

Haile Selassie

EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE I of Ethiopia has almost universally been remembered as a kindly benefactor, yet the evidence suggesting otherwise is overwhelming. It is argued that he implemented many reforms in his country and Rastafarians believe him to be God incarnate (as prophesied by Marcus Garvey, who surely deserves his own Myths and Legends page?) but how justified are these suggestions?

If we take as starting point Fascist Italy's invasion of Ethiopia we find Selassie fleeing to Britain in a brave attempt to rally support for his country. He remained in Bath for the duration of the war, but on returning to take his place on the throne he became paranoid about the partisans who had stayed and fought the Italians, fearing their bravery and preferring obsequiousness. Thus, they were gradually removed from positions of authority and replaced with those who had collaborated with the Italians as he knew they could be easily kept in line and would be open to the methods Selassie used to control his dignitaries. Selassie's methods of asserting and achieving and maintaining power involved breeding an atmosphere of distrust and corruption, where government officials would inform on each other in a constant vying for power, each wanting to be noticed and promoted by the Emperor, as the financial rewards could be great.

Ethiopia had much in common with any other capitalist society. For instance, starving peasants felt themselves privileged to even see a rich person in the flesh (shades of the homeless in Britain grieving over a recently deceased Princess). To achieve this state of affairs, Selassie would throw crumbs to the poor and bribe the rich. An example of this was his practice of throwing coppers to the poor to celebrate his birthday each year.

Always Selassie had to exercise absolute control, punishing those who undermined his authority, two examples being Prince Imru and Tekele Wolda Hawariat. Prince Imru gave some of his lands to the peasantry without the Emperors permission and as a result he was exiled from Ethiopia for twenty years for "disloyalty". Tekele Hawariat, a celebrated war hero, refused bribes and special privileges and so was imprisoned and finally executed by decapitation. If Selassie couldn't have

someone in the palm of his hand then he would get rid of them.

Progressive

The image Selassie liked to project to the West was always one of being somehow progressive. To this end many youngsters were sent abroad to be educated, though when they returned Selassie's megalomania and greed meant that this education could never be employed to initiate any reforms in the country. Yet, as we have said, Selassie



is remembered by many as a great reformer. Rather than being interested in reform, Selassie was interested in 'development'. This allowed him to appeal for funds to help this process. To this end hospitals, bridges, factories etc. were built, all bearing the name of the emperor. But as the money poured into Ethiopia much of it was misappropriated by Selassie and hundreds of millions of dollars found their way into his personal bank accounts. The West, however, continued to back Selassie, who they regarded as a bulwark against 'communism' in Africa.

In the sixties, when Selassie had begun to lose his grip following an attempted coup d'etat, he found it necessary to pay Army officers and his Police obscene amounts of money to maintain loyalty and order. Thus, in a country of 30 million farmers and 100,000 police and military personnel, 1% of the state budget was allocated to the farmers and 40% to the army and the cops.

Sumptuous Banquets

Selassie bred corruption in Ethiopia, he maintained a backward and inhuman system in which millions of his subject lived in degrading poverty, oppressive misery and ignorance. Nowhere in the world was the

gulf between rich and poor greater. In 1973 Jonathan Dimbleby visited northern Ethiopia and made the film which was to signal the end for Selassie. The film for the first time showed that people were starving to death in their multitudes, despite the money for 'development' which was being pumped into the country. At the Palace the splendour and riches seemed to know no bounds. The juxtapositioning of the two contrasting images in the film was striking; the pigs with their sumptuous banquets were growing fatter on the backs of walking skeletons. Of course this hunger suited Selassie as people could hardly rebel when they were starving to death. There was in fact, however, plenty of grain in Ethiopia. But landowners took the harvest from the peasants, grain prices doubled and the farmers who grew the grain could not afford to buy it.

As the dying continued, western journalists were no longer allowed into Northern Ethiopia. Selassie preferred to show off his great 'developments' to the world press. The suffering could not be hidden indefinitely so, as the situation became a bigger and bigger embarrassment to the Emperor, the Police began to kill off the starving en masse.

It is ironic that Selassie liked to project an image of himself to the world of a kind, tolerant and benevolent soul, yet those in his country who detracted from this image were usually executed. Supporters of Selassie could argue that it was his underlings and not he that were responsible for the atrocities and corruption, the Emperor being kept in total ignorance of the situation. A look at the facts shows this to be impossible. Selassie knew what he was doing when he stuffed the money stolen from his subjects under his mattress and encouraged others in his employ to do likewise. Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski wrote of Selassie: "the Emperor himself amassed his great riches. The older he grew, the greater became his greed, his pitiable cupidity...he and his people took millions from the state treasurer and left cemeteries full of people who had died of hunger, cemeteries visible from the windows of the royal palace" (The Emperor (1984) Picador p.160).

Haile Selassie was not God or a great reformer, but a callous, greedy, thieving autocrat, who should be remembered for the murdering leach that he was.

ORGANISE!

for revolutionary anarchism

No 48 Spring 1998

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FANNING THE FLAMES



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MYTHS AND
LEGENDS:
HAILE SELASSIE

FRENCH UNEMPLOYED FIGHT BACK

MAGAZINE OF THE ANARCHIST COMMUNIST FEDERATION

Aims and Principles

1 The Anarchist Communist Federation is an organisation of revolutionary class struggle anarchists. We aim for the abolition of all hierarchy, and work for the creation of a worldwide classless society: anarchist communism.

