project being bossed by their own union executive. We already have a situation where workers have to take on and fight their own union officials as well as management when they have to take action. So this move by the GMB would merely confirm a tendency that Direct Action has warned about for years. Modern unions are concentrating more and more on financial services while at the same time becoming more and more irrelevant to the defence of working class people.

ORGANISING AGAINST VIOLENCE

Violence towards staff in residential units is, once again, on the increase. Nothing is being done to protect RSW's (residential social workers) against attacks from the young people we deal with. Management always come up with the line that it is now all part of the job and these are the kind of kids we work with now. UNISON have been ineffective in combatting this and meanwhile workers are forced to either stay away from work or be forced to work with the young people who have recently assaulted them. This has got to stop! RSW's have got to come together on each unit and across the service to formulate a plan of action to combat this violence. This should include immediate removal of the offender; refusal to work on the unit until it is a safe working environment appropriate support from management; in the longer term a complete re-think of policy on the placement of young people. We need to come together and decide what we want and demand that UNISON gives us their full backing. We cannot rely on others to do it for us. We have to act before someone is really seriously injured or even killed.

The Public Service Workers Network (PSWN) is formed of ordinary public service workers who are trying to fight back against the attacks being made on us from all sides. We would be glad to hear of anyone who has experienced acts of violence and is looking for a change of approach. We have to stop this violence at work that makes our already difficult jobs near impossible to do.

*Public Service Workers Network
(Manchester Social Services),*

*PO Box 29,
South West PDO,
Manchester, M15 5HW.*

MAGGIE'S TEETH BITE BACK!

The Tory Conference was rocked by the wizened appearance of the former premiere as it was revealed that her molars were on the rampage as a result of cosmetic dentistry performed some years ago to give a softer image. A consequence of privatised treatment.

