

Communities of Resistance Unite!

A Radical History of the Edinburgh Unemployed Workers Centre



Demonstration against the termination of the lease and the eviction threat in 1994¹.

This paper looks into the history of the Edinburgh Unemployed Workers Centre (EUWC) and the struggles of anti-authoritarian revolutionary groups in Edinburgh during the 1980s and early 1990s². Grassroots and direct action oriented groups started to organise together in the early 1980s against the various attacks on the

¹ Scottish Radical Library, Drawer: ACE/ECAP/Edinburgh Claimants, Folder: cling film with several photos [hereafter SRL, D: label, F: label (further description)], Photo by Norman Watkins, 1994.

² You can contact the author through hohoh@gmx.de.

working class. They were often based in the EUWC and developed highly sophisticated forms of community resistance which culminated in their crucial role in the Poll Tax rebellion. This paper reveals forms of bottom up revolutionary organising to add important parts to the local radical history of Edinburgh. It furthermore developed as a contribution to current debates on how the radical left can organise collectively against capital, state and any form of oppression today. The references made in text aim to collect some of the most inspiring sources on the topic. As traces they invite for further research.



Cover picture from the 2015 booklet "Up Against the State: The Battle for Broughton St Unemployed Workers Centre"³. The booklet was produced by the Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh (ACE) and tells the story of the centre.

The first section gives a small introduction into the political climate of the time and looks not only at Thatcher's roll back of socialism but also at reactionary politics of the Labour party. This section is followed by some notes on the early years of the EUWC and the official response to the dramatically rising numbers of unemployed by the traditional working class organisations. The next section looks at the formation of an angry, militant and anti-authoritarian movement which was tightly connected to Edinburgh's punk subculture and bands like Oi Polloi. This is then followed by an examination of the miners' strike as a formative experience for the movement. Unemployed, youths, workers and other members of the community were not only inspired by the miners' militancy and the bottom up power of resisting

³ ACE, *Up Against The State: The Battle for Broughton St Unemployed Workers Centre* (2014), <https://libcom.org/library/against-state-battle-broughton-st-unemployed-workers-centre> ; accessed 10 August 2017.

mining communities but also became insides into violent state repression, twisted media coverage and the treacherous actions of the union leadership.

The fifths section looks into the local and Britian-wide organising against the harshening of the benefits system. There is a massive research gap on Claimant Unions and the various sources on the Edinburgh and Lothian Claimants' Unions give many insights into local struggles of claimants. The knowledge of the previous struggles then resulted in a movement of mass civil disobedience against a blatantly unfair reform of the local taxation system – the poll tax. Anti-authoritarian ideas became powerful practices and Edinburgh groups played a crucial role in the development of the Anti-Poll Tax Movement which was able to finally push Thatcher out of office and make the government to revert the tax. The resistance against the poll tax also sharpened the contradiction within the EUWC. After more than ten years of full on class struggle from above also discourses on unemployment had changed. The problem of unemployment had by then been framed as a problem with the unemployed. The centre was threatened with closure but users were determined to defend the base for their political struggles. The last section looks into the centre during its years of complete self-management and its final resistance against the eviction of the centre in 1994.

Many people were very supportive of this work. I especially would like to thank the Autonomous Centre Edinburgh (ACE) for their constant support of my journey through the drawers and folders of the archive of the Scottish Radical Library.

Berlin, June 2019

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1. The Roll Back of Socialism and the Labour Party

The 1980s saw huge changes in Britain. Power was centralised by a push back against trade unions and local governments, large state assets in industries and housing markets were privatised and former appeals to social justice replaced by the promotion of individual freedom for the strongest and most privileged.

Post-war governments in Britain had increased the social and political freedom of ordinary people by weakening the power of banks, privately owned companies and other economic projects of the upper classes. Trade union power on the shop-floor and government level were increased, state-ownership of industries and housing massively expanded and the welfare state developed. Margaret Thatcher's aim in 1979 then was to "roll back the frontiers of socialism"⁴ and introduced radical changes during her time in government between 1979 and 1990. These changes need to be contextualised within the greater political economic project of neoliberalism which can be identified as the increasingly successful tool for a new kind of class struggle from above. Thatcher became its British symbol and was part of a growing group in the Conservative Party which endorsed highly confrontational politics towards trade union power, the welfare state and the power of local governments.

In its 1979 election campaign the Conservative Party had used rising unemployment rates to demonstrate that 'Labour isn't working'. After they had won the election unemployment rose dramatically by 830,000⁵ in the conservative government's first year in office, peaked at over three million in 1986⁶ and was still above 1979 levels when Thatcher resigned as Prime Minister in 1990. Rising unemployment weakened the bargaining power of the unions. Thatcher's economic advisor later commented that the economic strategies which accepted massively rising numbers of unemployed was itself used as "a cover to bash the workers"⁷.

LABOURS NATIONAL RHETORIC UNDER CALLAGHAN

The analysis and policy decisions of the previous Labour government partly pre-empted the Conservative policies of the 1980s. Prime Minister and Labour Party leader James Callaghan called for a new social contract of wage cuts and industrial peace for the restoration of Britain's power in world markets. The government's rhetoric was closed to Thatcher's dogma that there is no alternative (TINA) to the roll back of the hard-won successes of the labour movement.

⁴ Margaret Thatcher, quoted in McSmith, *No such thing as society*, p. 9.

⁵ McSmith, *No such thing as society*, p. 27.

⁶ McSmith, *No such thing as society*, p. 5.

⁷ Alan Budd, quoted in David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford, 2005), p. 59.

The Labour government was facing the IMF crisis in 1976 when Callaghan gave the main address to the Labour Party conference. In his speech Callaghan argued for the redefinition of the "social contract". Callaghan evoked the concept to convince workers, unions and employees to peacefully accept wage and welfare cuts while securing profits for privately owned companies. The Labour government was confronted with rising unemployment and high rates of inflation when it broke with the Keynesian economics of deficit spending. It adopted the economic policy of massive public expenditure cuts. This is also called monetarism and an important column of neoliberal policies. The Labour leader argued that the post-1945 rise in the standard of living had been superficial and paid by "borrowed money"⁸. Previous British governments had failed to cut British "labour costs" and Britain needed to regain "success in the world's markets". The "national problems" were caused by the declining British "success in the world's markets" which was caused by "the particular problem of Japanese imports" and "very different political and economic philosophies" of Britain's major competitors like Germany and France. Callaghan concludes emphatically that this social contract is

the only way for our Movement and for our country. We have a duty to fight for it. If we follow it in the end we shall save not only our Party, not only our Government. We shall save our country.

To counter this nationally framed threat of international economic competition "a new spirit of co-operation (...) between employers and trade unionists" was needed. In regards to the already increasing unemployment he declared that the "cosy world" of living on borrowed money was gone and rising unemployment rates were "the first sorry fruits" on a "long and hard" route. Hillary Rose identifies the national turn of Labour politicians in governments as the product of "powerful and economic forces"⁹. She concludes that

The language of justice for working people and the poor becomes ineluctably replaced by the conservative concept of the national interest, a concept almost as commonly used by Labour politicians in office as Conservatives.¹⁰

THE CONFLICTS WITHIN THE TRADITIONAL LABOUR MOVEMENT

The labour movement was, however, torn apart. This can be illustrated by the changing attitude of the big unions. For the first time, they started to turn against the leadership of the Labour Party towards the end of the 1970s. By the beginning of the 1970s the unions had gained many powers in the British state and the Labour party. Unions were highly involved in the setting of wages and the development of industrial law and economic policies¹¹. Labour Party conference decisions "were rigidly controlled"¹² by the general secretaries of the four biggest unions and had up

⁸ James Callaghan, *Leader's speech*, 1976.

⁹ Rose, "Up Against The Welfare State", p. 181.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

¹¹ McSmith, *No such thing as society*, p. 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

to the late 1970s loyally supported the Labour Party leaders¹³. Accordingly, they had also backed Callaghan's policy of wage cuts in 1976. Some workers, however, had started to organise outside the hierarchical union structures. In 1969 miners all over Britain had formed independent strike committees to oppose their union leaders' inaction and decided a two-week-long unofficial wildcat strike. A new generation of more confrontational shop-stewards came to the fore in the union structures. Powerful miners' strikes in 1972 and 1974 succeeded in forcing the conservative government to accept their demands. The miners' victory had "produced an impetus to wage struggles which was especially strong in Scotland"¹⁴. Additionally, the increasing inflation created a climate where it felt "irrational not to strike"¹⁵.

The party's left wing formed an opposition against Callaghan. Young and more radical activists had entered the Labour party and organised around Tony Benn's initiative for more party democracy. The power of the party establishment was successfully weakened but when Benn lost the deputy leadership elections in 1981 by only one per cent the left wing never managed to recover¹⁶. Callaghan was succeeded as party leader by Neil Kinnock who sometimes seemed to be more occupied with the struggle against the left opposition within the Labour party than its fight against the Thatcher government. The Trotskyist group Militant was successfully organising within the Labour party and had gained control of the party's youth section in the 1970s and access to the party's National Executive Committee. In 1985 Militant was crucial for the Rate-capping Rebellion of local councils and played an important role in the Anti-Poll Tax movement between 1988 and 1991. Nonetheless, the Labour party leadership succeeded in pushing Militant gradually out of the party until the early 1990s. The fight against the Labour party's left wing or so called 'modernisation' within the party then opened the way for Tony Blair's project of New Labour.

THE LOCAL LABOUR PARTY

According to Gerry Hassan a conservative Labour Party approach of "patronage and administration"¹⁷ and "the notion of 'good authority'"¹⁸ dominated Labour politics in Scotland in the 1980s. In Labour strongholds like Glasgow a "networked local state" prevailed "where councillors and officials saw little conflict of interest, and the main debates went on behind closed doors"¹⁹. Openly confrontational politics with the central government were rare and Hassan concludes that Lothian and Edinburgh

¹³ Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁴ Neil Williamson, "Ten years after - the revolutionary left in Scotland", in *The Scottish Government Yearbook 1979*, eds. Henry Drucker, Nancy Drucker (Edinburgh, 1979), pp. 61-77, p. 63.

¹⁵ McSmith, *No such thing as society*, p. 15.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁷ Hassan, *Strange Death*, p. 9.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

with their resistance against centrally imposed budget cuts in 1981 and 1986 were "atypical" for the Scottish context²⁰.

Edinburgh's large middle classes and their attachment to the Conservative Party had traditionally dominated local politics. The introduction of the Lothian Regional Council (LRC) in 1975 and the inclusion of the region's large-scale industries and mining communities in the newly established administration had, however, strengthened the local Labour party. The Edinburgh council was furthermore "associated with younger, more radical groups of Labour councillors"²¹. Lothian's resistance to the cuts in 1981 "was the nearest Scottish Labour got to embrace the politics of defiance and resistance, which eventually erupted in England in 1985-6"²² when Labour councils organised collectively in the rate-capping rebellion.

In the early 1980s the budget of local governments still consisted predominantly of the rate-support grants which they received by the central government. Continuing cuts of these grants often lead to confrontations between local Labour councils and the conservative government. In 1981 a law had been passed to allow George Younger, the Secretary of State for Scotland, to define Lothian's budget as "excessive and unreasonable" and reduce the grant payment to Lothian region by £47 million. The governing Labour group and its leader John Mulvey strongly resisted these externally enforced cuts and succeeded in reducing the cuts to £30 million. According to Gerry Hassan Younger's particular attack on the Lothian region's budget can be interpreted as an avoidance of confrontation with the much more powerful Strathclyde Regional Council (Greater Glasgow Region) and a tactic to divide Scottish Labour councils.

THE LABOUR MOVEMENTS OFFICIAL RESPONSE TO UNEMPLOYMENT

The first Unemployed Workers Centre (UWC) had opened in Newcastle in 1977. Three years later the centre organised a conference in Newcastle²³ to present their concept and experiences to representatives of several local labour movements. In November 1980 a special meeting of the English and Welsh TUC propagated Unemployed Workers Centres as its official response to the dramatically rising numbers of unemployed. Following to that, local members of the Labour party and the Trade Union Congress established over 200 Unemployed Workers' Centres (UWC) all over the UK in the early 1980s.

In the 1970s traditional labour organisations had often dismissed political organising outside the workplace as "petit-bourgeois irrelevancy", regarded unemployed struggles as "a way of neutralizing backward sections" of the working class, or identified these struggles as "useful hand-maiden to serve industrial action"²⁴. Paul

²⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

²¹ Ibid., p. 25.

²² Ibid., p. 26.

²³ Des Loughney, *Interview by author* (16.06.2017).

²⁴ Rose, "Up Against The Welfare State", pp. 198-199.

Bagguley argues that the Trades Union Congress (TUC) centrally organised a response to rising unemployment in 1980 to prevent unemployed from organizing with the "extreme left or right" and to maintain a certain unity between unemployed and the trade unions. This was particularly important for the TUC in 1980 because union membership had decreased for the first time after the 1930s.

There was "tension over the ideological nature of the centres' role"²⁵ within the TUC since the beginning. Some wanted the centre as "an organization for fighting back"²⁶ and others wanted to focus on social work services to secure funding from local councils and national administrations. Some centres received funding from the Department of Health and Social Security through the Carnegie Trust. The condition for the DHSS funding was that centres had to focus on the promotion of voluntary community work to unemployed people. Other centres were funded by the Manpower Services Commission which prohibited centres to use their resources for any political action or be run and controlled by unemployed users²⁷.



Cover of the second issue of *The Raw Edge* in 1986²⁸. The newsheet was produced by an independent user group in the Edinburgh Unemployed Workers Centre.

²⁵ Forrester, Keith, Kevin Ward (eds.), "Trade Union Services for the Unemployed: The Unemployed Workers' Centres", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 28 (1990), pp. 387-395, p. 388.

²⁶ TUC 1982, quoted in Forrester, "Trade Union Services", p. 388.

²⁷ Paul Bagguley, "Protest, Acquiescence and the Unemployed: A Comparative Analysis of the 1930s and 1980s", *The British Journal of Sociology*, 43 (1992), pp. 443-461, p. 457.

²⁸ SRL, D: D: The Centre at Broughton Street (TCBS), F: University of Edinburgh (black ring binder), *The Raw Edge*, 2 (1986), p.1.

2. The Early Years of the EUWC

Rising unemployment was already making headlines in Edinburgh in 1977 when the Scotsman titled "Unemployed 'highest since war' in Lothians"²⁹. People started migrating to regions which offered more and better jobs which lead Edinburgh Evening News to state that "Edinburgh is dying"³⁰. When then unemployment worsened in 1980 Edinburgh teenagers were described as culturally adaptive to the new situation when some of them started to "collect rejection letters"³¹ as trophies.

A group of people in Edinburgh had learned about the UWC in Newcastle and wanted to set up a similar centre in Edinburgh. They approached Des Loughney, the secretary of the Edinburgh TUC, and asked him to attend the conference in Newcastle³². Loughney was impressed by the conference and organisations like the Citizens' Rights Office offered their help to the Edinburgh TUC to apply for funding and set up the centre. Loughney had come to Edinburgh in 1968 to work as a researcher at Edinburgh University. "Student occupations and a student uprising in Edinburgh"³³ had radicalised his politics³⁴. He had joined the predecessor of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and decided to quit his job to work at the shop-floor level³⁵ before he became secretary of the Edinburgh TUC in 1978. Just like Lothian's Labour leader John Mulvey Loughney saw himself as a radical socialist who was eager to resist the attacks by the conservative government through traditional labour organisations. As the Edinburgh TUC secretary and constant member of the EUWC board of trustees Loughney was involved in the foundation and forceful closure of the centre.

The centre officially opened in the basement of the Edinburgh TUC building in Picardy Place as the third UWC in Britain on 1 October 1980³⁶. The Edinburgh centre was the first UWC in Scotland and "was quickly noted by the whole trade union labour movement in Scotland"³⁷. Within the following years more than 30 centres

²⁹ Unknown author, "Unemployed 'highest since war' in Lothians", *Scotsman*, 3 February 1977.

³⁰ Unknown author, "Decline and fall of a city", *Edinburgh Evening News*, 6 October 1977.

³¹ Unknown author, "No jobs for the boys or girls", *Edinburgh Evening News*, 9 June 1980.

³² Des Loughney, *Interview by author* (16.06.2017).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ see: Caroline Hoefflerle, *British student activism in the long sixties* (Abingdon, 2013), p.159; Wintersgill, Donald, *The rectors of the University of Edinburgh 1859-2000* (Edinburgh, 2005), pp. 161-182.

³⁵ Loughney, *Interview by author*.

³⁶ SRL, D:TCBS, F: Trustees Meeting Mins. (red), EUWC report, 1982.

³⁷ Loughney, *Interview by author*.

were established in Scotland. The seven centres in Glasgow "tended to dominate publicity in the political scene"³⁸ due to their high number of staff and funding.

By 1983 nine UWCs had been founded in the Lothian region. Besides the Edinburgh UWC centres had been established in Wester Hailles, Dalkeith, Musselburgh, West Granton, Loanhead, Bathgate, Bonnyrigg and Livingston. The social work director demanded a "systematic allocation"³⁹ of responsibility between the district, regional and national level. The EUWC had developed into the central base for the Lothian centres, facilitated the other "satellite centres" with "expertise, training and equipment"⁴⁰ and thereby qualified for continuous funding. When the centres in Musselburgh and Dalkeith also turned into facilitating centres they also received funding from the Lothian Regional Council.

The changing composition of the regional council strongly affected the council's funding of Lothian's UWCs from its first grant in 1980 until its final withdrawal in 1991. Until the end of the 1980s Labour majorities in the council were willing to fund UWCs as an official response of the Labour movement to rising unemployment. In 1991, however, it was a Labour controlled council which first withdrew all funding and later ordered the eviction of the by then vibrant centre in 1994. Funding was mainly used for paid workers and different kinds of printing, video, photography and other equipment. The Lothian Labour party had lost its majority in the 1982 regional elections but regained a comfortable majority in 1986.