2 Capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling class. But inequality and exploitation are also expressed in terms of race, gender, sexuality, health, ability and age, and in these ways one section of the working class oppresses another. This divides us, causing a lack of class unity in struggle that benefits the ruling class.

Oppressed groups are strengthened by autonomous action which challenges social and economic power relationships. To achieve our goal we must relinquish power over each other on a personal as well as political level.

3 We believe that fighting racism and sexism is as important as other aspects of the class struggle. Anarchist-communism cannot be achieved while sexism and racism still exist. In order to be effective in their struggle against their oppression both within society and within the working class, women and black people may at times need to organise independently. However, this should be as working class women and black people as cross-class movements hide real class differences and achieve

little for them. Full emancipation cannot be achieved without the abolition of capitalism.

4 We are opposed to the ideology of national liberation movements which claims that there is some common interest between native bosses and the working class in face of foreign domination. We do support working class struggles against racism, genocide, ethnocide and political and economic colonialism. We oppose the creation of any new ruling class. We reject all forms of nationalism, as this only serves to redefine divisions in the international working class.

The working class has no country and national boundaries must be eliminated. We seek to build an anarchist international to work with other libertarian revolutionaries throughout the world.

5 As well as exploiting and oppressing the majority of people, Capitalism threatens the world through war and the destruction of the environment.

6 It is not possible to abolish Capitalism without a revolution, which will arise out of class conflict. The ruling class must be completely overthrown to achieve anarchist communism. Because the ruling class will not relinquish power without the use of armed force, this revolution will be a time of violence as well as liberation.

7 Unions by their very nature cannot become vehicles for the revolutionary transformation of society. They have to be accepted by capitalism in order to function and so cannot play a part on its overthrow. Trade unions divide the working class (between employed and unemployed, trade and craft, skilled and unskilled, etc.).

Even syndicalist unions are constrained by the fundamental nature of unionism. The union has to be able to control its membership in order to make deals with management. Their aim, through negotiation, is to achieve a fairer form of exploitation for the workforce.

The interests of leaders and representatives will always be different to ours. The boss class is our enemy, and while we must fight for better conditions from it, we have to realise that reforms we may achieve today may be taken away tomorrow.

Our ultimate aim must be the complete abolition of wage slavery. Working within the unions can never achieve this. However, we do not argue for people to leave unions until they are made irrelevant by the revolutionary event. The union is a common point of departure for many workers. Rank and file initiatives may strengthen us in the battle for anarchist-communism. What's important is that we organise ourselves collectively, arguing for workers to control struggles themselves.

8 Genuine liberation can only come about through the revolutionary self-activity of the working class on a mass scale. An anarchist communist society means not only co-operation between equals, but active involvement in the shaping and creating of that society during and after the revolution. In times of upheaval and struggle, people will need to create their own revolutionary organisations controlled by everyone in them. These autonomous organisations will be outside the control of political parties, and within them we will learn many important lessons of self-activity.

9 As anarchists we organise in all areas of life to try to advance the revolutionary process. We believe a strong anarchist organisation is necessary to help us to this end. Unlike other so-called socialists or communists we do not want power or control for our organisation.

We recognise that the revolution can only be carried out directly by the working class. However, the revolution must be preceded by organisations able to convince people of the anarchist communist alternative and method.

We participate in struggle as anarchist communists, and organise on a federative basis. We reject sectarianism and work for a united revolutionary anarchist movement.

No War But The Class War

As we go to press, it looks as though a negotiated "peace" has been obtained by the United Nations with Iraq, ruling out the likelihood of bombing raids by the US-British alliance. But the sanctions continue, and it is these sanctions which have caused more deaths than the 1991 Gulf War and Operation Desert Storm, through starvation and disease. Many parts of the Iraqi civilian infrastructure are still in ruins, medical supplies are scarce, and there are many water-borne diseases circulating. The end of the 1991 Gulf War did not mean peace, just as the negotiated settlement does not mean peace. The suffering continues for the mass of the Iraqi people, whilst the ruling elite continues to lead a life of luxury. The sanctions remain in place, backed up by a massive military presence, and the Anglo-American alliance retaining the right to take military action against Iraq whenever it feels necessary.

In the run-up to the possible war, Britain and the USA mounted massive propaganda campaigns, highlighting the massive and

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deadly arsenal of chemical and biological weapons that the Saddam regime was supposed to possess. But, as came to light, "United Nations inspectors do not know where Saddam Hussein's chemical or biological weapons are hidden, or even whether they exist in usable form, Whitehall sources admitted..." (Guardian 5 Feb). Both Britain and the US were aware that "public opinion" was against any new Gulf war, and that massive anti-war mobilisations could take place, just as they did last time, they are also aware of a reluctance by its former allies to take part in any further wars which is motivated by political logic. The European bloc led by France and Germany needs to build its own influence in the Middle East. It chooses to do this through "diplomacy", as the military option has already been taken by the USA. The British government's backing for the USA show the contradictory position it is in, as it seeks to both be a close ally of the US and be influential in the European Union. For our part, we must work to stop any of the power blocs' plans for war and mass destruction through mass mobilisations on an international level. No War But the Class War!

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IRELAND - is the 'peace process' collapsing?

The 'Peace Process' in the North of Ireland is in serious crisis once again. As *Organise!* goes to print Sinn Fein are beginning a suspension from the multi-party talks, following Unionist and British government assertions that the IRA has breached the Mitchell Principles of non-violence. Sinn Fein, for their part, have denied both that they are representatives of the IRA (!) and that the IRA "cessation" has been ended. They talk of returning to the table "on their own terms". Whilst the Process has never been exactly stable, why does it appear to have gone seriously awry?