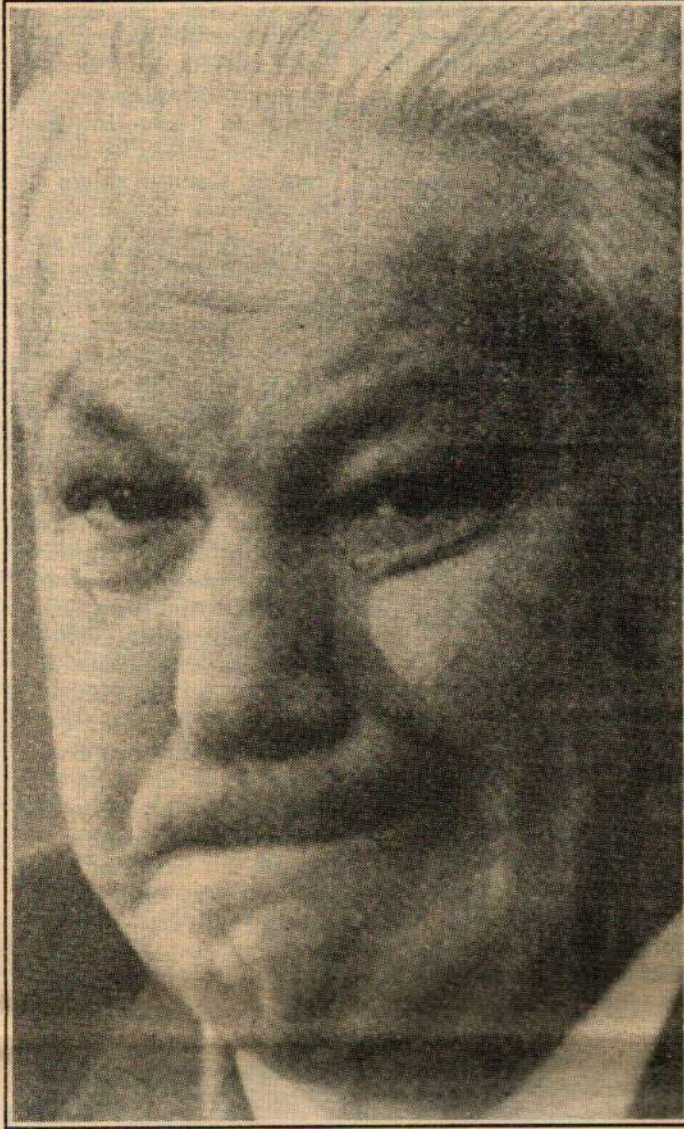


INTERNATIONAL UPDATE

CAPITALISM AND THE RUSSIAN WORKING CLASS

Economic thinking affects all of our lives. No clearer example is there than Russia where the failure and collapse of marxism led to a handful of elite western economists conducting a social experiment adversely affecting the lives of millions of working class people.

With the collapse of the eastern block right wing free market economists drew up the so-called "big bang" or "shock therapy" plan for the Russian economy. This involved privatisation; abolition of subsidies; making the rouble convertible; reduction and control of the money supply. It was planned to "drop an economic bomb" on the economy with the resulting collapse causing market forces to come to the rescue. The bomb was dropped in January 1991 and prices rose 250% in one day. By December 1992 prices had risen 2000%. The rouble plummeted; exports collapsed; output fell by 20%; and real wages by 40%. Meanwhile working class living standards nose-dived creating wholesale poverty. The whole thing was a failure.



YELTSIN
THE SOBER FACE OF A RUSSIAN RULER?

STUPIDITY

The bulk of the economy remained in the state sector mainly due to a total misunderstanding of how the Russian economy works. There were fundamental questions against bulk privatisation. How do you sell assets when there is no market for them? Where do you sell them? How do you value them? Where does the money come from? There were massive amounts of state assets to be sold but little private wealth. The free market view was based on small firms competing, bearing little resemblance to modern capitalism let alone the Russian economy. The simplistic view that Russian firms were similar to western ones, which, once freed from bureaucratic control, would flourish under the free market, is nothing but mind-boggling stupidity.

Firms in the Soviet Union developed totally differently than in the west. Their biggest problems were shortages of raw materials and labour. This led firms to secure their own supply and distribution services through barter, resulting in a highly vertically-linked, integrated economy. Thus huge firms provided everything for their locality - housing, schools, social and welfare facilities, etc, as well as jobs. There was no labour market in free market terms where wages are determined by supply and demand. In Russia the workforce, and thus the unions, have been in a strong position due to the labour shortage since WWII. Union officials were often in senior positions in the Communist Party and used their power to oppose change. For privatisation to work it would have to confront the powerful Russian working class in order to break it.

Despite what most western analysts would tell us, there is no evidence to suggest that Russia is transforming itself into full-blown capitalism. There is merely a restructuring with a new merchant class buying and selling but still dependent on the existing structure. The old elite and the old economic structures remain; the much-vaunted market is little more than a mafia/spiv market; corruption is rife; there is little control of exports. The western view that the future depends on western technological expertise and investment looks bleak and the early promise is unfulfilled. Workers are organised and resistant to change; joint ventures have not occurred where there is no guarantee that contracts will be honoured; there is a fear of a xenophobic backlash against foreign control. Meanwhile investment pours into the Pacific rim.

THE ALTERNATIVES

The Anglo-American free market is still backed by the World Bank, IMF and OECD, but more and more official trade unions and managers of large state concerns are looking to the Rhineland/Scandinavian model of social market capitalism. This combination of the free market and state intervention is appealing as it has roles for the traditionally paternalistic state sector and trade union bureaucrats and would give some kind of order to the chaos left by the big bang. Some western firms have been allowed to take over former state companies on the understanding they adopt a social market form of management. The problem remains in attracting western investment which will generally not take place without restructuring the labour market resulting in mass unemployment and further lowering of living standards.