SOURCES OF FUNDING AND RESTRICTIONS ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY

In order to secure state-funding and keep control over the centres the TUC put up a general guideline in 1980 which implemented a "'micro-corporatist' model of organization"⁴¹ where unemployed users were only be allowed on the management committee when they did not form a majority⁴². Lothian's social work director Roger Kent, however, envisioned "a management committee of unemployed" that would "run and manage" the Edinburgh UWC⁴³.

The Edinburgh UWC received its first one-year grant from Lothian Regional Council's Social Work Committee in March 1981 and was able to employ a full-time worker. The committee was the political executive of the social work department. It met every six weeks and decided each year in spring about the major grant applications of voluntary organisations and the broader distribution of their budget. The 1981 budget meeting was attended by a deputation of the newly established UWC and the social work director Roger Kent who was later remembered as "one of

³⁸ Loughney, *Interview by author*.

³⁹ ECA/LRC/DSWR, 1982-83, no. 149.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Bagguley, "Protest, Acquiescence and the Unemployed", p. 458.

⁴² Ibid, p. 457.

⁴³ ECA/LRC/DSWR, 1980-81, no. 178.

Scotland's most vociferous advocates of social work"⁴⁴. In his report to the meeting Kent summarised the centre's services as follows:

- i. A comprehensive welfare rights service including aspects of employment law.
- ii. A range of social and educational facilities aimed to ameliorate the worst effects of unemployment.
- iii. A 'drop in' centre for the unemployed to identify and discuss and tackle in an organised way their own particular problems.
- iv. A powerful local voice for the unemployed in the Edinburgh area.⁴⁵

Especially the last two of the described services point towards a political character of the centre. This was, however, limited by the conditions of social work funding. Grants had to primarily promote social welfare⁴⁶. Loughney highlighted that the regional council looked at the UWC from a social work perspective but allowed separate political organisations to work from within the centre. The EUWC was seen as an organisation that provided welfare rights or employment rights or support to unemployed people and it wasn't seen as a political or what you call political campaigning organisation. (...) they didn't mind other organisations based in the centre that were political but they weren't funded by the council.⁴⁷

A 1984 report on Lothian's UWCs then introduced restrictions on user control of the centres. The report differentiated between "major unemployed workers centres" which were recurrently funded by the council and allowed only "a small number of Centre users"⁴⁸ on their management committee and smaller centres which were fully controlled by its users.

The organisations which were involved in the foundation of the Edinburgh UWC established a trust in 1983 and its representatives became the first members of the board of trustees which was the EUWC management committee. Other representatives of Edinburgh's wider hard left like then regional councillor Alistair Darling⁴⁹ were invited on the board of trustees. The young university lecturer John Holloway was among them and joined the board in 1984. He remained trustee until 1991 when he started to support the uprising of Zapatistas in Mexico. As part of the Edinburgh Group of Socialist Economists Holloway published and wrote for the journal *Common Sense*. The journal was published since 1987 and developed into an important source for "open and autonomous Marxist critical theory"⁵⁰. Until 1991 several present and former trustees had been somehow associated with the journal

⁴⁴ Nicola Barry, "Roger Kent", *Glasgow Herald*, 28 March 2013.

⁴⁵ Edinburgh City Archives, Lothian Regional Council, Director of Social Work Report [hereafter ECA/LRC/DSWR], 1980-81, no. 221.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Loughney, *Interview by author*.

⁴⁸ ECA/LRC/DSWR, 1983-84, no. 257.

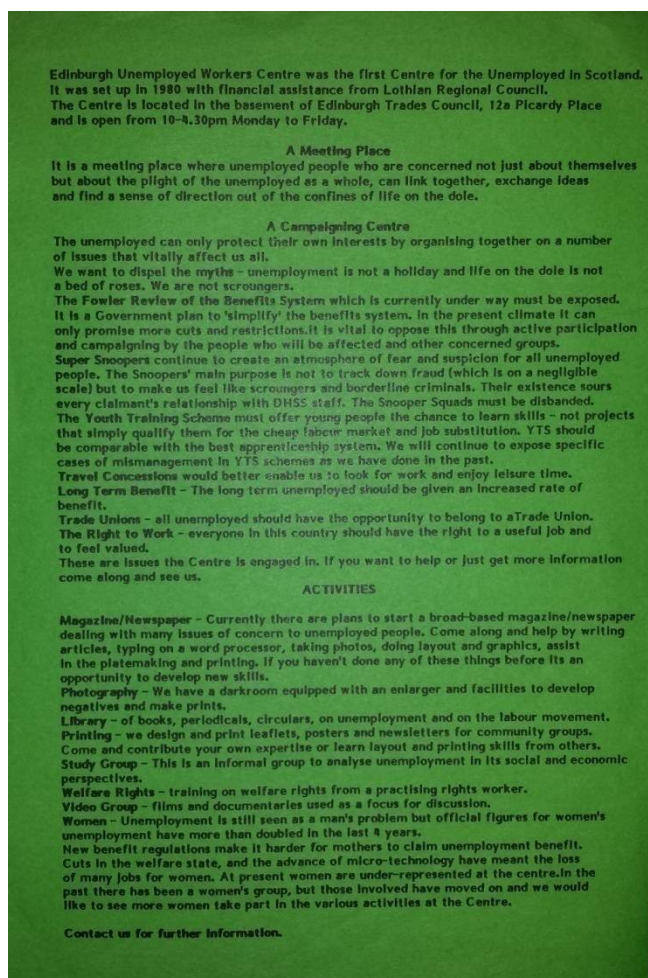
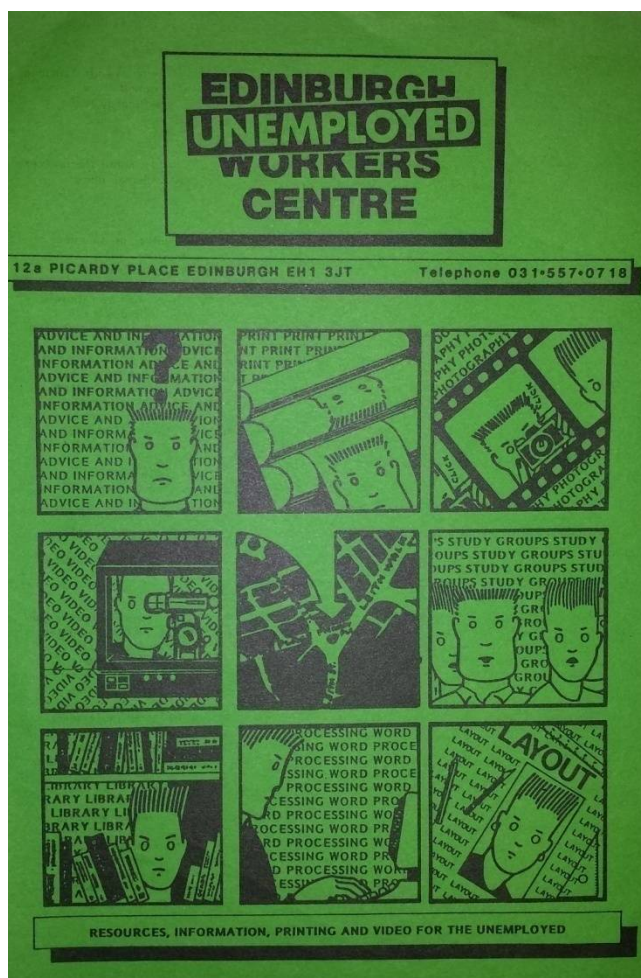
⁴⁹ Jason Allardyce, "Oi, Neil, I'm the bearded Trot", *The Sunday Times*, 4 September 2011, <https://redmolerising.wordpress.com/2011/09/05/alistair-darling-and-the-img/>; accessed 10 August 2017.

⁵⁰ *Common Sense*, "About", <http://commonsensejournal.org.uk/about/>; accessed 10 August 2017.

Common Sense. These trustees later took the side of the users when an open conflict arose among the trustees in 1992 and therefore ensured the users independent running of the centre until 1994.

According to the former organiser of the Dalkeith UWC, centres were "caught between two ideals – either to make the best of things, or to be a focal point of protest against the system that creates unemployment"⁵¹. Another publication by the same author shows that he saw the protest by unemployed under the lead of the trade union movement:

The unemployed cannot by themselves create a better society, because of their weak position in relation to the economy. It is really up to the Labour and Trade Union Movement to give a lead by uniting those in work with those out of work to the common cause of achieving a Socialist society, not in 5, 10 or 15 years time – but NOW.⁵²



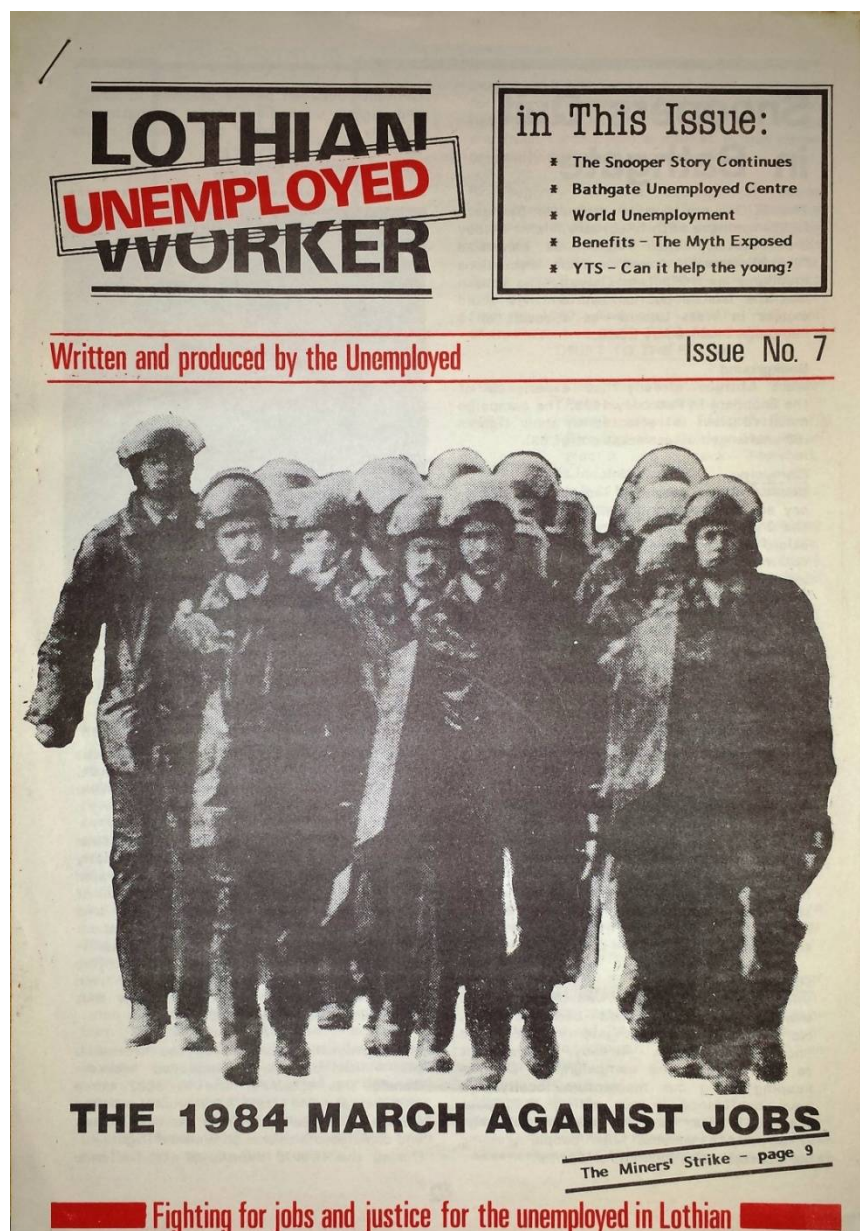
EUWC leaflet from around 1984⁵³.

⁵¹ Dick Vivian quoted in Chris Clark, "Voluntary Action on Unemployment", in *Scottish Government Yearbook 1987*, David McCrone (1987), pp. 174-202, p. 182.

⁵² SRL, Dick Vivian, "Featured Centre: Dalkeith", *Lothian Unemployed Worker*, issue 3 (1983).

⁵³ SRL, D: Edin Claimants (old), F: Claimants Struggles (light red), EUWC leaflet.

The Edinburgh TUC wanted the centres to support political campaigns of the trade union movement⁵⁴ and Unemployed Workers Associations were set up in UWCs which formed "the vital link between the Trade Union Movement and the unemployed"⁵⁵. For the first few years the centres were aligned to the trade union movement as previously envisioned. Edinburgh UWC's earliest publication, the Lothian Unemployed Worker, covered, for example, topics like the TUC organised People's March for Jobs in 1983⁵⁶ and perspectives taken in the articles were broadly in line with Labour and trade union narratives. Similarly, EUWC users first organised politically in the Unemployed Workers' Association.



Cover of the seventh issue of the Lothian Unemployed Worker in 1984⁵⁷. The sheet was produced in the EUWC by the paid worker and a group of unemployed.

⁵⁴ Loughney, *Interview by author*.

⁵⁵ Dick Vivian, "Featured Centre Dalkeith" (SRL).

⁵⁶ SRL, "Editorial", *Lothian Unemployed Worker*, issue 4, 1983.

⁵⁷ SRL, "Cover", *Lothian Unemployed Worker*, Issue 7, 1984.

3. The Emergence of an Anti-Authoritarian Movement

This section detects the emergence of a growing social and political movement which escaped Edinburgh's "atmosphere of respectability"⁵⁸. Since the mid-1980s the Edinburgh Unemployed Workers Centre slowly turned into a central space for an arising anti-authoritarian movement. Edinburgh anti-authoritarian groups demanded more horizontal and grassroots resistance against the variety of attacks on working class achievements. They aimed for political struggles outside the reach of the "good authority" which prevailed in the traditional labour organisation and the democratic institutions. A 1979 introduction into the left politics in Edinburgh quoted the interwar president of the Edinburgh trades council to describe a conservative infection of Edinburgh's working class:

Edinburgh has become to regard itself as the aristocrat among cities ... Workers themselves, unemployed as well as employed, tend to become infected with the prevailing atmosphere of respectability.⁵⁹

Anti-authoritarian activists in Edinburgh became increasingly connected to the EUWC throughout the 1980s. They were often influenced by the participation in the 1983-1984 miners' strike, were crucial actors within the claimants struggles and then strongly impacted local and supra-regional politics during the Anti-Poll Tax Movement. The EUWC turned into the central space of the anti-authoritarian movement in Edinburgh. Forms of participatory community organising from below were cultivated. These then fed into the powerful and highly successful form of organising against the Poll Tax. Similarly to the centre in Edinburgh, other UWCs in Britain became a base for anti-authoritarian members of the community who often organised within Claimants' Unions.

THE EUROPEAN AUTONOMOUS MOVEMENT

According to van der Steen squatting and autonomous movements are "active within every larger city in Europe"⁶⁰. From the student movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s the autonomous movement in the 1980s had inherited a focus on anti-authoritarian forms of organising, direct action tactics, localism and the "link between radical politics and subculture"⁶¹. A rejection of institutional politics within parties and trade unions was accompanied with a focus on participatory

⁵⁸ Campbell (ed.), *Alternative Edinburgh*, p. 108.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁶⁰ van der Steen, *The city is ours*, p. 19.

⁶¹ van der Steen, *The city is ours*, p. 8.

democracy.⁶² Specific about the 1980s was that rising unemployment and economic crisis had caused disillusionment among the new generation of activists and struggles became often much more "militant and embittered"⁶³. Struggles were often community-based and developed around centres where "political meetings were organised next to punk shows and alternative art exhibitions"⁶⁴.

The anti-authoritarian revolutionary movement in Edinburgh was rooted in the associations of anarchists, libertarian socialists and non-aligned activists which were often organised within several social movements and saw themselves as part of a revolutionary working class struggle against capitalism. Both in their analysis and political struggles they put a specific emphasis on the importance of direct actions and horizontal and participatory organising at the grassroots level. Edinburgh activists identified themselves as part of the autonomous movement in Europe⁶⁵. Exchange between different local struggles was often facilitated by long-term stays in other countries, collective organising with political exiles or translations of specific publications. Red Notes, for example, published translations of texts by the Italian Autonomia Movement⁶⁶. Influenced by these publications a later key EUWC user had decided to move to Italy and organise with an autonomia group in 1983. In the 1970s "youth and graduate unemployment" in Italy had massively increased to the point that "many young people consciously chose to avoid even looking for work"⁶⁷. Increasingly successful factory strikes, occupations and local protests peaked in 1977 when the state started its crackdown on the movement.

RESURGENCE OF ANARCHISM AND BREAK UP OF SOLIDARITY

Anarcho-punk and also anarchism in general were gaining strength in Britain in the early 1980s. In 1983, for example, the Britain-wide anarchist organisation and paper Class War formed. The "unexpected resurgence"⁶⁸ of anarchist organising in the early 1980s was accompanied with the reorientation of former Solidarity members and their spread into newly emerging local struggles. Solidarity was a Britain-wide libertarian socialist group that had accumulated highly sophisticated knowledge of social analysis and political organising. The group had been already founded in 1960 and its members were mainly anti-authoritarian dissenters of Trotskyist groups and later also dissenters of the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB). Solidarity and its intellectual leader Chris Pallis were strongly influenced by the co-founder of Socialisme ou Barbarie Cornelius Castoriadis, the Italian Autonomia Movement and the council communist critique of centralised party and trade union politics. The strongly hierarchically organised trade unions were identified as "a praetorian guard

⁶² Ibid., p. 11.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

⁶⁵ Mike, *Interview by author* (19.06.2017).