The assassination by the Irish National Liberation Army of Loyalist Volunteer Force fuhrer Billy 'King Rat' Wright in the Maze prison on December 27th marked the turning point. Wright's death was used by the LVF as an excuse to launch a campaign of sectarian murder against working class Catholics. The notion, however, that the murders of the likes of taxi drivers Larry Brennan and John McColgan were somehow merely 'revenge' or 'reactive' killings is very wide of the mark. Rather, the LVF, with the assistance of elements in the UDA, used the death of their leader to intensify their sectarian murder campaign which had already taken the lives of numerous innocent Catholics during 1997, and to attempt to wreck the talks process. Whether indeed, Wright's death was connived at by forces within the state, for whom the breakdown of the 'Peace Process' would be welcomed, remains to be seen.

What is clear, however, is that anti-'Peace Process' elements on both sides have had an impact out of proportion to their (albeit growing) numbers.

Fundamentalist

On the Loyalist side, the LVF, who apparently rejected overtures from the Ulster Volunteer Force to rejoin the fold shortly before Wright's death, have been recruiting outside of their Portadown base and have obviously attracted UDA /Ulster Freedom Fighters. A working relationship has developed which we probably haven't seen the last of. The LVF has no 'political' wing because Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, with its rejection of the 'Peace Process' and its old time Protestant fundamentalism, serves that function quite nicely.

The LVF has vowed to take the fight against the 'sell-out' of Ulster to the 26 counties and has already attempted an unsuccessful bombing of a Gardai station

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in Dromad, County Louth. Its main field of operation will, however, remain the six counties.

Meanwhile, on the Republican side, tension is certainly rising as dissension on the 'Peace Process' grows. The INLA claimed responsibility for the killing of UDA commander Jim Guiney

on January 19th and has reaffirmed its commitment to the armed struggle, despite some support for a tactical cease-fire amongst the Irish Republican Socialist Party leadership. The INLA, however, are not the main concern of those in the 'unarmed strategy' Sinn Fein leadership. The main 'threat' to the leadership of Sinn Fein lies in the IRA itself and the growth of dissent amongst the rank and file of the Republican Movement.

Internal Settlement

The likelihood of, at best, some sort of 'Internal Settlement' featuring continued partition but new, cross-border bodies with limited but tangible powers and a 'reforming' of the Northern Ireland statelet, has led to elements within both Sinn Fein and the IRA rejecting the 'Peace Process'. This years Ard Fheis of Sinn Fein may see these elements attempt to openly challenge the leadership. At the forefront of these will be the 32 County Sovereignty Committee, who count Bernadette Sands McKevitt, sister of 1981 hunger-striker Bobby Sands, as one of their spokespersons, but other critics of the leadership are developing and the possibility of a split, if not immediately then later in the year, is not unthinkable. Where such a split would go from there is

not so obvious, the only ready-made alternative being the abstentionist Republican Sinn Fein.

The bombings of Moira and Portadown at the end of February, like the massive car-bomb in Enniskillen on January 24th, would appear to be the work of the Continuity Irish Republican Army, the paramilitary force associated with Republican Sinn Fein. Although no group has claimed responsibility and the IRA has made a point of distancing itself from the bombings, the possibility exists that the CIRA was assisted by elements recently resigned from the IRA or even still nominally part of it. If this is the case then the potential split in Sinn Fein could be mirrored in the IRA. The option for the pro 'Process' majority then would be to either silence the 'splitters' or face their probable exclusion from the talks and, therefore, the end of the 'Peace Process' in its current form. The likelihood of a 'settlement', of whatever kind, by May 1998 is not exactly strong.

Whatever develops, one thing remains certain, that is that when the gunfire dies down and the rubble is cleared away the bodies on the floor will continue to be the working class of Ireland and not those of its exploiters and leaders.

Note: The Workers Solidarity Movement and *Organise!*-IWA have organised an event, titled Ideas And Action, to be held in Dublin on March 28th 1997. Details from: P.O. Box 1528 Dublin 8. Ireland. *Organise!*-IWA can be contacted at P.O. Box 505, Belfast. BT12 6BQ. N.Ireland.

The End of the Liverpool Dockers Strike

AFTER 2 YEARS 300 sacked Liverpool dockers agreed at a mass meeting by a majority of 4-1 to accept payoffs of £28,000 from the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, their employer. 80 dockers employed by Torside company, whose sacking had set off the strike will receive no payment. These pay-offs will mean that the strikers will receive no Jobseekers Allowance until each claimants savings fall below £8,000. Many are in debt after 2 years of strike, and will have to pay off mortgages etc.

When the strike first started, the dockers expected a massive show of solidarity from other workers. Recently the TGWU union in which the dockers are members, with Bill Morris at its head, sabotaged all solidarity action. Any motions for positive action from TGWU branches were ruled out of order by the union's president. In the New Year it was revealed that the dispute appeal fund was almost out of money, and that international solidarity actions had not escalated. 60 dockers had already accepted the offer, and since the last ballot in December, 20 more had accepted. Unfortunately, this is another defeat in a long line of defeats for the working class. This defeat was actively connived at by both the TGWU and by Labour. Indeed, the Mersey Docks Company expressed admiration for the union and for Bill Morris. The TGWU bureaucrats threatened the dockers that if they did not go along with the bosses' demands they would be sacked.