Another alternative is the "Third Way" of the newly industrialised, highly successful - in capitalist terms - Pacific rim countries (Taiwan, Korea, etc). They depend on an authoritarian state steering the economy with no labour force or union involvement. They are typified by state repression of workers, low wages, little or no welfare system, etc. This again presents massive difficulties in Russia. Leaving aside how the political system would be altered, it requires confrontation with, and breaking of, the Russian working class.

All the alternatives have one thing in common. To succeed, the working class would have to pay in the form of mass unemployment and a further collapse in living standards. There is, of course, another alternative, the form of economic organisation advocated by anarchosyndicalists, attempted in Spain in 1936 where it proved highly successful by any economic criteria, but that is another story to be told elsewhere.

SPAIN

CALL FOR SOLIDARITY

from: **Collectif Paideia**

After a series of actions taken by peasant groups in Extremadura (south western Spain) there were a number of arrests. Most of these were at a demonstration but one comrade was arrested at his home, two days after the event...maybe because he was an anarchist?

The legal process has moved on somewhat with most of those arrested being freed, apart from 2, one of whom is our comrade, Jose Paredes. Now his lawyer is asking for money to continue working on his case and his trial is imminent. We believe that those charged will be sentenced for their opposition to the agricultural policies of the local government.

This is why the collectives Paideia and Los Adelfas are calling for solidarity from anarchists and anarchosyndicalists to help defray the costs of the legal expenses and so that our comrade should not have to pay the personal cost of a prison sentence.

You can send donations (eg international PO's)

to: **Collectif Paideia,**
Apartado 133,
06800 Merida,
Spain.

BANGALDESH GARMENT WORKERS UPDATE

The last Direct Action covered the struggles of the National Garment Workers Federation in Bangladesh. After much campaigning by the NGWF a commission has set a minimum wage for garment workers. Now the task is to ensure that the employers honour the new pay rate and the NGWF have been making the necessary preparations. The NGWF has also been involved in trying to secure overtime payment for 57 workers made redundant by Lotus garments.

AWARENESS LEAGUE

ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM IN NIGERIA

The phenomenal growth of the anarchosyndicalist Awareness League in Nigeria over the past few years has continued recently despite continued oppression from the state. The imprisonment of four members, James Ndubis (General Secretary), Garba Audu, Kingsley Etioni and Chuks Udemba following their arrest during popular national protests in May 1992 marked an important stage in the development of the League. It maintained a high profile throughout the protests which led to the indefinite closing of all federally funded Universities and Polytechnics in the country.

Though the four were released last year, they were subject to strict bail conditions and two were subsequently re-arrested for apparently violating bail terms. Harassment of the Awareness League continued, with raids on homes and organised house searches being a major tool used by the police to repress members. Despite a change of government (the Babingida Dictatorship was replaced by an interim government whose leaders were hand-picked by Babingida), not surprisingly the oppression has continued in 1994.

On the positive side, the Awareness League was informed in April this year that they could become a new section of the IWA during the next congress, a move which is both a boost for the Awareness League and for anarchosyndicalism worldwide. Meanwhile, the Awareness League continues to 'hold aloft the banner of the struggle', and has joined with other activists and pro-democracy groups in condemning the governments' banning of political parties until 1995. There is clearly a long tradition of anarchosyndicalism in Nigeria in the making.



WHY WE NEED POLITICAL UNIONS

At a time when political debate in the trade unions is at an all-time low and the Labour Party has reduced itself to its current status of joke socialism, it is appropriate to reconsider what we mean by the term 'political unions' or anarchosyndicalism.

The principal reason for the failure of reformist unions (TUC unions in Britain) has been because they concerned themselves solely with 'economic' issues (pay and conditions) leaving 'politics' to the Labour Party. SF is totally opposed to this artificial division between political and economic responsibilities. The two are inseparable; all disputes between bosses and workers are political struggles.