⁶⁶ Cuninghame, Patrick, "For an analysis of autonomia: An interview with Sergio Bologna", *Left History*, 7, no.2 (2000), pp. 89-102.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.91.

⁶⁸ Cross, "British anarchism", p.132.

always prepared to carry out the most common and revolting crimes, always against the emancipation and autonomy of the working class"⁶⁹. A former Solidarity member remembered the group to say that "'the left' is still 'part of the problem' of capitalism rather than 'part of the solution'"⁷⁰.

STOP THE CITY AND EDINBURGH DAY OF ACTION AS A FORMATIVE MOMENT

Bands like Crass and Poison Girls had sparked a strong anarchist current within the broader punk counter-culture movement in the late 1970s⁷¹. Anarcho-punks and the "radical wing of the nuclear disarmament movement"⁷² organised the first Stop the City protests in London in 1983. The idea behind this 'Carnival Against War, Oppression and Destruction' was to unify radical anti-authoritarian groups of various social movements.

The new generation of anti-authoritarian revolutionaries in Edinburgh had gathered within several other social movements of the time before it started to organise on its own in 1984. An Edinburgh Day of Action in December 1984 illustrates how the previously scattered groups began to unite. An invitation leaflet called for the actions against "nuclear power stations"⁷³, "porn", "exploitation of animals" and for "solidarity with miners". According to a report of the event "groups all over the country were contacted, miner's support groups and various other 'Edinburgh leftie', animal groups, etc."⁷⁴. Around 100 people had attended actions which ranged from stink-bombs to bricked windows and burning bins on the street. Radical feminist direct action groups often confronted the distribution of pornography and at the night of the day of action "cement was poured into the toilets"⁷⁵ of an Edinburgh porn cinema.

The Edinburgh punk subculture was an important factor in the setting up of an organised anti-authoritarian movement in Edinburgh. The Edinburgh Day of Action, for example, was organised by Little by Little which had been formed in 1984 by a group of mainly young punks. The second issue of its small magazine demanded on its opening page that "Edinburgh needs to get people together to put up some sort of resistance to the state, lets try and break down the barriers, set up something real in Edinburgh"⁷⁶. In this vein the Day of Action also reflects the wide range of local anti-authoritarian activists directly involved in or associated with Little by Little.

⁶⁹ Otto Rühle, quoted in Unknown author, "KAPD and the German revolution", *Solidarity (Aberdeen)*, issue 3 (1969), <https://libcom.org/library/solidarity-aberdeen-no3> ; accessed 10 August 2017.

⁷⁰ Spikymike, "Comment" (16:27), 17 February 2011, <https://libcom.org/library/beyond-fragments-feminism-making-socialism> ; accessed 10 August 2017.

⁷¹ Cross, "British anarchism", p. 136.

⁷² Rich Cross, "London's Burning", *Freedom*, September (2013), p. 11.

⁷³ SRL/Mike, Little by Little, *Edinburgh Day of Action*, 20. December 1984.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ SRL/Mike, Little by Little, *Day of Action Report* (1984).

⁷⁶ SRL/Mike, "Edinburgh", *Little by Little*, issue 2 (1984).

LITTLE BY LITTLE DAY OF ACTION REPORT

On December 20th in Edinburgh there was a "Day of Action" on the theme of "PEOPLES NEED NOT DECEASES CREED." @ groups all over the country were contacted, miner's support groups and various other 'Edinburgh leftie', animal groups, etc. A lot of flyposting was done beforehand, maps and leaflets were sent to various groups, accomodation and food was provided as was a sympathetic lawyer. The night before some people went out spray-painting and glueing locks in the city centre. The day started at 10 a.m. with people assembling at 9 a.m.. There was about 50 to start off with, but it ended up with nearer 100 by the middle of the day.

The first action was at the S.S.E.D. where a lot of people went inside with placards and leaflets and made a lot of noise and asked a lot of awkward questions and the fire alarm was set off. The police arrived a while and everybody dispersed to meet up again at a big newsagents that sells porn books. At first the shop was leafleted then a group went inside and grabbed piles of porn and threw them in to the street. Security guards grabbed somebody and beat them up. The police arrived and arrested 5 people, 3 of whom had only been leafleting. We thought at this point the police would have clicked on to what was happening as they took some leaflets, but they didn't. Everyone regrouped again and we decided to change our plans. We met up at an N.C.B. office but it was shut, so stink bombs were posted through the letter box. The inland revenue which is next door, had one of it's very large and expensive plate glass windows bricked. The next action was at Skincraft. The windows were sprayed and the shop was stink-bombed, and a bag of animal guts were thrown over the door. Everyone quickly moved on to the Wimpy, stink-bombs and smoke-bombs were launched into the food preparation area much to the dissatisfaction of the customers and staff, one of their large bins was also dragged into the street and set on fire. The police by this time still didn't know what was going on, because we always dispersed before they got there. The next action was a 'die-in' at a big shopping centre, it was organised by Y.C.N.D. who really aren't too bad (in Edinburgh, anyway). Everyone just lay about and chanted 'til the police arrived, and en masse made their way to another shopping centre and had a rampage through it leading the police a merry dance, then it was on to Jenners (the Edinburgh equivalent of Harrods), and

a rampage through there, stink-bombs, were thrown, things knocked over, lots of noise etc.. The police arrested 4 people. The rest of the demonstrators returned to our contact point to plan our next actions because by this time the police were following us. At about this time 2 people grabbed porn books in a newsagents, but they were caught by the owner who beat them up and were later arrested.

That was really the last action because the police were the keeping an eye on our contact point and a lot of people had drifted home. 11 people had been arrested and the lawyer was contacted to act for them. 4 were let out that night, the rest appeared in court the next morning with a lot of people there to support them. 2 were fined £50 each, the others were given a trial date, (another 2 have been given a £50 fine since then).

During the day lots of individual actions took place, stickers proclaiming goods were free were used in many shops, there was leafleting throughout the day and 2 clowns gave kids black flags and @ balloons! A wimmin's action took place that night at a porn cinema where cement was poured into the toilets and the place was painted.

On the whole the day was a success, but we'd like to criticise groups who didn't turn up because a lot of people wouldn't think twice about going to a London action, but obviously don't care about Scotland in general. Don't you think it's up to us all to support each other's actions (take a page from the miners' book), that way a lot more can be achieved. SCOTLAND IS NOT IN THE NORTH POLE !!! So we hope to see you at further actions.

Any replies, criticisms, donations for fines, in fact anything at all (within reason) to :-

LITTLE BY LITTLE
BOX @
FIRST OF MAY BOOKSHOP,
43 CANDLEMAKER ROW
EDINBURGH
SCOTLAND (NORTH POLE)

Report on the Edinburgh Day of Action in 1984 by Little by Little⁷⁷. The action was inspired by the Stop the City protests in London in 1983 and 1984.

The vibrant gay liberation movement in Edinburgh had developed an influential anti-authoritarian wing in the early 1970s which first organised in Edinburgh in the Gay

⁷⁷ SRL/Mike, Little by Little, *Day of Action Report* (1984).

Liberation Front and later in the "small discussion and analysis group"⁷⁸ Homosexuals for Socialist Revolution. Since 1978 anarchists and libertarian socialists also met during the resistance against the construction of the Torness nuclear power plant which was planned and build just 30 minutes outside Edinburgh. First conflicts between anti-authoritarian and more moderate protesters evolved around questions of direct action and non-violence⁷⁹. Furthermore, the Faslane Peace Camp was established as a permanent protest against the central depot of British nuclear weapons in 1982 and furthered the interaction.

PUNK SUBCULTURE AND DIRECT ACTION

Links between the anti-authoritarian activists and punk subculture were established through Edinburgh anarcho-punk bands like Oi Polloi, Political Asylum or A.O.A. from the mining community in Loanhead. "The aggro at a lot of early Exploited gigs"⁸⁰ made venues sceptical of local punk bands. In contrast to Glasgow, however, punk bands were not "unofficially banned"⁸¹ in Edinburgh and the city developed a vibrant punk scene. Oi Polloi members had started to identify themselves as an anarcho-punk band "by 1984, when we were doing miners' benefit gigs during the miners' strike and taking part in the Stop The City protests"⁸². Oi Polloi, whose involvement in the EUWC was portrayed by a 1994 documentary⁸³, argued for the political impact of punk bands:

You look at any political direct action group, like, say, an AFA [Anti-Fascist Action] group, or hunt sabs group, or a bunch of politically motivated squatters, or whatever, and there are almost always numerous punks or ex-punks involved. Punk music can open people's eyes, make them think and inspire them to action, and that has concrete results in the real world.⁸⁴

The particular focus on direct action enabled the direct participation of many people in political struggles and counteracted the often elitist character of institutional politics. The lead singer of the internationally renowned Edinburgh punk band Oi Polloi explained his understanding of direct action and politics in an interview:

We are anti-political in the sense that we do not want anything to do with party politics - politicians are all full of shit but we are not "non-political" as that is just impossible. Politics with a small p comes into every part of life - if you get paid fuck all while your boss gets a fortune that is politics, if you have to wait ages for a bus while some fucker cruises past in a Roller that is

⁷⁸ Campbell (ed.), *Alternative Edinburgh*.

⁷⁹ Alistair Scott, Mike Sharples, On Site Torness, 1979, video, <http://movingimage.nls.uk/film/8500> ; accessed 10. August 2017.

⁸⁰ Ian Glasper, *The Day the Country Died: A History of Anarcho Punk 1980–1984* (Oakland, 2014), p. 436.

⁸¹ Unknown Author, "When punk and anarchy ruled the uk", *The Scotsman*, 23 October 2007.

⁸² Glasper, *The Day the Country Died*, p. 435.

⁸³ Brian Tipa, *Global Dissent – Anarchist Music and Actions* (1994), video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBW1I1MTgyQ> ; accessed 10. August 2017.

⁸⁴ Glasper, *The Day the Country Died*, p. 440.

politics, if the tax on beer goes up so the government can buy more bombs that is politics, if your local hospital gets shut down or the cops try out their new gas spray on you or whatever that is all politics. I can sympathise with folk who sometimes feel that everything is too heavy and that they just don't want to think about it all and just get drunk but that is exactly what the government want you to do. (...) if you want real fun you have to go for it - and that doesn't mean boring meetings or shit like that (...) Getting involved in direct action and so on can be a lot of fun too - hunt sabotage for instance can be a lot of fun.⁸⁵

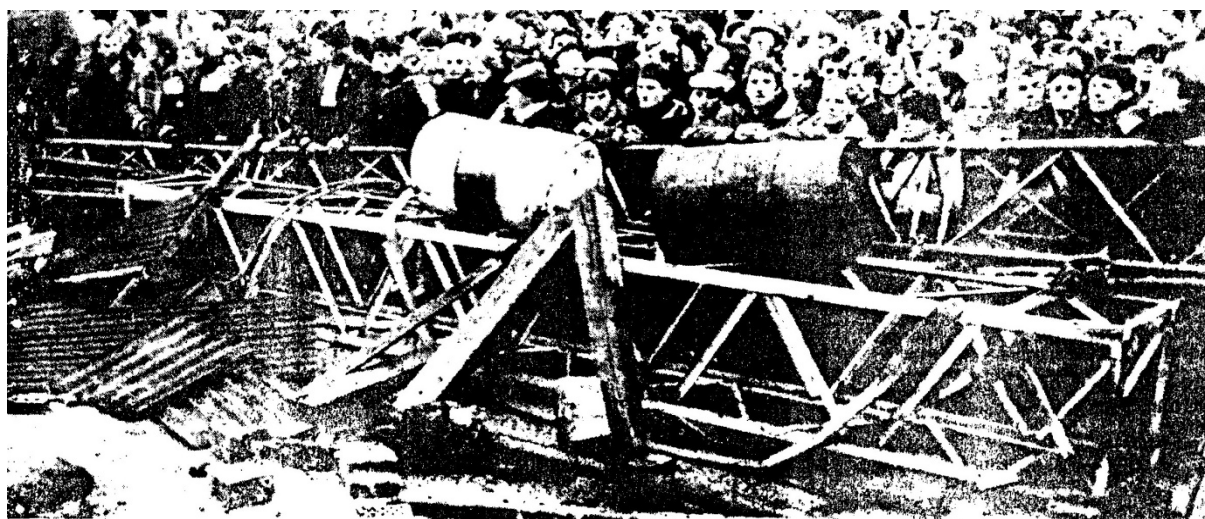
The rejection of traditional politics, the identification of the everyday life as political and the importance of collective direct action helped to loosely unite the anti-authoritarian groups of different social movements.

⁸⁵ Oi Polloi, *Interview by Punkoiuk* (26.04.2003), <http://www.punkoiuk.co.uk/interviews/oipolloi.htm> ; accessed 10 August 2017.

4. The Miners' Strike as a Formative Experience

The one year long 1984 Miners' Strike was in many ways an inspiration for the Edinburgh movement. The Monktonhall and Bilston Glen collieries just outside Edinburgh were sites of powerful confrontations during the strike. Furthermore, Lothian miners and activists also travelled to strongholds of the strike like Yorkshire.

Several mining communities organised in informal assemblies outside the union structures and militant miners all over the country used direct action tactics to destroy property of mining companies and increase the pressure on the companies⁸⁶. Mining communities were characterised by a strong working class culture and served Edinburgh unemployed and other activists as powerful examples of communities in resistance. One activist, for example, remembered a situation where a whole mining community besieged a police station until a detained miner was released from the station⁸⁷. Mass picketing, secondary and flying picketing and twinning of communities furthermore served as inspiration for future struggles. Non-mining communities showed enormous solidarity with their twinned mining communities and were able to ease the hardship of striking communities. Besides this experience of people's power and solidarity the strike also uncovered the brutality and political position of state violence, the treacherous union leadership and the twisted coverage of the bourgeois media. Latter lead to the publishing of the inspiring newsheet *Counter Information*.



Barricades protect miners against the police in Denby Grange⁸⁸. Flying pickets from Kellingley Colliery support neighbouring miners with fireworks, sticks and stones.

⁸⁶ Unknown author, "Direct Action from the 'grassroots'", *Counter Information*, issue 2 (1984).

⁸⁷ Bob, *Interview by author*.

⁸⁸ Photo taken from *Counter Information*, Issue 3 (1984).

COUNTER INFORMATION

Anti-authoritarian activists began to publish Counter Information⁸⁹ to spread information about the often unreported and more militant tactics of flying picketing, the extension of the strike to other sectors of the economy and the use of direct action tactics. Counter Information was published between 1984 and 2004 and solely financed by its editors and donations. The newsheet was published by a group of activists from the Edinburgh UWC, Glasgow and central Scotland, including former members of Solidarity⁹⁰. It became a major anti-authoritarian newsheet with a "print run of 12,000 minimum"⁹¹ and a free Britain and worldwide distribution. The aim of Counter Information collective was

to spread knowledge of resistance to oppression in all aspects of life. We encourage this resistance to aim for the complete overthrow of all relations of domination and submission, including the class system, the oppression of women and many other existing aspects of oppression and exploitation.⁹²

Counter Information not only reported these incidents where British workers, unemployed or housewives supported the strike but also stressed an internationalist perspective on the strike. Reports on how other European workers obstructed the transport of coal to Britain or on the killing of striking South African miners⁹³ counteracted a national framing of the economic crisis as a British crisis. One of the EUWC users involved in Counter Information remembers that

Counter Information was very internationalist of course and we saw struggles in Britain as being part of a global anti-capitalist movement and yeah Counter Information was linked to the centre in that there were some of us in Counter Information involved in the Centre and Counter Information was actually often produced physically on the Centre's computers.⁹⁴

Miners' direct actions were listed "in the hope of encouraging more such actions"⁹⁵ and miners were encouraged to organise independently from the union leadership. An article called for the establishment of "regular meetings in all areas, in which everyone – miners, women, unemployed, school students, other workers – could participate in deciding how to take the struggle forward"⁹⁶. Women, for example, had already established Wives Support Groups. In Edinburgh a group of women within Little by Little organised pickets with women from the local mining communities.

⁸⁹ All issues of Counter Information have been digitalised by the archive The Sparrow's Nest and are accessible on their website, <http://thesparrowsnest.org.uk/search.php?query=counter+information&logic=and&digital=0&digital=0> ; accessed 18. November 2017.

⁹⁰ Louis Robertson [Bob Miller], *Recollections of my time in Solidarity* (2006), <https://libcom.org/library/recollections-solidarity-louis-robertson> ; accessed 10. August 2017.

⁹¹ Stevie Gallagher, "Counter Information", in ed. John Covzin, *Radical Glasgow: a skeletal sketch of Glasgow's radical tradition* (Glasgow, 2003).

⁹² Unknown author, *Counter Information*, issue 12, (1986).

⁹³ Unknown author, "Same the Whole World Over", *Counter Information*, issue 1, (1984).

⁹⁴ Mike, *Interview by author*.

⁹⁵ Unknown author, "Direct Action from the 'grassroots'", *Counter Information*, issue 2 (1984).

⁹⁶ Unknown author, "A community of struggle", *Counter Information*, issue 4 (1984).

COUNTER INFORMATION

6th OCTOBER 1984



CHRONOLOGY

DIRECT ACTION from the 'grassroots'

TENS OF THOUSANDS OF MINERS AND THEIR FAMILIES ARE TAKING POSITIVE AND IMAGINATIVE DIRECT ACTION TO FURTHER THEIR STRUGGLE. HERE WE LIST SOME OF THESE ACTIVITIES, IN THE HOPE OF ENCOURAGING MORE SUCH ACTIONS.