The dockers fought long and hard for two years. Local carworkers at Ford and Vauxhall failed to back the dockers. The police viciously attacked the mass pickets on several occasions. Above all,



the dockers had to take on the union as well as the employers and the State. Now that the dockers have accepted the deal the T&G is being invited back into the docks. This is a sign of gratitude from the employers, and shows that they are confident that the union will police the workforce.

The T&G leadership actively sabotaged solidarity on an international level by sending letters abroad saying that the strike was not official and that any action would threaten the T&G. Because they realised that they were not getting support from the unions, the dockers began to seek the support of social movements outside of traditional labourist politics. For example they gained the support of Reclaim the Streets and other ecological groups. This was an important step in breaking with the old ways of carrying on a strike, both paralysing and ineffective. Such tactics can lead on to globalisation of struggle-that is a realisation that all struggles are connected and that there is a common enemy-capitalism and the State.

THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

THE MILLENNIUM DOME is a huge construction being built on derelict land on the banks of the river Thames in South London. It is a prestige project, effectively a re-run of the Great Exhibition of 1850 (history repeating itself as farce) which trumpeted the wonders of the Industrial Revolution, and of British Capitalism. This time around the structure is only intended to be temporary, lasting 25-30 years, and it will be a snip at a mere 758 million pounds.

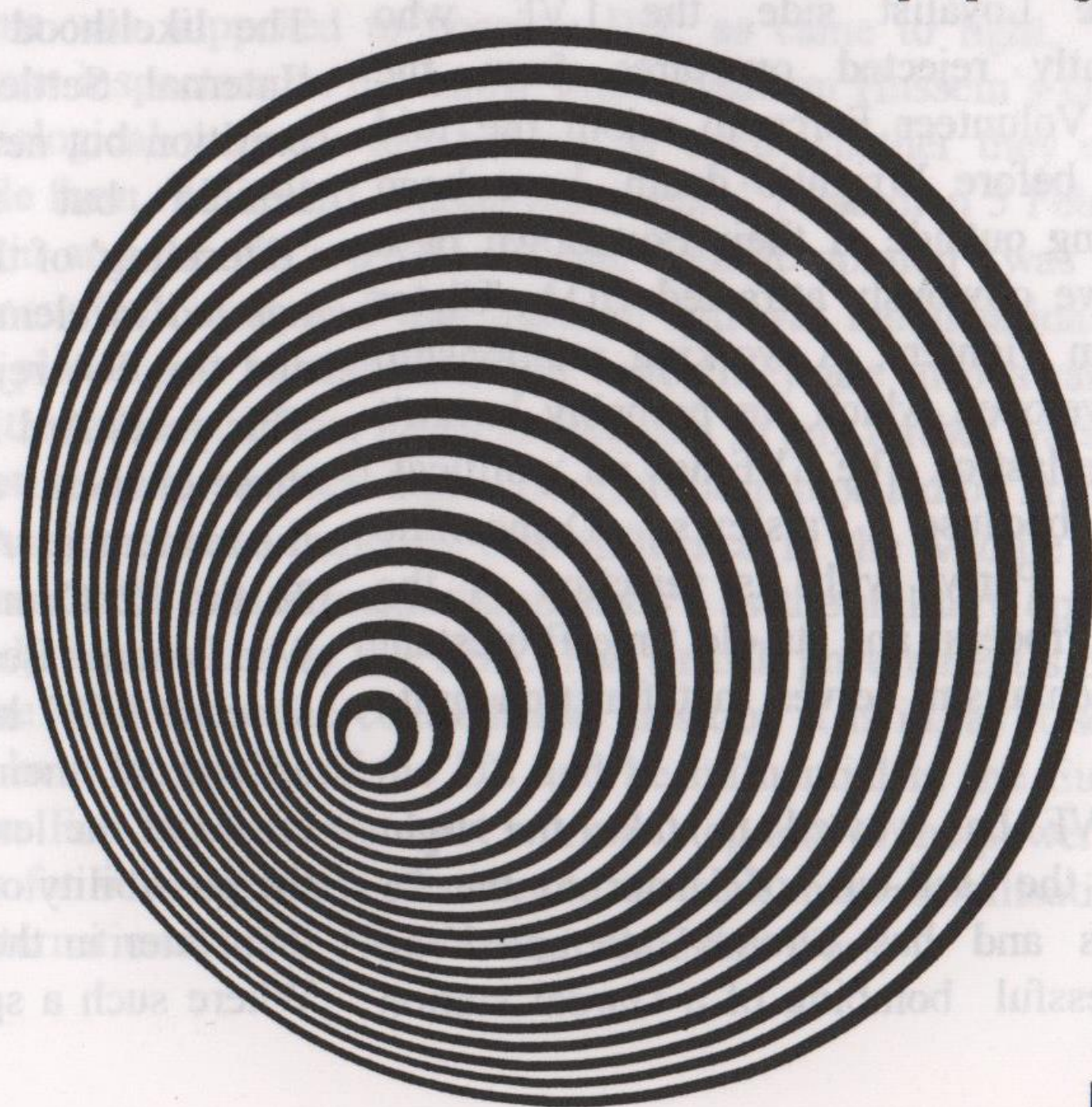
Why oh Why?