This is the lesson the trade union movement has repeatedly failed to learn. Faced with an economic crisis in the West and the rising power of the tiger economies of south-east Asia, the boss class in Britain conducted a systematic assault on trade union power aimed at breaking what they perceived as the high wage, low productivity practices and militant culture of the labour force, and replacing it with casualised, non-unionised, low-paid workers and a job market based on high unemployment which favours bosses and intensifies competition amongst the divided working class. Only a highly politicised trade union movement could have stood up to this onslaught, one willing to stand by its members and committed to a clear agenda involving both short- and long-term aims leading to the replacement of capitalism with a social system run by and for the working class.

Unfortunately, far from defending working people by involving themselves in class conflict, the social democratic (reformist) trade unions sought class co-operation, playing down class consciousness and politics in the workplace. Social democracy embraced ideas of social partnership between employers and unions and accepted assurances of a higher standard of living for workers through 'trickle down'. The original aim of the trade union movement, that of securing for the workers by hand or by brain the fruits of their labour, was replaced by the aim of securing a larger slice of the capitalist cake.

The severe and prolonged economic crisis of the 1980's shattered the social democratic premise that boom and bust in capitalism had

given way to stability, and allowed the capitalist class to return to their traditional method of labour discipline - fear of mass unemployment to hold down wages backed by state repression to manage social conflict. The tragedy for working people was that forty years of class collaboration had depoliticised the trade unions leaving them defenceless. An entire generation of trade unionists thought 'political unions' meant the block vote at Labour Party Conference and 'beer and sandwiches' at 10 Downing Street.

The future clearly does not lie with social democratic trade unions. Capitalism, though constantly in state of flux, will always rely on competition to cut costs by increasing productivity and driving down wages. This is the source of class conflict and is a central reason why social democracy is always doomed to failure.

SF believes the future lies in a revolutionary alternative to the current trade unions, one involving militant action for better pay and conditions now, while also stressing the need and organising for the implementation of a new society. Above all we must learn from the mistakes of the reformist unions which separate politics and economics and only organise in the workplace. We must look to build a union movement based both in the community and the workplace, which offers assistance in all aspects of working people's lives, in addition to essential workplace organisation: A union which is a living expression of the class it represents rather than a bunch of old men in suits.

Political unions with the kind of structure and purpose we need will have more strings to their bow than the essential labour strike, with organisation outside the workplace allowing for actions such as rent strikes, consumer boycotts and protests against poor public services. They will also involve workers without workplaces in the traditional sense - unemployed, unpaid workers, self-employed etc. Issues which capitalism uses to divide workers - racism, sexism, homophobia to name a few, are just as much the province of political unions as any other divisive tactic of the boss class.

In short, we need to start laying the foundations for a society administered on the basis of workplace and community control for need not the profit of a few, by building organisations of and for the working class now.

EDUCATION WORKERS' NETWORK

Who are they?

The Education Workers' Network is one of the three industrial networks currently active within the Solidarity Federation. Where did it come from and where is it going?

EWN has been around for five years now and apart from steadily building contacts of like minded people in Education and producing and distributing its bulletin Education Worker (formerly General Assembly) it has also had some success over the years through becoming involved in workplace disputes. The EWN is open to all involved in Education, including teachers, students, cleaners, caterers, administrators, researchers etc. For some reason we have historically had a disproportionately high number of workers from further and higher education involved, and one of our current objectives is to rectify this by making ourselves more accessible to workers in other sectors of education.

Organisation

The structure of EWN reflects its anarcho-syndicalist outlook - open and ultrademocratic. It is controlled by its members, with unpaid officials accountable to and recallable by the membership. So far we have had several changes of secretary and treasurer, and the regular bulletin is a forum for all members to use for the development of the Network and its ideas. It is hoped that all members will continue to participate in these duties, and this combined with organised self-education will allow each member to fully understand their organisation and the reasons for its existence. Nationally, the EWN is federated to the Solidarity Federation.