3RD AUGUST. 200 pickets raid a Coal Board transport depot at South Normanton in Derbyshire, damaging 14 lorries and 2 coaches.

(source Scotsman 4/8, Black Flag 20/8)

8TH AUGUST. Using CB radio to co-ordinate their actions, hundreds of miners attack Coal Board property at 3 places in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire. First target is Silverhill Colliery, where NCB office windows are smashed, strikebreakers cars are damaged, and a police vehicle rammed. Next stop Harworth Colliery, 20 miles away. More damage to NCB and scabs property.

Across into Yorkshire for the final target as strikers smash £2,000 worth of windows at the 11 storey Coal Board offices in Doncaster.

(Information: Black Flag 20/8 and 3/9, Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism (FRFI) Sept., Class War)

12TH AUGUST. 5 Coal Board coaches being fitted out for strike breaking are destroyed by fire at J. Thompson engineering works at Pleasley Vale, North Derbyshire.

(Information: Black Flag 3/9, FRFI Sept., Guardian 14/8)

22ND AUGUST. Mass actions by pickets throughout Yorkshire. At Markham Main colliery miners use a crane from the pit yard to block the road with concrete blocks, and hijack an excavator to help build the barricade. At the colliery yard pickets smash TV cameras, floodlights and office windows.

In nearby Armthorpe pickets build a large barricade and set it alight. Police cut off the village, baton pickets, break into people's homes, and generally terrorise the whole community.

Pickets at Bentley Colliery barricade the pit entrance with an overturned colliery van and Coal Board bus. NCB property in the Colliery is damaged. Miners build a barricade and set it ablaze at the gates of the Yorkshire Main colliery, Edlington.

In Durham a mass picket successfully prevents a solitary scab entering Easington colliery.

(Information: Guardian and Scotsman 23/8, Black Flag Autumn 84)

30TH AUGUST. South Wales miners take direct action to block coal supplies to steel workers. They seize a transporter bridge and use it to prevent ships passing up the River Usk, Newport.

Simultaneously 103 miners occupy a British Steel jetty at Port Talbot and climb onto cranes being used to unload coal.

(Information: FRFI Sept., The Miner 21/9)

2ND SEPTEMBER. A Coal Board office is demolished with a bulldozer in an overnight attack. £250,000 worth of damage caused at Thurncroft Colliery, near Rotherham.

(Information: Guardian and Scotsman 3/9)

5TH SEPTEMBER. Pickets fell trees to block the road used by police to bring in scabs to Tilmanstone Colliery, Kent.

(Information: Guardian 6/9)

10TH SEPTEMBER. The main A645 road is closed for over 2 hours as around 4,000 pickets attempt to prevent 2 strikebreakers from entering Kellingley Colliery, North Yorkshire.

(Information: Daily Telegraph 7/9)

21ST SEPTEMBER. An estimated 6,000 pickets take action at Maltby Colliery as 7 construction workers enter the Yorkshire pit. Miners barricade and block the road into the colliery for 3 hours. The police say they faced "a continuous barrage of missiles".

Miners succeed in limiting arrests to 5, by retreating when police advance, then resuming the offensive.

(Information: Daily Telegraph, Daily Record)

22ND SEPTEMBER. 40 pickets and supporters burst into a police station at Rochester, Kent in a bid to rescue a comrade who'd been arrested and detained. In the ensuing melee 4 people are arrested.

(Information: Radio News)

24TH SEPTEMBER. More mass action at Maltby Colliery near Rotherham as 5,000 pickets besiege the pit.

(Information: Glasgow Evening Times)

25th SEPTEMBER. Pickets and Union officials persuade a miner to return home after he went into work at Wooley Colliery.

26th SEPTEMBER. Miners block roads into Wooley Colliery with rubble and an excavator, to prevent any strikebreaker entering.

(Information: The Express 28/9)

26th SEPTEMBER. Before dawn 300 striking miners march through the Kellingley Colliery gates and take over the Yorkshire pit for more than 6 hours. They occupy the coal preparation plant and the two winding towers. Police arrest 43 miners as they leave, but they are later released.

(Information: Yorkshire Evening Post 26/9, Newline 28/9)

Cover of the second issue of Counter Information in 1984.

CONFLICTS WITH THE OFFICIAL TRADE UNION LEADERSHIP

A long-year activist of the EUWC who had just come back from Italy during the miners' strike remembered divisions between the NUM leadership and more radical groups of miners:

There was big flying pickets coming through from other more militant areas like Ayrshire and also I did meet individuals very active in the miners' strike that were still battling to take the struggle forward and interestingly they were very critical of the union and the union hierarchy. Even though the Scottish leader Mick McGahey was in the Communist Party and had the reputation as a militant in a lot of practical ways they kind of kept a tight reign on the strike and didn't encourage mass picketing or flying picketing or extending the struggle to shut down other parts of the economy.⁹⁷

THE GOVERNMENTS CRACKDOWN

Not only had the warm winter weakened the bargaining power of the miners. The government's repression of the strike had been neatly prepared in advance and served as a final crackdown on the miners' political power which had been the stronghold of workers' power. By the development of "new policing initiatives"⁹⁸, an increase in coal imports and the recruitment of non-unionised transport companies the government planned ahead to prevent another state of emergency and defeat as the previous miners' strikes in 1972 and 1974. When large-scale closures of publicly owned pits were announced in spring 1984 the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) called for a Britain-wide strike. The strike lasted until spring 1985 when the last of the massively reduced mining communities went back to work and admitted defeat.

⁹⁷ Mike, *Interview by author*.

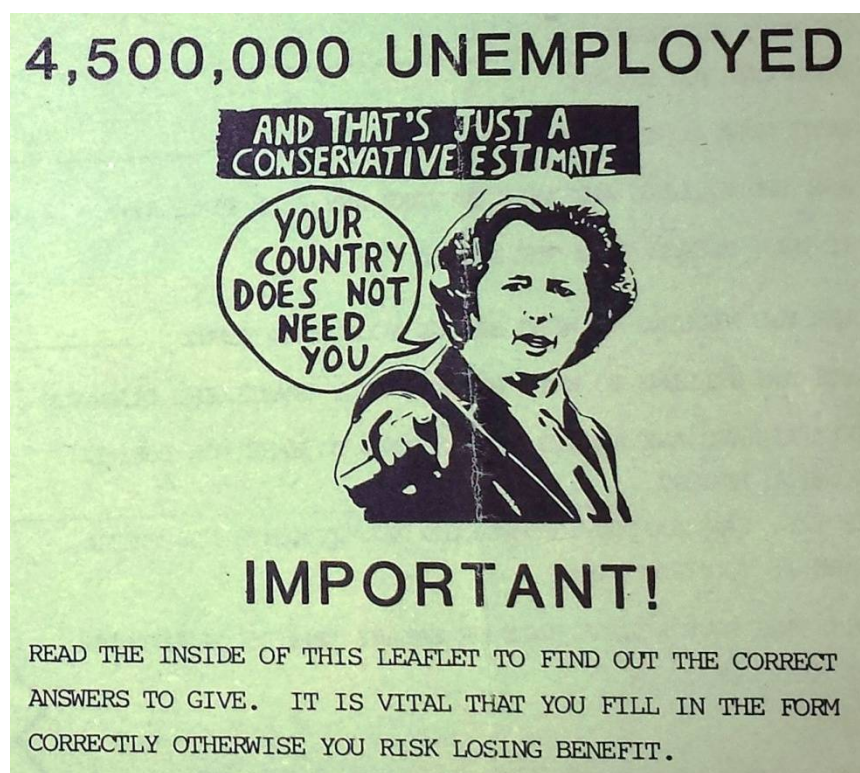
⁹⁸ Jim Phillips, "Workplace Conflict and the Origins of the 1984–85 Miners' Strike in Scotland", *Twentieth Century British History*, 20 (2009), pp. 152–172, p. 159.

5. Claimants' Struggles

In the early 1980s the conservative government met the increasing costs of unemployment with the abolishment of earning-related benefits and the containment of administration costs. The increasing workload for benefit office workers was not matched with new staff and wages were kept low.

The result of both these factors – increased workload and demotivation of dole workers - combined with the fact that for most people there were few if any 'suitable employment' opportunities, was that the pressures on unemployed people to find work diminished substantially.⁹⁹

This led to a "significant relaxation of the benefits regime"¹⁰⁰ in the early 1980s. Towards the second half of the 1980s the state, however, tried to counteract this relaxation by a harsher regime against the unemployed. The implementation of Norman Fowler's green paper in 1985 introduced several schemes which forced unemployed to work for their benefits in community projects or for private companies.



Leaflet of the Tyneside Unemployed Workers Movement from 1986¹⁰¹. Different centres and Claimants Unions often shared their latest materials.

⁹⁹ Aufheben, "Dole autonomy versus the re-imposition of work: analysis of the current tendency to workfare in the UK", Aufheben (1998), <https://libcom.org/library/dole-autonomy-aufheben> ; accessed 10. August 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ SRL, D:Edin Claimants (old), F: Claimants Struggles (light red), Tyneside Unemployed Workers Centre, 1986.

UNEMPLOYED ORGANISE AND RESIST

When Thatcher had visited the Liverpool district Toxteth after the 1981 riots she was wandering "how people could live in such circumstances without trying to clear up the mess"¹⁰². In 1985 she urged unemployed to stop being "moaning minnies"¹⁰³ and pull up their socks. What she probably did not have in mind was that many unemployed had actually stopped moaning and started to clear up the mess by organising collectively. Organising of unemployed within Claimants Unions was increasing. Claimants Unions were often strongly connected to the anti-authoritarian movement.

CLAIMANTS UNIONS

A year after the first Claimants Union had been established in Birmingham in 1969 the Federation of Claimants Unions was founded. In only a few years the federation included 70-90 Claimants Unions¹⁰⁴. Only claimants could become members of the unions and the unions had to be entirely run by claimants themselves. The term claimant included not only unemployed but also pensioners, chronically ill or any other groups which made claims to the state. Conferences, summer camps and publications facilitated its affiliated unions throughout the 1970s and 1980s with a non-hierarchical space for exchange and collective action. Toru Yamamori argues that the institutional sexism within the benefits offices led amongst other reasons to women becoming "the centre of the movement"¹⁰⁵. Claimants Unions were characterised by their "highly participatory democracy"¹⁰⁶. In this vein John Barker remembered that it had taught him to resist as a community¹⁰⁷. Before he was imprisoned for participating in the Angry Brigade he had been one of the founders of the West London Claimants Union and taken part "in the build-up of the movement" which he later recalled as "the most important thing he had ever done"¹⁰⁸. During the 1980's many Claimants Unions began to organise within the newly established UWCs. The resistance against unemployment in the 1980s never became as powerful as in the 1930s. Spectacular hunger marches during the 1930s had been accompanied by powerful grass-roots struggles "where the unemployed themselves ran the show" and "a radical participatory democracy ruled"¹⁰⁹. In the most detailed article on unemployed organising in the 1980s in Britain Paul Bagguley gives different reasons for the different response of the unemployed. His first argument is that the protests of the 1930s led governments to obstruct protests by a) centralising the decisions on social security and b) tightly codifying welfare rights in inaccessible legal language

¹⁰² Margaret Thatcher, quoted in McSmith, *No such thing as society*, p. 88.

¹⁰³ Margaret Thatcher, quoted in McSmith, *No such thing as society*, p. 233.

¹⁰⁴ Rose, "Up Against The Welfare State", p. 194.

¹⁰⁵ Toru Yamamori, "A Feminist Way to Unconditional Basic Income: Claimants Unions and Women's Liberation", *Basic Income Studies*, 9 (2015), pp. 1-24, p.5.

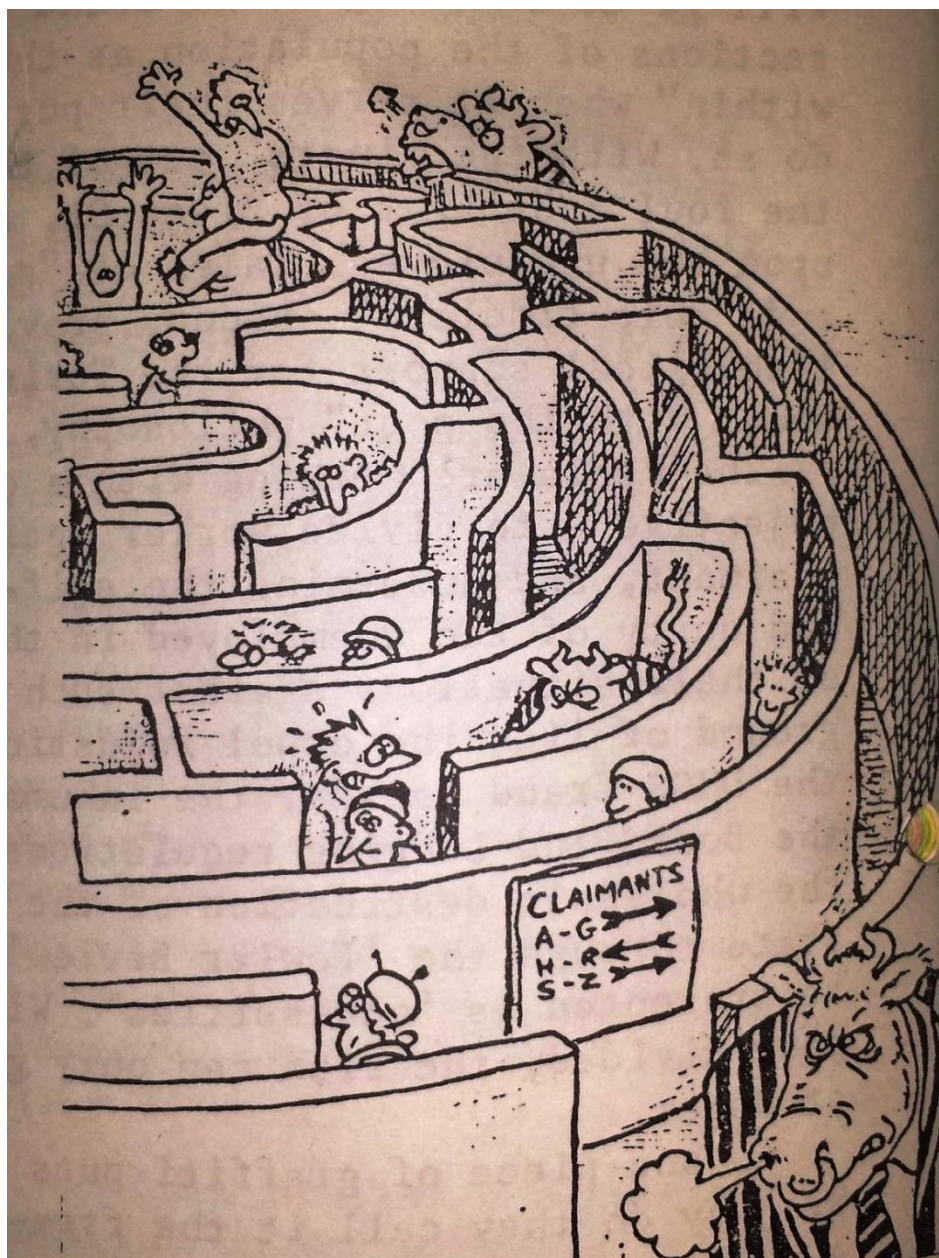
¹⁰⁶ Rose, "Up Against The Welfare State", p. 185.

¹⁰⁷ Gordon Carr, Christie Stuart, *The Angry Brigade: A History of Britain's First Urban Guerilla Group* (Oakland, 2010), p.42.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.42.

¹⁰⁹ Bagguley, "Protest, Acquiescence and the Unemployed", p.451.

and procedures¹¹⁰. He then argues that "the knowledge of organizing and mobilizing people politically" and the "unshakeable belief in the absolute correctness and righteousness" of working class resistance against capitalism had massively decreased. Besides the changing state institutions and the loss of political and cultural resources Bagguley identifies the strong control of unemployed organising in UWCs through the state and union officials as a further reason for the lower levels of unemployed resistance in the 1980s.



The illustration was published in 1985 in the second issue of the *Hard Times* – the newsheet of the Oxford Claimants Union in 1985¹¹¹.

SPARCE RESEARCH ON CLAIMANTS UNIONS

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp.446-7.

¹¹¹ SRL: D: , F: (), Oxford Unemployed Workers & Claimants Union, *Hard Times*, Issue 2 (1985/1986), p.4.

In line with the general marginalisation of the Claimants Union Movement in social and historical research Bagguley fails to look into the vibrant Claimants Union Movement and its common use of UWCs as their organising base¹¹². Similarly, a 1998 analysis of workfare schemes in *Aufheben* only marginally deals with the Claimants Unions¹¹³. In 1972 Hillary Rose published one of the very few articles on Claimants Unions in which she sharply analysis the emergence and character of the early Claimants Union Movement¹¹⁴. It takes another 40 years until Tori Yamamori publishes another article on the Claimants Union. In his article he looks into the unions' prominent claim for an unconditional basic income during the 1970s and 1980s from a feminist perspective¹¹⁵. Furthermore, Claimants Unions are marginally mentioned in other publications on topics like the Angry Brigade¹¹⁶ or Mental Patients Unions¹¹⁷. However, the Claimants Union Movement, especially in their struggles and organising in the 1980s, poses a major research gap since no further research has been conducted.