The Dome will 'celebrate the Millennium' - the year 2000 (though a number of people argue that it falls in the year 2001!), and promote Britain plc and New Labour. British Capital will be promoted to investors and consumers abroad in terms of 'look at our high quality, low cost products, and skilled but cheap labour'. For the punters at home the main message is that of 'One Nation -

a peoples' Britain where everyone is equal as a citizen/consumer. Accordingly, everyone must work together to make Britain plc profitable - workers and bosses, all political parties, all races and religions - in order that they all profit, though not equally of course. The Millennium project itself is a shining example of this, it is run by a cross-party committee headed by the prominent Tory Michael Heseltine (ex-deputy Prime Minister under Major). Appropriately, the Dome is the pet project of Peter Mandelson, the Minister without Portfolio aka the government's chief spin doctor. It is significant that one of the main places visited by the committee members for inspiration has been Disneyland in Florida, which has been described as 'a marvel of technology applied to mass psychology', which is what the dome aspires to. Similarly the designers want to appeal to people's hopes for future worlds

which are different but essentially similar - like Blair's Labour and Major's Tories- or was it the other way around? The project is an important part of the spin doctoring strategy, which consists of misinformation and managing the news in order to maintain and increase power and influence. It is characterised by the triumph of form over content

- good-looking (sic) smiley politicians selling politics-as-product, dressing more-of-the - same policies with words such as *new* and *people's*, with the underlying message that they were better and fairer. What are the reasons for this 'Americanisation' of power politics? It is partly a consequence of technology which atomises people e.g



elections campaigns are increasingly fought by television. This is itself political however, in that technologies form and content (use) are the product of the dominant social and economic forces in society. More importantly spin-doctoring is an essential part of the ruling class strategy. In the latter days of the Tory government a significant proportion of the ruling class, exemplified by media mogul Rupert Murdoch, decided that the Tories had lost their ability

to manage the population for Capital having lost their authority as a result of pigs in the trough and other scandals. A new regime, different and cosmetically fairer was needed in order that it would have the authority to administer the harsh medicine to the workers that Capital required (workfare, benefits cuts, hospital closures, rail privatisation etc.).

Opposition

The Millennium dome project continues to be controversial,

arousing much criticism and opposition on a number of fronts. The huge cost is a major factor, for a temporary building, at a time of huge cuts and attacks on the working class and poor with attacks on unemployed, single mothers, people with disabilities etc. The secrecy surrounding the proposed contents of a 'public' project, the artistic/cultural merits of exhibits, whether there will be a religious theme - yep, Christianity, the desirability or otherwise of

commercial and nationalist elements. We are totally opposed to the whole kit and caboodle. We applaud the direct action of the Reclaim The Streets protesters who occupied the construction site for several hours late last year. We should support all such direct action against this and other prestige projects such as Olympic Stadia and contrast the obscene waste of resources with poverty and suffering in a world of plenty. May the dome be Labour's and the Ruling Classes' Titanic!

Labour's welfare warfare

OUR STATEMENT IN the last couple of issues of *Organise!* that Labour would start to attack working class people almost immediately in particular with a full frontal assault on welfare benefits might have surprised some. Now events have shown that indeed Labour has this in mind and is acting very rapidly to carry out its attacks.

Labour is planning to axe maternity benefits. It disguises this attack behind the propaganda that women earning £1 million a year should not get maternity benefits. In reality this is aimed at women in ordinary white collar jobs.

They are also planning to cut disability benefits by forcing the disabled into jobs that would be totally unsuitable. When Harriet Harman became Secretary of State for Social Security she refused to increase incapacity benefits, probably amongst the lowest in the EU. Now the disabled are being forced back to work with camouflage propaganda about personal advisers talking with the disabled-threatening and bullying them.

Another part of the attack on welfare benefits is the old lie much used by the Tories, now dusted off and polished up by Labour that fraud is taking place on a massive scale with the benefits system. Labour plucked the figure of 17% from the air. This figure was supplied by the Department of Social Security itself, when other surveys suggest around 2% fraud. At the same time big businessmen, including people like Geoffrey Robinson, the Paymaster General are taxdodging by salting their money away in offshore trusts-perhaps as much as £96 billion.

Labour will cut single parent benefits further scapegoating a section of the working class that had already been scapegoated under the Tories. Labour knows that a large part of the social security budget goes on pensions. This is likely to increase with an increasing proportion of elderly in the population. Labour will attempt to close down State pensions and force people to take out private pensions. Many will find this difficult to pay, already finding it hard to make ends meet.

Slave labour

Labour's welfare to work scheme through the New Deal is designed to provide cheap labour to the employers through training, education and job opportunities. Those who refuse to be forced into derisively low paid jobs will have their benefits removed. Many of these involve sending people to work for charities, councils, or for supermarkets. This will provide slave labour workers and threaten the wages of those already working in these sectors. The education part will mean NVQ Level 2 qualifications at further education colleges. This means training for semi-skilled jobs. Those already signing on and taking NVQ Level 3 will only be allowed to continue if it is thought that there will be 'job prospects'. 69,000 enrolled on A Level and Access courses will find themselves being forced onto these schemes. These education schemes would be totally shoddy, with little chance of a job at the end, and with a direct aim of camouflaging unemployment figures.

Labour is hiding these attacks behind the propaganda of 'Radical Welfare Reform' 'New Deal' 'New Opportunities'. These soap ad jingles disguise a brutal attack on



the welfare system as does the statement that 'The country can't afford the massive spending on the welfare state'. In fact Britain is the third lowest in the EU league of 11 countries' expenditure on health and welfare benefits. Labour wants to make sure the British bosses have to fork out less for benefits.