Old Solutions

Similarly to other public services the education system is in an advancing state of decline, a process which has accelerated with the education 'reforms' of the last decade. Academic standards, pay and conditions, workers' morale, student support and job security are just a few areas where all of us involved in education have experienced this worsening situation. Government policy to recreate a two-tier system; one for those who can pay and one for the dregs to keep them off the streets, has combined with a move towards a mass higher education system reminiscent of the United States, with profit-orientated student-marketing institutions, huge student drop-out rates and the destruction of the grant system leading to the current 'whoever can pay, can play' approach to recruitment.

It is patently clear that the traditional reformist Trade Unions and the Labour Party are not going to reverse the decline in our education system. As in all sectors of the workforce they are supposed to represent, the advice of 'wait for Blair', the excuses of having to abide by union-bashing laws, and the reality of careerist men in suits dominating the Unions and spending workers' dues are all rife in the education sector, and are all equally as impotent as everywhere else.

The Alternative: Building The EWN

We see the building of the EWN as a first step towards creating a real worker-based union based upon syndicalist principles. We believe there must be no separation between the political and economic spheres and we reject party politics and distinct political or economic organisations in favour of a single organisation consisting solely of workers. We believe that revolutionary transformation is essential and is our fundamental goal, however we also recognise the importance of present-day struggle for reform on various levels to help workers now. We reject partnership with management in favour of self-reliance, workplace and community organisation and co-operation, and direct action.

Over the past five years EWN has made practical steps towards building a syndicalist union in Education. Clearly, we still have a long way to go before we can execute a successful strike, and we are continually examining our strategy, aiming to ensure that we move forward as effectively as possible. We are a growing organisation, finding our direction and establishing our relevance to everyday life. We aim to communicate plainly and stress the need for a no-nonsense approach to class struggle.

EDITORIAL:

DIRECT ACTION WILL WIN

"Direct action" has become a very widely used term and it seems to mean many different things to different people. It is popularly associated with protests like that at Greenham Common against the siting of cruise missiles, and in more recent times with the anti-roads campaigners. To some people it means setting off bombs; to others it means sabotage. All of these, it could be argued, are valid forms of direct action.

To us, as anarchosyndicalists, direct action is a fundamental principle. It is essentially about taking direct action on your own behalf instead of leaving it to professional politicians, experts or other intermediaries. For example, in an industrial dispute, taking action through the use of mass assemblies and strike committees is a form of direct action since the decisions are being made and carried out by those who are directly affected. On the other hand, leaving things for a full-time official to sort out on our behalf is not. Similarly, if a number of people organise a public meeting to discuss what to do about something that is affecting their community, a toxic waste incinerator for instance, they are taking direct action. Calling for the local MP to raise the issue in parliament and expecting something to be done about it that way is not.

Government in the present hierarchical societies is based on the concentration of power into the hands of a small minority who then decide what they think is best for the majority. We propose a system where power is dispersed throughout society; where decisions are made by those who will be affected by them. Today's political parties and trade unions, despite the democratic pretensions of some at least, are bodies that merely serve the purposes of the elite that have managed to barge their way to the top. In their place the Solidarity Federation advocates organisation based on the direct control of the members, where office-holders have no special benefits, are subject to recall by the membership and can only hold office for a limited period. It is only this form of organisation that can make direct action a reality.

Direct action, allied to strong organisation, is the only answer for working class people to the numerous problems that face us today. From confronting the problems of crime-ridden estates to tackling low pay; from fighting new taxes to preventing environmental hazards in working class areas, we can only look to ourselves. In these days when many of the gains won by previous generations are being taken from us it is well to remember that not one of those gains was won without working class people first taking direct action in the streets and workplaces, forcing the politicians to give in. In more recent times we have seen the defeat of the poll tax and just a few short weeks ago the victory won by signalworkers who took determined strike action against a government that seemed set on breaking them. More and more of us need to look to these examples and act accordingly.

ANARCHO - SYNDICALISM IN ACTION

Before the end of 1994 a new pamphlet will appear on the subject of A/S in action in a shipyard town, Puerto Real, Spain, illustrating how our comrades have fused revolutionary workplace activity with issues including Direct Democracy and the environment.

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