INDEPENDENT ORGANISING WITHIN THE EUWC

Since around 1984 a group of users formed in the Edinburgh centre who often preferred to receive benefits and work in the centre over finding paid work at any price. They began to argue for the control of the unemployed struggle by the unemployed themselves. This was explained with the particularity of the situation of unemployed as well as with a general suspicion of authorities. Users tended to identify trade union officials and Labour Party politicians as forces which personally gained from containing the autonomous resistance of the people they represented. The editorial to the first edition of *The Raw Edge* in 1986 argued that "to the unions we offer a challenge. (...) We are not campaign or electoral fodder but thinking, acting human beings with concerns, desires and aims of our own!"¹¹⁸. Although one article in the issue also called for the support of the Labour Party other articles and illustrations told the anarchist history behind the first of May protests or proposed the smashing of the state.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s Lothians Oppose Social Security (LOSS) was a claimants action group active in Edinburgh and the wider region. Besides the EUWC users also paid workers and volunteers from the Citizens' Rights Office (CRO) were prominent members of the coalition. The CRO was a counselling and research centre

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ *Aufheben*, "Dole autonomy versus the re-imposition of work: analysis of the current tendency to workfare in the UK", *Aufheben* (1998), <https://libcom.org/library/dole-autonomy-aufheben> ; accessed 10. August 2017.

¹¹⁴ Hillary Rose, "Up Against The Welfare State: The clamants unions", in *Socialist Register*, 10 (1973), pp. 179-203.

¹¹⁵ Yamamori, "A Feminist Way", pp. 1-24.

¹¹⁶ Gordon Carr, Christie Stuart, *The Angry Brigade*.

¹¹⁷ see for example Survivors History Group, Survivor Timeline, <http://studymore.org.uk/mpu.htm> ; accessed 25. September 2017.

¹¹⁸ Edinburgh City Library [hereafter ECL]/qYHD5765/11 03021 28, "Editorial", *The Raw Edge*, issue 1, 1986

which had been founded in 1971 and was connected to the more research oriented Child Poverty Action Group. Its members were crucial for the foundation of the EUWC and in friendly cooperation throughout the 1980s until both the CRO and the EUWC had their funding withdrawn from the council in 1991. In September 1985 LOSS organised a week of action against the Fowler Review and occupied the Scottish Conservative Party headquarter in Edinburgh. In 1986 EUWC users then founded the Edinburgh Benefit Rights Action Group (EdinBRAG) and participated in the organisation of the Edinburgh Festival against Fowler in spring 1986. Unemployed activists were fed up with the government's attacks on claimants and commented that "the Tories are introducing changes to their Harassment programme faster than we can keep up"¹¹⁹.

After these first years of protest against the harshening of the benefits system EUWC users began to organise as claimants in the Edinburgh and Lothian Claimants Unions. The Lothian Claimants Union consisted, in contrast to LOSS, exclusively of claimants. The Lothian Claimants Union was a union of the Edinburgh, Midlothian, East Lothian and West Lothian Claimants Unions and the Bathgate Unemployed Workers Association. The Midlothian and East Lothian unions were based in the Dalkeith and Musselburgh UWCs and the Edinburgh and Lothian unions were based in the Edinburgh UWC. The Edinburgh and Lothian Claimants' Unions gained a prominent role within the Britain-wide Federation of Claimants Unions. It soon became the Scottish contact for the Federation of Claimants Unions, was frequently covered in its bulletin *The New Scrounger* and organised its Britain-wide conference in 1988¹²⁰. The Social Security Act had just been passed in 1986 and the first pilot schemes had been introduced. The Lothian Claimants' Union then produced a leaflet with the right answers to a newly introduced availability for work test which was reprinted in the bulletin of the Federation of Claimants Unions¹²¹. The *New Scrounger* also reprinted the LCU leaflet against the introduction of the Job Training Scheme and the editor noted that "once again, Lothian CU has cantered home ten lengths ahead of the field with a splendid leaflet"¹²². The Edinburgh and Lothian Claimants' Unions "were run by claimants and were autonomous and though they may have got some funding they didn't rely on funding in the same way the actual centres did"¹²³. The activism within the Claimants Union Movement accelerated towards the end of the 1980s and an activist described the Claimant Unions in Lothian as "quite a vibrant movement for a good number of years"¹²⁴. The extensive

¹¹⁹ SRL, D: Edinburgh Claimants: Archive Material F: no label (black ring binder), Unknown author, "Job Training Scheme", *The New Scrounger*, issue 4 (1986).

¹²⁰ SRL, D: Edinburgh Claimants: Archive Material F: no label (black ring binder), Unknown author, *The New Scrounger*, issue 6 (1988).

¹²¹ SRL, D: Edinburgh Claimants: Archive Material F: no label (black ring binder), Unknown author, "New Dole Test", *The New Scrounger*, issue 3 (1986).

¹²² Unknown author, "Job Training Scheme", *The New Scrounger*, issue 4 (1986).

¹²³ Mike, *Interview by author*.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

local and Britain-wide actions of the Claimants Unions are well documented in the Scottish Radical Library.

RESISTANCE AGAINST FRAUD INVESTIGATION TEAMS

Besides their everyday practice of mutual assistance in claiming benefits Edinburgh claimants focused on direct actions against the implementation of the Fowler Review, the massive increase of so-called workfare schemes, the fraud investigation teams or similar attacks on the unemployed.



This illustration was published in Counter Information's first issue on claimants struggles¹²⁵. It was connected to an article about the increasing harassment by DHSS Fraud Squat (Snoopers)

Every year millions of benefits stayed unclaimed because claimants didn't want to face the hassle with the benefit system or just didn't know about their rights. Nonetheless, the Department of Health and Social Security was increasingly putting unemployed under general suspicion of fraud and rapidly expanded the repression of claimants by the formation of benefit fraud teams. In this vein, an 1985 article in Counter Information called them the "Public Enemy No. 1" because "their sole remit is to SAVE MONEY at the claimant's expense"¹²⁶. Fraud team workers were contemptuously called snoopers and one group they especially focused on were single parents due to the cohabitation rule¹²⁷. In practice this meant that women were especially targeted. Neighbours were interviewed and sexual relationships of single mother investigated to find out whether they 'deserved' to receive single parent benefits.

The Lothian Claimants Union reported in an Counter Information article about their actions against 'snoopers':

¹²⁵ Unknown author, "Claimants Beware!", *Counter Information*, issue 7 (1985).

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ see: Yamamori, "A Feminist Way", pp.5-7.

some of us from the Claimants Union and the Unemployed Workers Centre got together to stop this. We photographed the snoopers and printed the photos on leaflets and posters we distributed to claimants. We challenged the snoopers and up to August 28th, had succeeded in chasing them off the street on five occasions.¹²⁸

As one member of the Lothian Claimants Union remembers these direct actions against benefit workers became one of the underlying dividing lines between activists in the Edinburgh UWC:

in the Claimants Unions there was a certain amount of tension between people that were more militant with a small "m" and less militant which would often have been related to whether or not they were sympathetic to the Labour Party. Like myself and a good number of the others were very much in favour of where necessary that there should be direct action. For example, direct action in confronting snoopers.¹²⁹

REFUSAL OF WORKFARE AND WORK FOR BOSSES

A 1986 discussion paper by EUWC users argued that unemployment was "inbuilt into the economic system" and that it was not to be cured anymore by economic upturns. The few jobs available for the growing number of long-term unemployed were "poor quality jobs"¹³⁰. The introduced schemes for unemployed often did not result in a job or offer valuable training but meant cheap labour for employers and an improved unemployment statistic for the government. Activists identified the large-scale introduction of schemes as a change from welfare to workfare which aimed "to force the unemployed to work for our dole"¹³¹. Refusal became an important tactic of resistance for claimants. The collective action against work schemes was often organised through local Claimants Unions. The Youth Training Scheme was introduced in 1983 and aimed at forcing young unemployed school leavers into workfare. The Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce was occupied and school students went in strike in protest of the scheme. Six months after the introduction of the Job Training Scheme in 1985 less than 20 per cent of the expected 110 000 unemployed participated in the scheme of which again 60 per cent left early¹³². Scheme workers in Edinburgh further organised¹³³ and even received funding from the regional council. They organised an Anti-Slavery Rally in Princess street¹³⁴ and formed the Edinburgh Campaign against Workfare. In Edinburgh and many other cities the launching event of the new Employment Training scheme was sabotaged in 1988 and a week of action

¹²⁸ Unknown author, "Snoopers on the Run", *Counter Information*, issue 16 (1987).

¹²⁹ Mike, *Interview by author*.

¹³⁰ SRL, D: TCBS, F: Trustees Meeting Mins. (red), Discussion Paper, May '86.

¹³¹ Unknown author, "Action Against Slavery", *Counter Information*, issue 17 (1987).

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ SRL, D: Edinburgh Claimants, F: outside folder, Edinburgh Campaign Against Workfare Minutes, 20 June 1988.

¹³⁴ Unknown author, "Strikes hit E.T.", *Counter Information*, issue 20 (1988).

in September aimed at pressurising community projects, workplaces and unions to refuse any cooperation with the new scheme¹³⁵.

RESIST COMPULSORY JOBPLAN

DEMONSTRATE

TUES 10TH AUGUST 10.00 A.M
UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT OFFICE,
HIGH RIGGS, NEAR TOLLCROSS.

SAY NO TO WORKFARE

Leaflet by Edinburgh claimants from 1993¹³⁶.

A new group of long-term unemployed emerged in the 1980s whose opportunities to enter permanent full time employment were limited and who adapted to the new situation by developing a strong anti-workerist attitude. Whereas some radicalised

¹³⁵ Unknown author, "E.T. Blasted", *Counter Information*, issue 21 (1988).

¹³⁶ SRL, D: TCBS, F: University of Edinburgh (black ring binder), Resist Compulsory Jobplan, 1993.

students in the 1970s had decided to leave academia and work on the shop-floor level radicalised students in the 1980s were more inclined to only enter the workplace infrequently and concentrated their political involvement on struggles within the wider working class community.



SHOCK.....HORROR.....how did THEY get in? Consternation for the bosses as anti slave labour protestors disrupt the launch of the Employment Training Scheme at the Crest Hotel, Edinburgh, on 1st September.

Photo taken from Counter Information's 21st issue in 1988¹³⁷. E.T. refers to the newly introduced workfare scheme Employment Training.

One of the EUWC trustees remembered that users during the mid-1980s started to not look for work anymore and "didn't want to work"¹³⁸. EUWC users often worked 40 hour weeks in the centre, produced video documentaries, offered photography or computer classes to other unemployed, planned demonstrations against the introduction of new schemes, accompanied other claimants to the benefits office or printed leaflets for the Anti-Poll Tax Movement towards the end of the 1980s. Users developed, however, a strong attitude against wage labour and one user described how this had actually created tensions between more Labour Party oriented members of the Lothian Claimants Union and the anti-authoritarian users of the Edinburgh centre:

we didn't agree with the left-wing slogan of "the right to work" because we say that's just the right to be exploited and we would argue that the majority of jobs in capitalism were not actually socially useful and people were essentially exploited to make money for a boss or they were being used to prop up the power of the state. So, that was certainly quite a big difference between our approach and more mainstream trade union labour party approach.¹³⁹

Users were aware that many people were economically not able to refuse wage labour. He further explains his vision of work and revolutionary change:

The difference between those of us who were actually against wage labour and actually believed that it was not enough whatsoever just that everybody should have a job. You know, what we actually envisioned to do was to transform work and we needed workers and the community to control work

¹³⁷ Unknown author, "E.T. Blasted", *Counter Information*, Issue 21 (1988).

¹³⁸ Loughney, *Interview by author*.

¹³⁹ Mike, *Interview by author*.

and for work to be something satisfying and creative - doing something useful to meet needs in the widest sense not just working through a boss.¹⁴⁰

Another former user explained his anti-workerist attitude which he had developed during this time:

I think work is a major form of social control so I would much rather see people be unemployed but not marginalized. (...) I think 'work' is a way of atomising people, to keep them in their house, in a low paid job. Most people actually live under quite precarious working conditions, but they've been sold this illusion that somehow they're actually aspirational middle-class, self-actualisers, or whatever.¹⁴¹

SOLIDARITY OF DEVIANT BENEFIT OFFICE AND LOCAL ADMINISTRATION WORKERS

Actions against snoopers often relied on benefit office workers leaking the dates when the fraud units were scheduled to operate. The Lothian Claimants Union established good contact with one sympathetic benefit office worker¹⁴² but did not manage to get full union support. In London, however, unionised office workers left their offices in protest when the fraud units arrived and in Glasgow unionised workers decided to refuse any cooperation with the fraud officers¹⁴³.

Independent claimants struggles were also supported from within the social work department. The formation of the Lothian Claimants Union, for example, had been initiated by the welfare rights team of Lothian's Social Work Department. After the regional elections in 1986 had resulted in a strong Labour majority in the council its welfare team invited several welfare rights and unemployed groups to a forming meeting of a Claimants Union. The invitation stated that the new council "has taken a keen interest in campaigning to encourage people to claim their full entitlement to benefit and in opposing proposals to reduce benefits or restrict their availability in any way"¹⁴⁴. The council workers wrote that they didn't want to run or control unemployed organising. They initiated the collective organisation of claimants and welfare groups in Lothian to fight the "present and proposed changes to the benefit system"¹⁴⁵ in the most powerful way.

¹⁴⁰ Mike, *Interview by author*.

¹⁴¹ Sacha, *Interview by Variant*, "Vagabonds, criminals, paupers & gangrels?", *variant – the free arts and culture magazine*, 36 (2009).

¹⁴² Mike, *Interview by Jay Wiggan* (2017); This interview data was collected as part of a research project 'Bringing labour back in: class antagonism, labour agency and Britain's active labour market reforms' conducted by Wiggan, J. and funded by the Independent Social Research Foundation <http://isrf.org/about/fellows-and-projects/jay-wiggan/>.

¹⁴³ Unknown author, "Scuppering the Snoopers", *Counter Information*, issue 17 (1987).

¹⁴⁴ SRL, D: Edinburgh Claimants: Archive Material F: Lothian Claimants Union (blue sheet), invitation LCU meeting 20.8.1986.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

6. The Resistance Against the Poll Tax

In 1986 the conservative government presented the plan to radically change the local government taxation system. The new community charge was commonly called poll tax because it introduced a tax system where rich and poor had to pay the same amount of taxes. Edinburgh's anti-authoritarian movement and the EUWC played a crucial role in the initiation of the resistance, the establishment of the non payment movement and the horizontal grassroots organisation of the protest. The Labour Party establishment carefully prevented the party from joining the non payment movement in order to keep its "newly respectable image"¹⁴⁶. A similar position was adopted by the STUC. This resulted in the situation where a growing non payment movement developed outside the direct control of the traditional labour organisations and democratic state institutions.

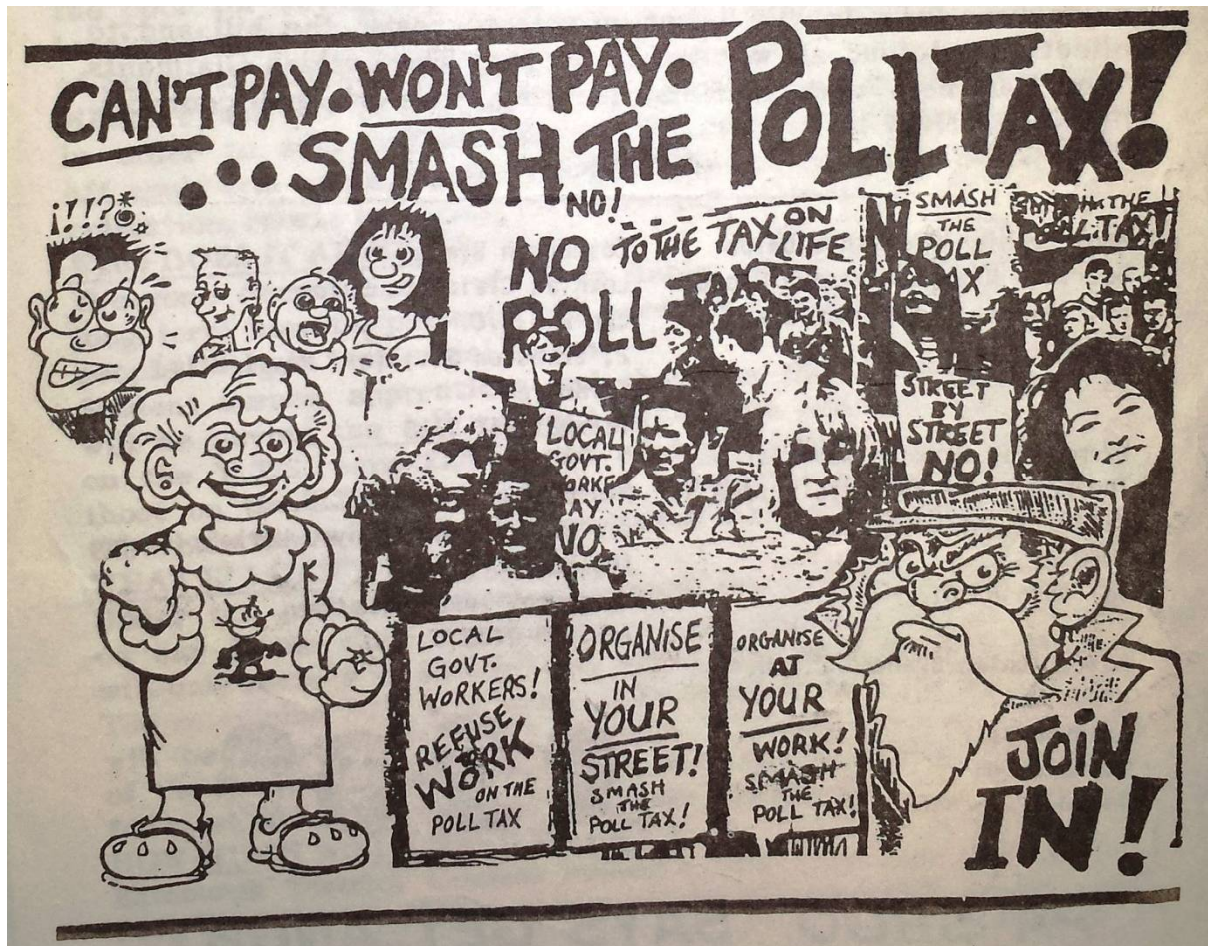
The protest was directed against the implementation of the tax which was carried out by the local councils. The Labour Party leadership ordered the local Labour councils to implement the tax. Some Labour councillors, including the EUWC's trustees, refused to pay the poll tax themselves and even broke the whip when the rate was set by the council¹⁴⁷ in 1989. The council, however, heavily relied on the tax payments as its major source of income and was not used to uncontrollable political participation of the people. As a base of the local Anti-Poll Tax Movement the EUWC was therefore in a constant conflict with the Labour controlled council which funded the centre. The character of the new tax favoured a community-based resistance and the use of civil disobedience and direct action tactics. People forced their way into the council chambers and the offices of sheriff officers several times. When sheriff officers were trying to seize people's belongings phone trees were used to mobilise the support of the community and make the sheriff's work impossible. That these tactics and forms of organising were so dominant during the struggle in Edinburgh and beyond is, however, no coincidence. The existing experience and infrastructure of the local anti-authoritarian movement which had gained experience and strength throughout the 1980s was crucial for a successful anti-poll tax struggle.