At the same time Labour has signalled its policy on wages. Public sector workers-teachers, health workers etc.- were due to get a pay rise of 3.8%. With 3.7% inflation and the cost of living soaring, even this would be pathetic. Labour intervened to stop the Pay Review Bodies paying out, and ordered that 2% only be paid from April. The rest to be paid in December. This means that 8 months worth of an already measly rise will be taken off wages. This is the biggest pay delay ever in public sector history. Nurses will lose £5 a week and teachers £50 a month.

In addition, all pay awards will be what Gordon Brown calls self-financing. No extra money will be given by the Government and schools and hospitals will make the pay awards by cutting elsewhere. This was already carried out by the previous Conservative government resulting in the

loss of 250,000 public sector jobs since 1993.

Blair intends to make this a signal to workers in the private sector and to all public sector workers not covered by the Pay Review Bodies. Unison, the union representing many public sector workers has put forward a demand for a 10% pay rise or

an increase of £1,000 (whichever is greater). This is due to outrage among public sector workers. In fact, it will do nothing to push this demand and the Unison leaders are ready to accept the PRB decisions. Unison will attempt to sabotage any industrial action by pointing to the implementation of a national minimum

wage as a solution. It will also point out that David Blunkett, threatened to ban strikes in the public sector.

We cannot rely on the unions. Now is the time to think about organising independent action outside the control of the unions. Let's wipe the smug grins off the faces of the Labour government.

Three strikes and you're out!



THE FOLLOWING IS an interview with a member of Edinburgh Claimants, Jim, about attempted police repression of the Three Strikes (anti-Job Seekers Allowance) campaign; on the 21st of January a claimant was found guilty of Breach of

the Peace and sentenced to 150 hours of community service. His offence (sic) had been to deliver a 3 strikes warning letter to a Benefits Office Official at High Riggs Unemployment benefit office in Edinburgh. The Sheriff (judge) called it 'a sinister offence' and said that he was considering a jail sentence; in his summing up he called the campaign a 'premeditated and illegal attempt to undermine the welfare benefits system'.

ORGANISE!: Can you tell us about the context of the Three Strikes campaign?

JIM: There has been a continuous independent claimants presence in Edinburgh since the early to mid 1980's around the Edinburgh Unemployed Workers Centre and Lothian Claimants Union. The Centre successfully occupied by claimants opposing its closure, and claimants established a presence, particularly at unemployed benefits offices (UBO's).

Tens of thousands of leaflets were distributed, consisting of practical information for claimants, for example about how to resist Restart - Snooper Harassment and Actively Seeking Work measures. Although the numbers of activists involved have been small, they have gained the respect of many claimants and have had a big influence. The idea that people should be accompanied at interviews, for example. The Three Strikes campaign began in early 1996, and has struck a chord with unemployed people, though it has been unpopular with Union and Labour party bureaucrats because it gives claimants power. The underlying idea is that this should be part of building a claimants' counter power in all areas of social life, to counter oppression and exploitation (see previous recent issues of *Organise!*, and issue 19 of *Subversion*). The first warning letters were given out in 1996. The information received from claimants showed the same names of bullying Benefit Office officials kept recurring, e.g. Alistair Mathieson, client adviser at Torphichen Street UBO in Edinburgh. This slimebag forced claimants onto Jobplan and Restart courses, showed political bias during a restart interview (quoting Michael Portillo), emotionally abusing claimants, sometimes reducing them to tears. Following 2 warnings there was a 3 Strike demonstration against him. Fifteen people took over the Benefit Office, went to his desk and

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photographed him. Mathieson responded by running away. The demonstrators left the office before the police arrived. Mathieson's photo was flyposted throughout the city with a list of his sins, the posters urged people to refuse to be interviewed by him. The campaign has received quite a lot of coverage in the local press over the years. It has not been sympathetic, but claimants can read between the lines, and contact addresses and phone numbers have been quoted at times. The campaign has been important, but it is only one direct action tactic to build claimants power, complementary would be a phone tree consisting of 30-50 people. They would be 'dole-busters' who were available at 24 hours notice to actively support claimants facing harassment. I believe such a phone tree has been developed in Brighton.

ORGANISE!: What has the reaction of the authorities to Three Strikes been?

JIM: The benefit office authorities have been very worried by it. Edinburgh claimants have been very involved in supporting the Liverpool Dockers struggle locally. The PTC (a civil service union which is mostly for managers) have consistently written to the support group urging them to get rid of us from the group. The author of the letters is Bernie Jaster, a benefit office manager and real nasty. The police have been showing an interest for some time; they have contacted people who they think are involved, going to their houses and trying to interview them. In Nottingham of course they have actually carried out raids on people's houses. There have been questions raised in the Houses of Parliament about 3 strikes; the answer maintained that Groundswell made anonymous and illegal threats against those carrying out JSA sanctions. Police advice and support has been exemplary it says, and appears to have helped deter Groundswell from implementing their threat to harm staff. The 3 strikes policy against Mathieson was described disapprovingly from the platform at the CPSA (Civil and Public Servants Association) trade union conference.

ORGANISE!: What have relationships generally with Benefits Office staff been like?

JIM: We have continuously striven to maintain contacts with UBO workers. The best of them seem to have left now; up to half of those left are on temporary contracts. Most of them now seem to have little idea about claimants situation or the possible effects of what they are asked to do. They are raised on the idea that claimants are the enemy.