Anti-authoritarian revolutionaries within the Anti-Poll Tax Movement and especially the anarchist organisation Class War were strongly attacked for their alleged 'organisation' of London's Poll Tax Riots in March 1990. One day before the poll tax was introduced the All Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation organised a huge demonstration in London which attracted more than 100,000 demonstrators and

¹⁴⁶ Danny Burns, *Poll tax rebellion* (Stirling, 1992), pp. 25, 40, 44-47.

¹⁴⁷ SRL, D: TCBS, F: Stuff Reading to the Making of our Case (brown A4 envelope), Brian McGrail, Report to the Trustees' Board, the Voluntary Workers and the Unemployed Users of the Edinburgh Unemployed Workers Centre (March 1992)

ended in a full blown riot in the city centre. Luxury cars were demolished, the South African embassy attacked and several shop windows bricked. The significant role of anti-authoritarian revolutionaries in facilitating the creation and vibrant expansion of the Anti-Poll Tax Unions and federations all over the country was and is, however, often neglected. Danny Burns' book *Poll Tax Rebellion* is an exemption.



The illustration was published in the leaflet "Claimants Beware!" by the Lothian Claimants Union in 1988¹⁴⁸. The leaflet informs claimants about the Poll Tax, its impact on claimants and the way to resist against it.

LOCAL ANTI-POLL-TAX UNIONS AS POWERFUL BASE OF THE STRUGGLE

Since the tax was first introduced in Scotland it were also Scottish groups and neighbourhoods which developed the first resistance against the tax. The collective refusal of the payment of the tax became the principal tactic of the Anti-Poll Tax Movement. In order to make the tax unworkable huge numbers of people had to join the non-payment movement. Masses of previously law-abiding and politically unorganised citizens had to enter a collective but in the end also very individual confrontation with a government which had just recently defeated the miners. People had to trust in the power of collective action and commit themselves to civil disobedience. Anti-authoritarian individuals, groups and networks offered a form of

¹⁴⁸ SRL, D: TCBS, F: University of Edinburgh (black ring binder), *Claimants Beware!*, 1988, p.4.

political organising and struggle which enabled the high level of involvement and trust of communities which was so characteristic for the Anti-Poll Tax Movement.

Anti-Poll Tax Unions (APTU) became the most important sites of the movement and their broad establishment was neither sparked in Glasgow nor by traditional labour organisations or by Militant but by the Edinburgh group Community Resistance. The group initiated the establishment of several APTUs in Edinburgh districts in summer 1987, organised the first anti-poll tax conference in the Glasgow City Hall in November 1987 and hosted the founding meeting of "the first city-wide federation"¹⁴⁹ in Britain in January 1988 in the premises of the EUWC. When the real mass movement took off with the arrival of the first bills in 1989 Edinburgh had 40 APTUs with often around 200 members each. Militant supporter Russell Taylor got involved in the Dalry/Gorgie¹⁵⁰ APTU and pressured Militant Scotland to adopt a non payment position. Militant then started to fully support a community-based non payment movement in 1988 and became the second major tendency in the movement besides the anti-authoritarian groups.

COMMUNITY RESISTANCE

Community Resistance was an anti-authoritarian revolutionary group which had developed out of earlier groups like Little by Little¹⁵¹. Many EUWC users were involved in Community Resistance and EUWC resources were used by the group. It first organised discussion groups in the centre and got increasingly involved in the Anti-Apartheid Movement at a time when a huge boycott campaign was launched against the Edinburgh Commonwealth Games in 1986. Members were part of a Britain-wide and even global networks of an anti-authoritarian revolutionary movement. These networks were established through personal contacts, their involvement in Counter Information or their touring through European squats as members of Edinburgh punk bands. They were further expanded through Community Resistance's global support campaign for a wildcat strike by female factory workers in Adrossan¹⁵².

These networks were massively used to spread the struggle against the poll tax to England and Wales where the tax was introduced a year later. Community Resistance sent information packs with sample leaflets, posters and information on how to start your own Anti-Poll Tax Union to contacts all over the country. Members of Community Resistance travelled to several cities to share their experiences. Furthermore, neighbourhoods in England and Scotland developed a system of twinning where Scottish APTUs shared their experiences of successful organising with their twin union in England.

Another hind at the crucial role of anti-authoritarian revolutionaries within the Anti-Poll Tax Movement is its slogan 'Can't Pay, Won't Pay'. The slogan had been

¹⁴⁹ Danny Burns, *Poll tax rebellion*, p. 39.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁵¹ Ramsey Kanaan, "When Fucking The System Isn't Enough", audio, *Indymedia UK*, <https://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2004/03/288199.html> ; accessed 10. August 2017.

¹⁵² see *Counter Information*, issue 14 (1987).

popularised in the 1970s by Italian autonomist Dario Fo and his theatre play 'Can't Pay, Won't Pay'. Italian autonomists used the same slogan for their 1987 article on a rent strike in Padova in *Counter Information's*¹⁵³. The next issue then used the same title for one of its first lengthy articles on the poll tax¹⁵⁴.



Pictures of the occupation of the Edinburgh City Chambers by anti-poll tax protesters¹⁵⁵.

ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN IDEAS BECOME POWERFUL PRACTICES

A EUWC user highlighted the anti-poll tax struggle as one of his most important political experiences. He was especially fascinated by the way anti-authoritarian ideas became powerful practices of many communities and neighbourhoods between 1987 and 1991.

Well I suppose I was always inspired by the idea that people should organise together on an egalitarian basis cause I believe if you want a society where people are equal and share then you have to organise in a way that is consistent with that. (...) I think in terms of these ideas actually becoming effective on a big scale the Anti-Poll Tax Movement was very important. You know it's one thing to have the ideas but the Anti-Poll Tax Movement actually saw this grassroots direct action decentralised way of organising become a very big movement and actually a very successful movement – it actually defeated the poll tax – and also in the course of the movement a lot of people got involved and active that weren't active before and there was a lot of creativity you know a lot of creative ways of protest.¹⁵⁶

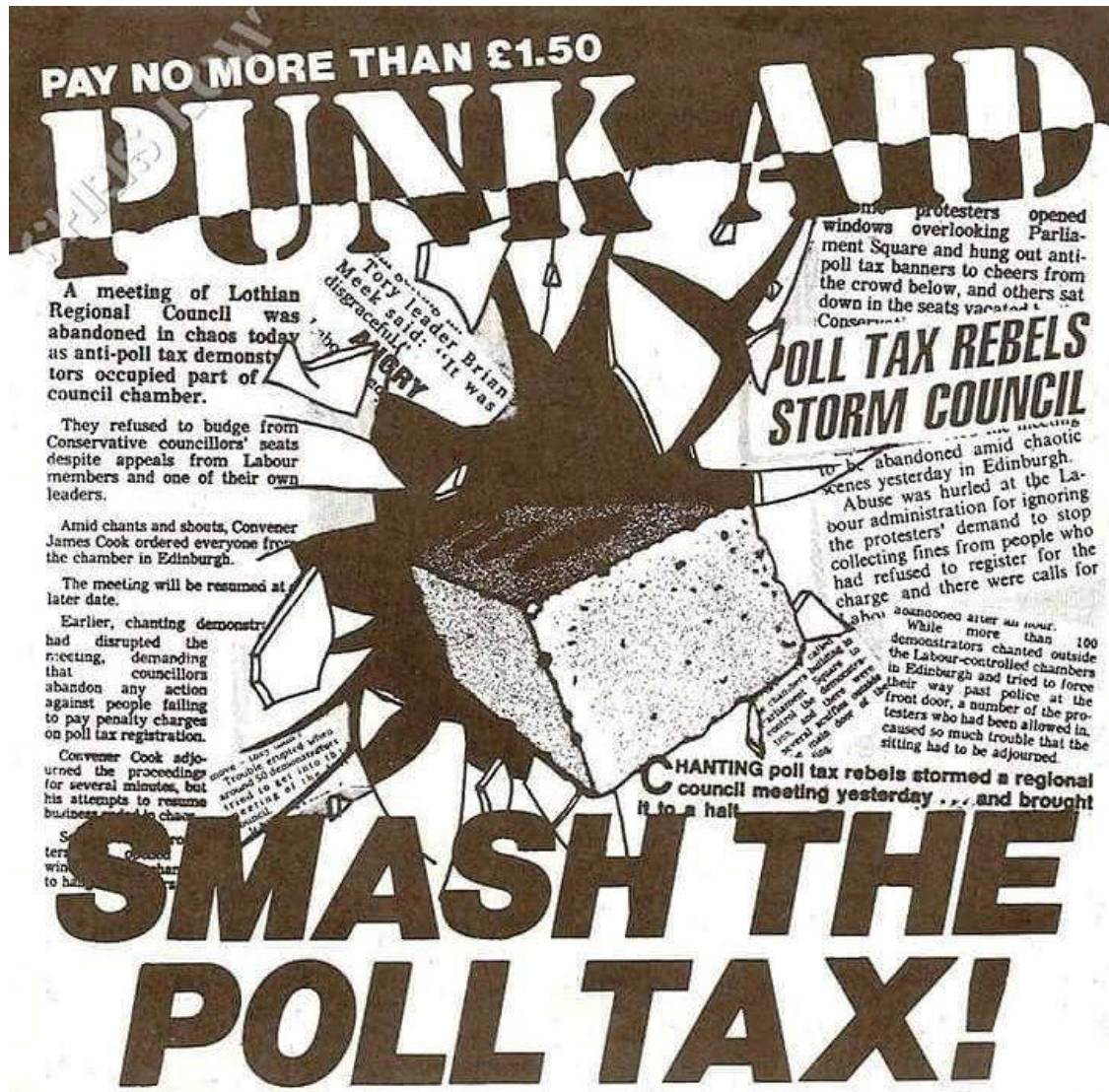
¹⁵³ see *Counter Information*, issue 16 (1987).

¹⁵⁴ see *Counter Information*, issue 17 (1987).

¹⁵⁵ Punk Aid, "Axe the Tax", 1989, <http://www.45cat.com/record/rifkind01srt9ks1955> ; accessed 10. August 2017; "Pay No Poll Tax", *Counter Information*, Issue 22, 1989.

¹⁵⁶ Mike, *Interview by author*.

Anti-Poll Tax demonstrators occupied the council chambers in Edinburgh in December 1988 and a banner of the Lothian Claimants Union was hung from one of the windows. The demonstrators massively disrupted a meeting by the Lothian Regional Council by sitting down on the seats of the conservative councillors and hurling at the Labour councillors for administering the hated tax. A few weeks later Oi Polloi got Edinburgh's still vibrant anarcho-punk scene together and produced the three-track vinyl *Smash the Poll Tax*¹⁵⁷.



Cover of the three-track vinyl *Smash the Poll Tax*¹⁵⁸.

Throughout their songs they encouraged people to join the massively expanding Anti-Poll Tax Movement and axe the tax by collectively refusing to pay it.

All across the nation Poll Tax registration,
 Invasion of our privacy and mass intimidation,
 An Attack upon the poor, imposed by Tory law,

¹⁵⁷ Punk Aid, "Axe the Tax", 1989, <http://www.45cat.com/record/rifkind01srt9ks1955> ; accessed 10. August 2017.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

But have had enough and we're taking it no more.
Axe, Axe, Axe the Tax,
Mass Non payment! Stop it in its tracks¹⁵⁹

The accompanying booklet acknowledged not only the different musicians but also the Edinburgh Unemployed Workers Centre for "Word Processing"¹⁶⁰. A former user further described the involvement of the EUWC in the Anti-Poll Tax Movement:

Edinburgh Unemployed Workers Centre and the linked Lothian Claimants Union produced leaflets urging the claimants and unemployed not to pay the poll tax, and giving practical advice on the law and how to resist. The Lothian Claimants Union banner was hung from the windows of the occupied Council Chambers in Parliament Square when the Lothian Anti Poll Tax Federation took over the Regional Council meeting on 6th December 1988. The Centre featured prominently on the public phone trees widely circulated to mobilise community resistance to sheriff officers, and was itself was a base for organising. We were present when hundreds put sheriff officers to flight as we defended non-payers homes from 'poindings' or seizures of goods. On one famous occasion we were among the dozens who turned up at Councillor's houses to 'poind' them!¹⁶¹

IMPORTANCE OF INFRASTRUCTURE

While Ramsey Kanaan founded AK Press in 1987 in Edinburgh he was organised in Community Resistance and strongly involved in the Anti-Poll Tax Movement. In an inspiring talk on the movement he stresses the importance of organisation and infrastructure for the successful resistance against the tax:

We created the Anti-Poll Tax movement, we didn't create the Poll Tax. The conservative government dreamed up the Poll Tax. But because there was an infrastructure, because there was organisation, because there was starting in Edinburgh, because there were all these other anarchists we could plug in to, because there was other organisers there, we could create an Anti-Poll Tax movement. There was some sort of infrastructure there so we could create an Anti-Poll Tax movement.¹⁶²

Community Resistance dissolved at the beginning of the Anti-poll Tax Movement so that members could fully join the struggle through the APTU in their neighbourhood. When the movement, however, had come to an end "we were left with this spectacular history of anarchist organisation which actually didn't exist anymore so we were left with literally nothing"¹⁶³. In Kanaan's opinion the rebellious energy and the huge amount of committed and organised people crumbled away because there was no organisation left when the struggle ended.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Unknown author, "The Centre and Social Struggle", in ed. ACE, *Up Against The State: The Battle for Broughton St Unemployed Workers Centre* (2014).

¹⁶² Ramsey Kanaan, "When Fucking The System Isn't Enough".

¹⁶³ Ibid.

I think that we have to be organising as anarchists so when the next crisis the next whatever it is that comes along, we have something to build from. So I think there is a need for infrastructure and organisation. Which means in many ways not to do not anything spectacular for many years but it is there, it's being build quietly. So when something happens, a revolutionary situation may occur, whatever. Also I think infrastructure is crucially important in that how do people come to anarchism, how do they plug in.¹⁶⁴

THE LABOUR COUNCIL'S ATTACKS ON THE RESISTANCE

Councillors began to withdraw funding to projects and organisations like the EUWC based Scaley Spanner Theatre Company¹⁶⁵ because of their support for the Anti-Poll Tax Movement. The Scaley Spanner Theatre Company used the EUWC's new premises in Cranston Street to produce a large Nessie monster, a Thatcher puppet and other props for its show¹⁶⁶. The theatre group started its shows in summer 1987 with funding from the Edinburgh council and a license to do shows in local parks and housing schemes. Up to 25 kids could slip into the long monster and run through the park. It was then up to them how they reacted to the entrance of Thatcher and the poll tax bill whereas the common reaction was to chase Thatcher away and rip up the bill. When the council found out about the political message of the play it withdrew both funding and license and even arrested one member of the team when the theatre had continued nevertheless.

Similarly, the Lothian Regional Council ordered a police investigation into the Musselburgh UWC "over allegations that the publicly-funded centre was being used for political purposes"¹⁶⁷. The district council threatened with eviction and the Musselburgh centre closed. The centre was accused of being a base for the local anti-poll tax struggle and Militant organisers. MUWC trustee, former regional Labour councillor and Militant supporter Keith Simpson saw a political motivation behind the closure and warned that "this attitude will affect not only the Musselburgh centre, but other unemployed workers centres in the region"¹⁶⁸. He was right. In the following day's newspaper the assistant secretary of the newly elected Labour council Donald Anderson announced a review of all other UWCs and argued that this review was necessary "particularly in view of what has happened at Musselburgh"¹⁶⁹.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ misterworthington, "Scaley Spanner Theatre Company 1989", 12 July 2010, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/misterworthington/4787962284/in/photolist-7VMiaq-8i6ynS> ; accessed 10 August 2017.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ken Smart, "Sent packing: Centre under threat", *Edinburgh Evening News*, 3 August 1990.

¹⁶⁸ Keith Simpson, quoted in Ken Smart, "Sent packing: Centre under threat", *Edinburgh Evening News*, 3 August 1990.

¹⁶⁹ Donald Anderson, quoted in Ken Smart, "Focus on Funds: Centres come under review", *Edinburgh Evening News*, 4 August 1990.

THE **SCALEY**
SPANNER
theatre Co

Supported by.....
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH DISTRICT COUNCIL
EDINBURGH

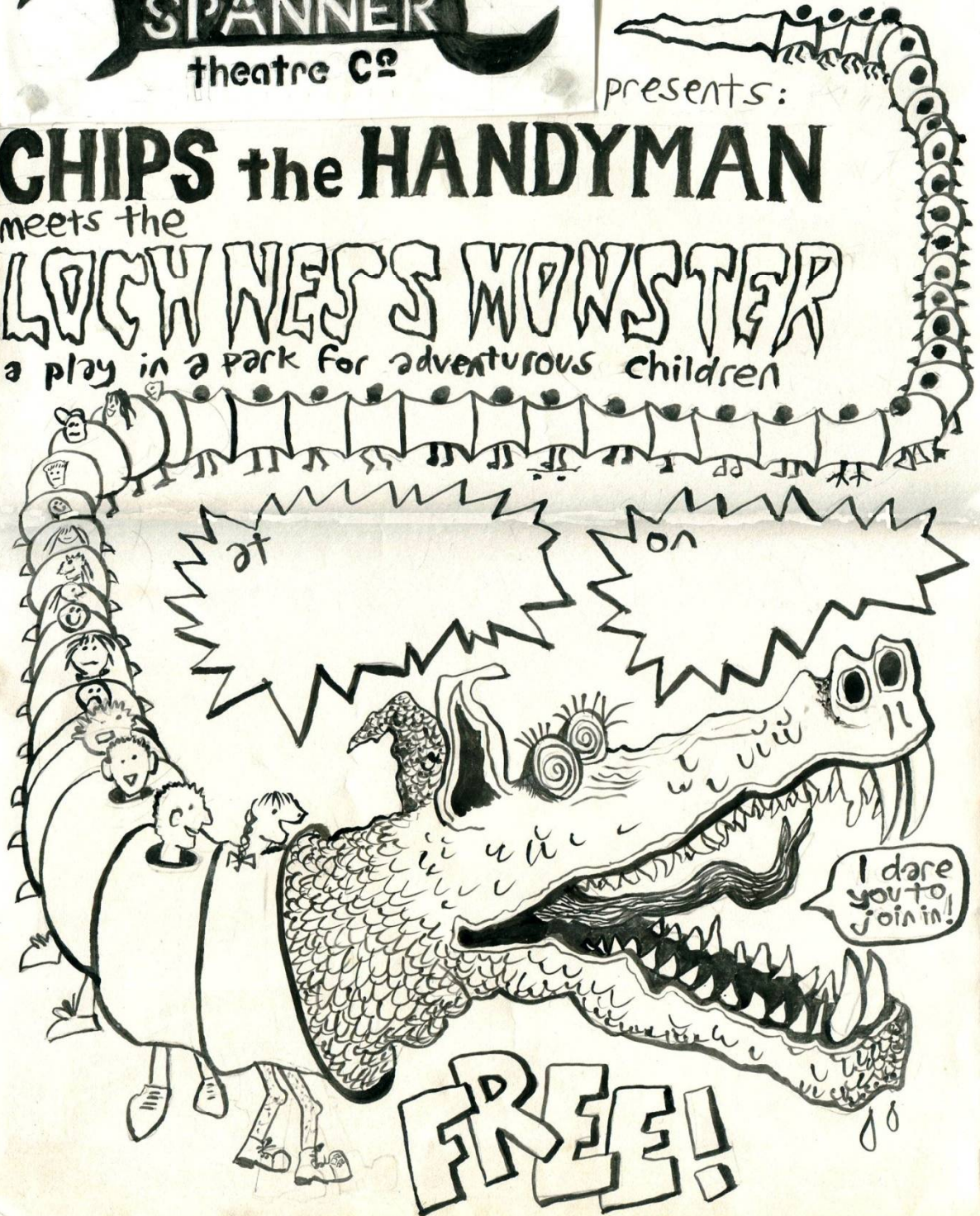
presents:

CHIPS the HANDYMAN

meets the

LOCH NESS MONSTER

a play in a park for adventurous children



Poster of the free theatre play The Scaley Spanner¹⁷⁰. The premises of the EUWC were used to build the Loch Ness Monster and other props for the play.

¹⁷⁰ misterworthington, "Scaley Spanner Theatre Company 1989".



ANTI POLL TAX DEMONSTRATORS BLOCKADE A ROYAL MAIL VAN LOADED WITH COUNCIL POLL TAX DEMANDS

Picture taken from Counter Information's 25th issue in 1989¹⁷¹.

SUCSESSES OF THE ANTI-POLL TAX MOVEMENT

Millions of people refused to pay the tax and by doing so made the implementation of the tax unworkable. In Scotland alone more than one million people had ignored and sabotaged the law by refusing to pay the poll tax. It constituted "the largest act of civil disobedience in recent Scottish history"¹⁷². By the end of 1990 Margaret Thatcher had become so unpopular that she stepped down as prime minister. The government admitted defeat and announced a new tax system. Although the new tax was again on property dependent, former levels of wealth distribution were not restored, business rates were kept under central government control and other flat taxes like value added tax increased instead of local governments' powers over their own budgets restored.

¹⁷¹ Unknown author, "We Are Winning", Counter Information, Issue 25 (1989).

¹⁷² Gibbs, Ewan, "Historical tradition and community mobilisation: narratives of Red Clydeside in memories of the anti-poll tax movement in Scotland, 1988–1990", *Labor History*, 57 (2016), pp.439-462, p.441.

7. Users Fight for the Control of the Centre

Bottom up organising against the ongoing attacks on the working class became increasingly powerful in Edinburgh towards the end of the 1980s. The centre and its users were crucially involved in this reappropriation of peoples' power. Local authorities then withdrew their funding in 1991 from the EUWC, took most of the centres resources against the will of the users and the majority of trustees in 1992, terminated the lease and forcefully evicted a four-months-long occupation of the centre in 1994. This section will look into the wider reasons for the attacks on the centre by local authorities and the users strategies to defend the centre.

THE WITHDRAWAL OF FUNDING

The EUWC had moved into a three-storey old school building in 103 Broughton Street in 1989. Unemployed volunteers had renovated the building for months and just reopened when Lothian's Labour group announced the withdrawal of its funding. The chairman of the Social Work Committee argued that welfare rights services were unnecessarily duplicated. They could be rationalised by a council controlled drop-in shop in the city centre¹⁷³. The council invited deputations of the EUWC and other affected organisations to hear their case. The Glaswegian author James Kelman shared his impressions of this meeting during an EUWC day of protest against the withdrawal:

Next up in front of the beaks were representatives from the Unemployed Workers' Centre. It took me a few minutes to realise that what they were doing was a bit different from the others. In fact I began to feel, Oh fuck, they have got no chance of getting anybody's sympathy, apart from the folk on the public benches. (...) There was no reason whatsoever to think you could get charity from the Parliament Square crew at all. The best that you could do was show them that you knew the score, that like Nolan, Geddes and the cronies you had only contempt for the process you were expected to take part in, it was a hoax, a charade.¹⁷⁴

Kelman later evaluated the deputations fighting for funding as "another instance of the public being treated with contempt, that singular brand professional politicians reserve for any citizen they suspect of integrity"¹⁷⁵. Kelman was disenchanted with official politics and especially with Labour politicians who carried out attacks against people they claimed to represent:

For these Labour Party politicians, politics is just a business. (...) Power is the bottom line and power belongs to them. That is where their contempt for

¹⁷³ Christopher Reekie, "Lothian grant cut by £350,000", *Glasgow Herald*, 15 March 91.

¹⁷⁴ James Kelman, *'And the judges said ...': Essays* (London, 2002), p.92.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

democracy springs from. As far as they are concerned, people who do not have power are little more than a joke, an occasional irritant but nothing more than that.¹⁷⁶

The council's decision to withdraw funding was implemented and the funding ended in summer 1991.

One of the EUWC trustees had become regional councillor in 1990 but rather identified himself as a trade union official¹⁷⁷. He was part of the superseded left-wing of the Labour group which led to his own displacement from the board of the newly established and council funded Trade Union Resource Centre. He stressed that the funding for the EUWC could have been secured if only the users had been willing to accept compromises and the new rules of funding. The user group only had to limit the use of the centre for political struggles and renounce their hard-won control over the management committee¹⁷⁸. Both, however, had become the core and success of the centre and wasn't to be given up like this.

FIGHT FOR USER CONTROL OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

During a strike of the benefit office workers in 1987 several Claimants Unions all over the country not only supported the strike by joining picket lines but also occupied local council buildings to protest for emergency payments. The Camden Council punished the local Claimants Union for its participation by withdrawing the funds to the Unemployed Action Centre. The claimants responded with a long-term occupation of the premises¹⁷⁹. Previous issues of *Counter Information* had covered the withdrawal of funding for the Leicester Unemployed Workers Centre which was answered by a one month occupation of the premises and the setting up of "a free food kitchen and workshops"¹⁸⁰ and the eviction of an unemployed group by the Islington Council in 1986¹⁸¹. More and more conflicts between UWC user groups and local authorities became public. In many cases they evolved around issues of whether unemployed should run and control the centres by having a majority on the management committee.

A discussion about the organisational structure of the Edinburgh UWC developed in spring 1986. Two discussion proposals by EUWC users called for the expansion of user control to the centre's finances and legal representation¹⁸². Some of the trustees at the time stressed that it was important that unemployed took "action on their own

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁷⁷ Loughney, *Interview by author*.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Unknown author, "Action", *Counter Information*, issue 16 (1987).

¹⁸⁰ Unknown author, "Occupied", *Counter Information*, issue 15 (1987)

¹⁸¹ Unknown author, "The Unwaged and the Traditional Labour Movement", *Counter Information*, issue 10 (1986); for more information see: Unwaged fightback - A history of Islington Action Group of the Unwaged - 1980-86, <https://libcom.org/library/unwaged-fightback-a-history-of-islington-action-group-of-the-unwaged-1980-86> ; accessed 10 August 2017.

¹⁸² SRL, D: TCBS, F: Trustees Meeting Mins. (red), Discussion Paper, May '86; SRL, D: TCBS, F: Trustees Meeting Mins. (red), Proposal for Discussion, May 1986.

behalf"¹⁸³ but argued that there only "should be a minority of unemployed members"¹⁸⁴ on the board. Whereas full user control was never established three of six trustees were substituted by users in autumn 1986¹⁸⁵. The various political struggles of the previous years and interaction with politically more experienced activists had by then radicalised many users of the centre. One of the user trustees remembered how the miners' strike had transformed him "from Bennite to a revolutionary, anarcho-communist, committed to class struggle by any and all means necessary"¹⁸⁶. The changing power relations on the board of trustees in 1986 lead to a situation in 1992 where the representatives of the traditional labour movement could not implement their plans for the centre through the "democratic legal structure of the centre"¹⁸⁷. It therefore contributed to the situation in 1992 where the user group took the opportunity to run the centre independently for over two years and transform the centre in an autonomous community centre.

REASONS FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF FUNDING

The secretary of the Edinburgh Trades Union Congress (TUC) remembered how he hadn't identified unemployment as a major problem anymore towards the end of the 1980s. Instead he had focused on the political struggle for Scottish devolution and a Trade Union Resource Centre which he had initiated in 1985¹⁸⁸. Just like the EUWC the Trade Union Resource Centre was also trapped within the contradiction of being political and depend on funding from local authorities. In contrast to the EUWC it acknowledged the "rules of funding"¹⁸⁹ and moved away from working class politics towards social work services to secure grants from local authorities. In that way it was able to exist until 2004. However, the secretary himself was even made to step down as chair of its management committee because he was an irritation to the funders "as a left wing person"¹⁹⁰. As we have seen in the first chapter the restriction of political activity in the centre had been a topic since the first application for funding had been filed. The tightening of the unwritten rules of funding over the course of the 1980s was increasingly creating problems for EUWC users.

CHANGING DISCOURSE ON UNEMPLOYMENT

¹⁸³ SRL, D: TCBS, F: Trustees Meeting Mins. (red), Colin Kirkwood, Some Ideas, 13 January 1986.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ SRL, D: TCBS, F: Industrial Tribunal: George Wilson Case (grey), Industrial Tribunal (brown), Paperwork presented by George Wilson (white), EUWC minutes, 30 September 1986.

¹⁸⁶ Bob Goupillot, Tony Benn: A Man of Principle and Radical Democrat, *Emancipation & Liberation*, 2014, <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2014/03/16/tony-benn-a-man-of-principle-and-radical-democrat/#more-6738> ; accessed 10 August 2017.

¹⁸⁷ SRL, D: TCBS, F: stuff Reading to the Making of our Case (brown), Brian McGrail, Report to the Trustees' Board, the Voluntary Workers and the Unemployed Users, March 1992.

¹⁸⁸ Loughney, *Interview by author*.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

The closure of the Musselburgh centre showed that the involvement in the anti-poll tax struggle was an important reason for the Labour-lead council to withdraw funding. The withdrawal of EUWC funding in 1991 furthermore happened within the context of the Labour Party's shift to the right and a changing discourse on work and unemployment. Towards the end of the 1980s the problem of unemployment lost importance in the eyes of local authorities. The Conservative government did its best to creatively lower the number of unemployed without the creation of new jobs. This was made possible by the introduction of several changes to the unemployment statistics through the government. Furthermore, the discourse was changed in a way that not unemployment but the unemployed appeared to be the problem.

The unemployment rate in Britain peaked in spring 1986 when the number of unemployed exceeded three million. In Scotland and the Lothian region the unemployment rate continued to rise for another year but also declined by 1987. Unemployment started to rise again during the recession in 1990 and peaked again in 1993. Edinburgh especially increased employment in the service industries above the British and Scottish average. The number of employees in the insurance and business service sectors doubled between 1981 and 1991 and the vast majority of the new employees were women¹⁹¹.

By 1990 the official number of unemployed was reduced to 1.6 million but the unemployment numbers and rates have to be interpreted with caution. Throughout the 1980s employment legislation had been changed to the effect that it was cheaper for employers to 'hire and fire' their employees. The government therefore often increased employment only by worsening the working conditions. Furthermore, several changes in the unemployment count and expansions of work-for-benefit programmes severely decreased the official unemployment numbers¹⁹². Before new measures were introduced in 1986 when the number of unemployed had alarmingly exceeded the three million mark, the unofficial number of unemployment was estimated to be at least half a million higher¹⁹³. People who registered for work at job centres but weren't officially entitled for benefits were excluded from the unemployment count just as unemployed men over 60 and other older claimants who had been increasingly pushed onto sick benefits. From 1987 onwards a new calculation method of the unemployment rate was introduced. Unemployed were not only put in relation to workers and employees but also in relation to the self employed and the armed forces. Additionally, benefit receivers were more forcefully pushed on the massively expanding workfare schemes by making certain schemes compulsory and introducing newly promoted Claimants Advisors whose further task was to fulfil targets of benefit rejections¹⁹⁴. In 1987 alone the number of unemployed

¹⁹¹ ECL/qYHD5765, Edinburgh & Lothian Labour Market Assessment (1993).

¹⁹² ECL/QHD 5765 Unemployment Bulletin 1986-1996, Councillors Research Unit, May 1986.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

was reduced by over half a million unemployed who worked for their benefits on "special employment and training measures"¹⁹⁵.

The governments increasing emphasis on work schemes for unemployed did not only improve the unemployment statistics but also implied "that the jobs are there and that the long term unemployed are not willing or sufficiently motivated to take them"¹⁹⁶. The discourse on unemployment seemed to slowly accept high numbers of unemployed and lost its dramatic headlines. Despite the chronic character of high unemployment rates unemployment was increasingly understood as a personal failure. The day Thatcher resigned as prime minister Tony Benn concluded that her administration had "propagated from the platform of political power (...) a virulent strain of right-wing capitalist thinking"¹⁹⁷ and threatened a whole society with this philosophy. In the early 1980s newspapers had scandalised that there were "no jobs for boys or girls"¹⁹⁸ but already in 1986 more articles appeared which focussed on successes of unemployed finding work. A newly established Job Club was featured in the newspaper. It boasted with the statistic that it would only need six months "to get people into work"¹⁹⁹. The problem of unemployment had changed into a problem with the unemployed. This also resulted in a change of priorities in the Social Work Department. Shortly after John Chant had succeeded Roger Kent as director of the Department he ordered a review of welfare rights services and determined day-care services for mental health patients and services for the elderly instead of the unemployed as the new main priorities²⁰⁰.

LOCAL LABOUR PARTY SHIFT TO THE RIGHT

As described in the resistance against workfare schemes more and more users of the EUWC started to criticise and reject wage labour in capitalism. A former trustee and Labour councillor described how the regional council tolerated this rejection as long as the Labour party was dominated by its left wing²⁰¹. When the party's political makeup shifted to the right after the regional elections in 1990 the new Labour group identified the funding for UWCs as "a waste of money"²⁰².

This shift to the right of the Lothian Labour group after the 1990 regional elections was the result of a wider reorientation of the British Labour Party. James Callaghan had already announced the end of the "cosy world"²⁰³ of socialist policies in 1976 but

¹⁹⁵ ECL/QHD 5765 Unemployment Bulletin 1986-1996, Councillors Research Unit, Research Review May '88.

¹⁹⁶ ECL/QHD 5765 Unemployment Bulletin 1986-1996, Councillors Research Unit, May 1986.

¹⁹⁷ Tony Benn, House of Commons Debate, Hansard, 181, cols 439–518, 22 November 1990, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1990/nov/22/confidence-in-her-majestys-government#S6CV0181P0_19901122_HOC_457 ; accessed 10 August 2017.

¹⁹⁸ Unknown author, "No jobs for boys or girls", *Edinburgh Evening News*, 9 June 1980.