ORGANISE!: How do you react to the outcome of the court case this week? (February 11th 1998)

JIM: Four hours after the verdict, 20 claimants and supporters carried out a 3rd strike action against Marianne MacDonald, a Project Work interviewer at High Riggs, and her manager Mr Laird. The demonstrators, all wearing masks of MacDonald's face, stormed into the benefit office in central Edinburgh. They carried posters of her with the slogan NO ONE LIKES A BULLY.

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French unemployed organise and fight



"Fed up with unemployment! We want to work"
Old slogans from the movement

A MASS WAVE of occupations of unemployment benefit offices swept through France in December 1997 continuing well into the New Year. *Organise!* takes a look at this welcome resistance.

This phenomenon should be looked at in detail as it should provide lessons and examples to all unemployed who are looking to defend themselves in Britain and round the rest of the world. As the French magazine *Courant Alternatif*, the paper of the Organisation Communiste Libertaire noted in a February editorial: "Once more, libertarians were omnipresent in the action."

The movement of occupations began in December when some local unemployed groups, as well as the national unemployed co-ordination Agir contre le chômage! (Act against unemployment)-AC! occupied the offices of Unedic/Assedic - the equivalent of supplementary benefit- in Arras in northern France and Marseilles in the south. They demanded an immediate payout of 1,500 (francs (£150) for the long term unemployed.

A new left government under Lionel Jospin came to power in France last year. Apart from his own Socialist Party, the cabinet included 4 ministers who are members of the Communist Party. The new government promised the creation of 700,000 jobs, 350,000 of them in the public sector. The private sector promise of unemployment failed to get off the ground straightaway, as the private sector bosses refused to release finance, and the State would not subsidise

them. Similarly a government promise of a universal 35 hour week has met with fierce resistance from the employers.

The election of the left destroyed any remaining illusions among the unemployed that anything would be done by the State to tackle unemployment. This is why unlike the usual demobilisation in France after elections of left governments, this new movement, starting out with small numbers, quickly increased in size and militancy and continues to be active. This should be compared with the social movement of November-December 1995. This time it is a government of the Left in power, and as a result the usual manoeuvres of the Left to demobilise any social movements have been that little bit more difficult to carry out.

Enough is enough!

The Unedic is a joint government/union body headed up by Nicole Notat, leader of the CFDT union (noted for its "radicality" and talk of "self-management" in the 70s and for a long while a close accomplice of the Socialists). Notat refused to pay the sum demanded by the unemployed activists. Conditions have deteriorated rapidly for the unemployed in the last 2 years, to the point where many are not far off of almost complete destitution.

The actions were set off by the unemployed committees of the CGT (large union central controlled by the Communist Party) in the Marseilles area. But this does not imply a manipulation by the Communists. Rather it was a movement from the base that was taken up by multiple unemployed groups and activists, including the CNT

(Anarchosindicalist union) and by many anarchist/libertarian militants as well as by those in no group or organisation.

Assedic offices everywhere were occupied with large united demonstrations of the unemployed and employed in many main towns. The demand for a payout was raised to 3,000 francs, and demands were then put forward for a rise in benefits for all of the equivalent of £150, with a new benefit for the under-25s, who receive no benefits at all.

The old carrot and stick tactic that the Left in power/the unions had used to finally demobilise both the lorry drivers strike (late autumn 1997) and the struggle of the sans papiers (immigrants without official stay permits) did not immediately work this time.

The movement put at the head of its priorities the human and social factors, refusing to be taken in by various economic arguments (one union leader said that the unemployed were taking jobs from the employed!). In certain areas, the unemployed broke with the old schema of trade unionism: corporatism, strike, negotiations, end of struggle.

Indeed, the frontiers of what was "possible" were pushed back considerably, with hundreds of buildings occupied day and night, and groups of unemployed demanding and taking food in the supermarkets and in the most posh restaurants! All of this might be seen as symbolic, but demonstrates the determination and willpower of a social movement, weak numerically, but which is a great novelty in a situation where most workplace struggles are defensive and well controlled by the unions.

If the movement is weak in numbers, this is hardly surprising. Hundreds of thousands are today totally defeated in their daily life where survival is their main preoccupation.

For those who did engage in struggle, for many there was a massive widening of horizons leading to the questioning of the capitalist system in its totality. Yes, when one is out of work, one has time to become totally depressed, but one also has time to think. If waged workers have the "muscle" to potentially back up their struggles, they are also the victims of paralysing alienation. Hence a paradox in both waged and

unwaged sectors. This vulgar economism is an enemy of all revolutions.

The new demands were met with an offer of the equivalent of £50 million for retraining and a promise that 216,000 unemployed would get additional transport subsidies of about £3 a week. This was met with an escalation in the number of occupations. The government then decided to give out £100million in unemployment benefit. Again this was met with derision. This meant the princely sum of £30 per person! Now Jospin talked about his commitments to the European Union, and refused to give any more money.

First cops, then cops

The riot cops were sent in, evicting the occupations in an euphemistic "evacuation". Up to this time, the Communist Ministers were saying things like: "The first measures taken...make good sense", supporting the cops given out by the government. Now it was: "The Assedics must rediscover the possibility of fulfilling their role"- in other words, "riot police, charge!" For their part, the Greens also supporting the Left government played it both ways, reflecting their minor influence on the government. One Green leader visited occupying unemployed and denounced police attacks whilst another said he was in solidarity with the unemployed whilst supporting the government at the same time. Once again, as in the last few strikes and social movements the extreme right Front National failed to offer an opinion apart from remarking in their paper that the unemployed were profiteers who lacked decency.