¹⁹⁹ James Gray, "Join the Club – find a job", *Edinburgh Evening News*, 13 January 1986.

²⁰⁰ ECA/LRC/DSWR, 1989-90, no. 270.

²⁰¹ Loughney, *Interview by author*.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ Callaghan, *Leader's speech*

it was not until Tony Blair's 1994 announcement of New Labour that the party fully broke with these policies. The Labour Party establishment was occupied with the struggle against different strands of left opposition from within the party. Defeats of traditional workers' organisation like the National Union of Mineworkers in 1985, constant efforts of the Labour party leadership to crowd out of the hard left within the party and Labour's bad results in the 1987 general election in England and Wales all strengthened the modernisation trend within the Labour Party.

Lothian's Labour group leader John Mulvey had been known for his hard left²⁰⁴ confrontational politics towards the central government and was succeeded by Keith Geddes in 1990 who wanted to quit with Labour's hard left politics in Lothian²⁰⁵. When the conservative councillor Tom Ponton called for the withdrawal of funding to the Citizens' Rights Office in 1990 Mulvey rejected Ponton's accusations as irrelevant. Instead he criticised Ponton as being obsessed by attacking organisations which supported poor people²⁰⁶. Although Geddes did not want to comment on the closure of the Musselburgh UWC in 1990 his assistant secretary stressed the importance to review all UWCs "to make sure that the grant is not being used by representatives of any fringe political grouping"²⁰⁷. This political change within the regional Labour group changed the official approach towards UWCs. Just as UWCs had received a major increase in funding after the newly gained Labour majority on the Lothian Regional Council in 1986 the new Labour group in 1990 started to review policies and started to weaken remnants of the previous administration.

LOCK OUT OF USERS BY LABOUR COUNCILLORS AND THE PAID WORKER

Most of the users and trustees were convinced that the centre was able to continue without funding. The centre had acquired valuable video, photography, printing and computer equipment and its lease did not expire until 1994. The newly renovated building in Broughton Street was council property and the rent was only one symbolic pound a year. It was solely the salary for the centre's full-time worker which could not be afforded anymore. In January 1992 a trustee and regional councillor presented a vague six-point plan which included a redundancy payment to the worker and a six months experimental phase where a small group of trustees and other interested people would try to adapt the centre to the new circumstances. The plan was agreed but the events of the next day caused an open conflict between the trustees. The three representatives on the board which were aligned to the traditional labour movement and the paid worker decided to change the locks of the centre, locked the user group out and rejected to share keys with the other four trustees. The majority of trustees either were present or past users or were from the surroundings

²⁰⁴ This paper uses the term "hard left" to describe people within the traditional labour movement which posed a left opposition to the national Labour Party leadership during the 1980s.

²⁰⁵ Loughney, *Interview by author*.

²⁰⁶ Smith, Douglas, "Call for Rights Office probe turned down", *Edinburgh Evening News*, 6 April 1990.

²⁰⁷ Smart, Ken, "Focus on Funds: Centres come under review", *Edinburgh Evening News*, 4 August 1990.

of Common Sense and aligned themselves to the user group. The direct confrontation was at its height when the majority trustees and users repossessed the centre by physically breaking into the front door.



Picture taken from *North Edinburgh News*' April issue in 1992²⁰⁸. After users had been locked out of their centre they broke back in and stayed in control of the premises for another 2 1/2 years.

For many years users had fought together with the paid worker for the expansion and survival of the centre but now the situation had changed. He saw no other option then to call the police to forcefully evict his former colleagues which one user remembered as "the complete betrayal"²⁰⁹. The police, however, did not evict the users because the repossession of the centre was backed by the majority of trustees. Building and equipment were back under user control but the minority of trustees then managed to freeze all bank accounts, removed all valuable equipment from the centre and threatened the users with court action and eviction. The centre, however, was now fully under user control and didn't depend anymore on council funding. The centre further developed into a base for several political groups and collectives and turned into a highly frequented open space for the local community.

²⁰⁸ SRL, D: TCBS, F: Leaflets and Posters (green), "Unemployed Locked Out", *North Edinburgh News*, 110 (1992).

²⁰⁹ Mike, *Interview by author*.

8. The Self-Managed Centre

A variety of people, groups and political approaches met in the centre. The participation in the self-management of the centre and different centre-based groups introduced her to collective political organising. The centre enabled members of the community "to be part of some form of dissent that criticized the status quo and had at its heart an objection to the inequalities and the violence that pervade our society"²¹⁰. Political groups used the premises for their regular meetings, a café offered cheap vegan food and a meeting place for people who just wanted to meet people for a chat, and the basement and top-floor were used for punk concerts. Together with donations these activities generated enough money to pay the bills and keep the centre running. Weekly open meetings were the main governing structure and the involvement and participation in these meetings increased over the years.

When the user group gained full control of the centre in 1992 users were using different strategies to organise in an egalitarian way. A former user remembers that "it was a space that was kind of free of top-down control"²¹¹.

You always have different levels of experience and confidence. I think it is just always important when new people get involved to encourage them and to make a specific afford to sort of let new people or less experienced people know how things work so they can actually get involved in day to day running so thereby have more influence over what actually happens. To be honest it's probably something that is neglected. It probably needs to be talked about more overtly in anti-authoritarian groups. Yeah, it's quite a big step from rejecting hierarchy and rejecting the concept of people being in charge, it's still quite a big step towards actually having a group or movement that is actually functioning in an egalitarian way. Having said that I think, you know, the centre was reasonably successful in involving people and we maintained the open meetings and a lot of people were involved in doing different things²¹².

In this vein users tried to build up awareness and intervention strategies against several forms of internalised power structures. The centre was a place to meet "other strong sort of independently minded women" and users developed "a desire and an attempt to reject sexism"²¹³. When users became aware that one of them was abusing his female partner the situation was dealt with in the centre's open meeting. Users

²¹⁰ Cloudberry, *Interview by Alessandro Frolidi* (2014); The interview was conducted for the brochure "Up Against the State" but was not published.

²¹¹ Mike, *Interview by author*.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Cloudberry, *Interview by Alessandro*

decided to offer him an opportunity to react to the claims and excluded him from the centre when he had failed to do so. Internalised superiority and inferiority complexes of men and women and its effect on the participation in the centre and other finer forms of patriarchal power structures were, however, subordinated to the survival of the centre. In doing so they were deferred "until after some sort of [laugh] magical and sort of unspecified point"²¹⁴.

The centre did not only enable people from the community to get involved in politics but also became a meeting place for many different groups who generally identified themselves as part of the anti-authoritarian movement but had often not linked up with each other. Resistance against an upsurge of militant nationalists who organised in the National Front or the British National Party had become an important activity of Edinburgh's anti-authoritarian movement. Band members of Oi Polloi called in their 1990 song *Nazi Scum* for an organised resistance against neo-Nazis:

We must clear the streets of Nazi scum
Make them safe again for everyone
No longer will we have to walk in fear
Of scum who have no place here
If we unite, the battle can be won
Stop the problem before it's really begun²¹⁵.

A year earlier Somali student Ahmed Shekh had been killed by white nationalists after a pub night in Edinburgh's Cow Gate. The murder and the judge's mild sentences against the perpetrators sparked one of the biggest demonstrations against racism in Scotland. James Kelman remembered that "what was becoming clear was the extent of the racism not only in Edinburgh and Lothian Region but throughout Scotland"²¹⁶. An Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) group was founded in Edinburgh in 1992²¹⁷ which was based in the centre. The Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Community Centre was just opposite of the centre in Broughton Street. It was also regularly attacked by neo-Nazis and formed a LGB anti-fascist group in 1993. It approached the EUWC user group for cooperation²¹⁸.

People started to get to know each other and new groups and projects were started. In 1992, for example, the radical publisher and literature magazine *Rebel Inc* was founded in Broughton Street. *Rebel Inc* developed into an important actor within Edinburgh's radical literature scene and first published Irvine Welsh's novel *Trainspotting* in 1993. The anarchist founder stressed the importance of the Scottish literature scene for the anti-authoritarian movement in Scotland. According to Kevin Williamson "many of its most influential writers (...) seem to be leaning strongly

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Oi Polloi, *Nazi Scum*, 1990.

²¹⁶ Kelman, *'And the judges said ...'*, p. 6.

²¹⁷ AFA Edinburgh, "No sell out, no compromise", *Fighting Talk Edinburgh*, issue 1 (1992), <https://afaarchive.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/fighting-talk-edinburgh-1-november-december-92.pdf> ; accessed 10 August 2017.

²¹⁸ SRL, D: TCBS, F: General Info The Lease, letter from Diversity to EUWC, 16 February 1993.

towards a libertarian left perspective"²¹⁹. Rebel Inc released new issues of its magazine in the centre and organised benefit events with performance, poetry and music in and for the centre²²⁰ - especially when it was threatened with eviction in 1994.

The centre was furthermore linked with the biggest anarchist online library Spunk Press through its co-founder Ian Heavens who lived in Edinburgh. The public use of internet was still in its infancy and not more than five million people world-wide had access to the internet. At a time when only very few workplaces had fully introduced computers, the centre had already acquired computers and users were constantly improving their computer skills. The new technology was also used in support of the anti-authoritarian movement. There also was the rumour that the main computer for the poll tax register was attacked and registrants were removed and replaced by names of deceased people²²¹. Spunk Press was founded in 1992 and started uploading as many magazines, leaflets, pictures and books in an electronic format as possible²²². The editorial collective consisted of "approximately 30 people spread around the globe"²²³ and spunk was "sort of the anti-authoritarian's Gutenberg Project"²²⁴. According to Edinburgh researcher Chris Atton Spunk Press was eager "to involve as many people as care to become involved"²²⁵. Ian Heavens therefore co-organised computer workshops at an anarchist summer school in Glasgow in 1993 and at the Anarchy Online 101 meeting which was part of the Anarchy in the UK festival in London in 1994. The ten day international festival was organised by a group around the Class War founder Ian Bone. It covered a large range of topics and involved many anti-authoritarian groups²²⁶. Mitzi Waltz from the US-publisher Extreme Books was involved in computer workshops in London and called the events a "NSA man's worst nightmare: a roomful of dedicated anarchists swapping e-mail addresses, planning new online linkages and surreptitiously swapping PGP tips"²²⁷.

²¹⁹ Kevin Williamson, "Scotland's Libertarian Left", *Bella Caledonia*, 20 November 2007, <http://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2007/11/20/scotlands-libertarian-left/> ; accessed 10 August 2017.

²²⁰ SRL, D: TCBS, F: The Centre – ACE – Leaflets – Posters, 1992-2001, An Evening with Rebel Inc, 15 August 1992.

²²¹ Solnit, David, "Poll Tax Rebellion – How One Small Scottish Anarchist Group Toppled the Thatcher Government: An Interview by David Solnit with Ramsey Kanaan", in ed. David Solnit, *Globalize Liberation: How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World* (San Francisco, 2003), pp.405-406.

²²² Spunk Library, "Numeric Catalog", <http://www.spunk.org/cat-us/numeric.html> ; accessed 10 August 2017.

²²³ Ian Heavens, "Anarchism Wanders Around the Information Superhighway", Spunk Library, 1995, <https://www.j12.org/sp/smears/REPLY.TXT> ; accessed 10 August 2017.

²²⁴ Mitzi Waltz, Getting serious about anarchy online, Spunk Library, 1994, http://www.spunk.org/texts/events/an_uk/sp000868.txt ; accessed 10 August 2017.

²²⁵ Chris Atton, *Alternative Media* (Edinburgh, 2002), pp.137.

²²⁶ Sparrows Nest, Anarchy in the UK '94, programme, http://www.thesparrowsnest.org.uk/collections/public_archive/PAR0021.pdf ; accessed 10 August 2017.

²²⁷ Mitzi Waltz, Getting serious about anarchy online

Scottish anarchist federation

(working title)

Appeal to all anarchists and autonomous revolutionaries to come to the aid of The Centre !

Correspondence
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1008 Glasgow
G42 8AA.
tel 041-427-6380
or 031-557-0718.

On Saturday 25th June, anarchists from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Falkirk district assembled at short notice. The purpose was to show our solidarity with the Edinburgh Unemployed Workers Centre which is under occupation by the users in defiance of the Labour Council's intention to terminate their lease.

Two spokespersons for The Centre, Eddie and Cloudberry, explained the necessity for keeping the centre open, the record of resistance associated with the centre, the role of the ex paid worker and two Councillors in removing resources, and the campaign of misinformation waged by certain figures on the Social Work Committee, and the new initiatives now launched such as the vegan cafe, bookstore, meeting place which are strengthening the ties with the Broughton-New Town community. The Centre is under 24 hour occupation by voluntary workers.

Although recent support for the fight to keep The Centre open has come from Malcolm Chisolm, the left wing Labour M.P. from Leith, the Broughton Community Council and local papers such as the "Broughton Spurtle", the users group running the centre are determined to preserve the identity of the place as an international social centre promoting resistance to capitalism, while campaigning against racism and fascism, sexism, attacks on the unwaged etc..

It was decided, after a series of discussions designed to examine ways of increasing our links and sense of solidarity, to call for a mobilisation of all Anarchists and libertarian socialists in Scotland to demonstrate our opposition to the Council, should current eviction proceedings lead to Court Action to enforce the removal of the occupiers. Since such Court Action isn't yet initiated in mid July it was decided to proceed with a follow up conference on Saturday 6th August at The Centre, 103 Broughton St. The afternoon conference would have 3 sessions, a social to follow, and an 'action' the next day to reclaim use of space for picnics etc in anticipation of the future Criminal Justice Act.

We also decided to create a Scottish anarchist federation, built initially around the pressing need to mobilise to defend the centre. We also intend to link up throughout Scotland, while increasing our international ties etc.. This letter is intended to bring this urgent matter again to your attention and highlight the need to put aside inertia and sectarianism, and join arms in The Centre's 'hour of need'.

Their fight is our fight !

The struggle continues !

Stop Press : At a Social Work Committee meeting, Tuesday 28th June, the Centre's users were given an ultimatum to move out or else the proposed transfer of lease to the Community Council wouldn't be considered. Meanwhile the eviction threat/ proceedings continue. The Council have gave no definitive guarantee to the Community Council about 'taking over' and no assurance to stop eviction proceedings to allow this to happen.

Proposed Agenda for Saturday 6th August

From 11.30am. Snacks available to 12-1pm. Creche available 1-6pm, users need to ph 031-557-0718 by 4th Aug
1 - 2.30pm Discussion on Criminal Justice Bill & implications for direct action Edinburgh & Glasgow introductions. 2.30 - 2.45pm Short break for leg stretching & tea etc.
2.45 - 4.15pm Discussion on Unemployed and wage labour struggles. Andy of Dundee to introduce.
4.15 - 4.30pm Another short break !
4.30 - 6.15pm Session on the Federation:-
1 To reaffirm our intention to mobilise to defend The Centre & federation contacts when threatened.
2 Proposal, Mike (Ed.) name should include reference to Autonomous revolutionaries after Scottish Federation of anarchists (and.....)
3 Proposal, Eddie (Ed.) the SAF/SFAAR should have a paper/magazine (perhaps developing out of the Anarchist Review to be published late August in Glasgow ?)
4 To coordinate a series of speaking tours with public meetings to promote our ideas. Examples could include Lorenzo Kombo Ervin from New York Black Cross & McLabels defendants.
5 To assemble a minimum Aims & Principles (basis of agreement) Robert L / Iain (Glas.)

Report from the founding meeting of the Scottish anarchist federation in the centre²²⁸ in 1994. It was organised to unite forces in defence of the centre.

Despite a powerful media campaign by the users, many solidarity events with authors like James Kelman and Irvine Welsh, and a cooperation with the local community council the regional council finally rejected the lease renewal. The lease expired in June but the centre kept open. The users invited "anarchists and autonomous revolutionaries"²²⁹ from all over Scotland to Edinburgh to discuss how they could defend the centre. The attendees founded the Scottish Anarchist Federation and initiated the publication of the first issue of the Scottish Anarchist²³⁰. The building

²²⁸ SRL, D: TCBS, F: Leaflets and Posters (green), Scottish anarchist federation, 1994.

²²⁹ SRL, D: TCBS, F: Centre Leaflets & Posters (green ring binder), Scottish Anarchist Federation, 1994.

²³⁰ Scottish Anarchist, issue 1, 1994, <https://libcom.org/history/scottish-anarchist-magazine-issue-1> ; accessed 10 August 2017.

was then occupied by users 24 hours a day to resist the council ordered eviction. A large police operation on 1 December 1994, however, evicted the centre. 21 demonstrators were arrested and two were faced with charges²³¹. Some of the users regrouped after the eviction. By 1997 they had found new premises and established the Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh (ACE) which is a vibrant centre of autonomous politics until today.



Shop front of the Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh²³².

²³¹ SRL, D: TCBS, F: University of Edinburgh (black ring binder), The Centre Fights Back! leaflet, 1995.

²³² The Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh, <https://www.facebook.com/AutEdinburgh/photos/a.170935689617829/1210874452290609/?type=1&theater> ; accessed 10 June 2019.

9. Where Do We Go from Here?

In times of a striking weakness of working class organisation it is especially important to engage with experiences of organisation outside the workplace and outside the organisations which failed to defend its previous power.

We are still being attacked by the same inequality generating system. New laws are constantly being introduced which further the profits of the ruling classes and increase the suffering of the youths, the unemployed, the illegalised border crossers, the evicted tenants, the precarious workers. Race, gender, class, sexuality and other lines of systemic oppression still decide on the allocation of this suffering. Still we are being told that it is us, our personal failure which causes the suffering.

Let us once again unite against the manifestations of capital and state rule and other systems of oppression. Let us once again turn anti-authoritarian revolutionary ideas into powerful practices.

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