For their part, the Trotskyists put forward the usual transitional demands, seeking to limit the movement to the "possible". Some

of their organisations are deeply implicated in support for the Left government. For example, Lutte Ouvriere, a Trot group with several thousand members, denounced anarchists as provocateurs, in line with the talk of the Communists/CGT who constantly droned on about "casseurs" (breakers) and uncontrollables. For its part the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire, French section of the Fourth International, was doing its little wheelings and dealings, in line with eventually joining the Socialist Party en masse. One of its leaders, Aguiton, also a leader of AC! and the SUD union, had several meetings with Cambadélis, number two in the Socialist Party, and an eminent Trotskyist himself (in a different faction) assuring him that "we are not looking for a crisis".

Now the CGT union moved to fulfil its role as saboteur of struggle. On January 27th they called out over 20,000 people in 3 separate demonstrations in Paris-unemployed, railworkers, road maintenance workers. All demonstrations were concerned with unemployment, but the Communists made sure that they marched in different parts of the capital.

The radicalism of the movement was shown in occupations of Socialist Party offices, in the blocking of railway lines to stop the TGV high speed trains, in the questioning of work itself. During a demonstration in Paris on 17th January, which brought out 25,000, a meeting under the banner *We Want Shit Work paid with Crumbs* a group of people whipped themselves whilst demanding work at any price. Some of their slogans were *Work, no wages and overtime - One solution, exploitation, - Bosses join us, your slaves are in the street, - The unions are our friends, they have never betrayed us, - 35 hours a day*. The meeting went from

50 to 400. After this demonstrators broke a police blockade of an occupied building, occupied a shopping centre and forced one of the swankiest Parisian restaurants La Coupole to provide food. On other occasions attempts by the AC! bureaucrats to negotiate were thwarted by mass meetings. At many mass meetings, people questioned the whole nature of waged work.

Demobilisation?

In towns like Nantes the high school students began to take part in the struggle. A thousand marched to join the unemployed in Nantes and took part in an occupation. The Act-Up committees (organising around AIDs and HIV) took part in most of the actions calling for the same benefits for AIDs sufferers as for other claimants.

The number of anarchists/libertarians involved in the movement was far from negligible (for example 400 people in the Federation Anarchiste contingent on a Lyons demo). Beyond satisfaction at the good health of different libertarian organisations was there the influence to create a self-organised movement of unemployed and those in temporary work, independent of the parties and the State, leading to the creation of a movement of social resistance capable of creating a new society?

The Left government has put forward its plans for a 35 hour week that it says will solve unemployment. It hopes to introduce this by the year 2000 and to encourage bosses to create jobs. But in actual fact the bill does not mean that pay will not be cut in line with reduction of hours, that 35 hours will be compulsory, that job creation will not be paid out of taxes rather than by the bosses. In addition, the 35 hours will be "flexible". It will be calculated annually, so that one week you might work 60 hours, and another 10, which suits the needs of the bosses very well!

The movement is being demobilised on this 35-hour promise. The Communists are busy winding down the movement. AC! and other unemployed organisations feel smug that they have been received by those in power, have begun to be integrated into negotiation structures, and will go along with these manoeuvres. At Marseilles where the action first started, this is already under way, but as we write other towns have seen an increase in the strength of the movement. The government will both hope to destroy the movement with the help of its allies in the Communist Party and the unions, and with brute force. Already a member of the Federation Anarchiste,



"Share wealth. Live differently with or without work" New slogans emerge

Christophe Fetat, has been arrested in Lille for taking part in actions. If the movement does come to an end, what needs to be built upon by anarchists/libertarians is a radicalisation of those involved, and the establishment of occupied buildings that can continue to service the unemployed, operated by autonomous committees of unemployed/those in temporary work outside of the control of the parties.

And in Germany

After the German government announced the highest unemployment rate since the war, 4.8 million-14% of those able to work-a mass wave of demonstrations effected 200 cities and towns and involving 40,000 people in early February. Contacts between French and German unemployed have been established with the French giving advice from their own experiences.

STOP PRESS: As we go to press, we hear of the following.

6th February Occupation of public transport building initiated by CNT in Paris. Building surrounded and 80 (!) arrested by police armed with assault rifles. After identity checks all released.

11th February 150 unemployed/temporary contract workers arrive at the Cash Converters store. This scummy business buys the property of the poor who urgently need money, at derisory prices, and sell it to other poor people at a profit! That's the market for you! The objective of the 150 was to bring the goods out on the pavement to distribute it free. The police attacked violently. 40 arrests. 30 released in the evening, the rest kept overnight in cells and released the following morning. Possibility of prosecutions. Media imposes blackout on many actions. At Poitiers police physically attack occupying unemployed (5 Feb.) Growing radicalisation as many unemployed see the role of the Left and of the police.

Friends and Neighbours

If you like what you read in *Organise!* you might be interested in these publications:

Counter Information. Quarterly newsheet produced by independent collective. Information on struggle worldwide. Free copy with SAE from Transmission, 28 King Street, Glasgow G1 5QP, Scotland.

Subversion. Quarterly magazine of group of same name, with politics close to ours. Free copy from Dept 10, 1 Newton St, Manchester M1 1HW.

Collection Action Notes. Bulletin produced by CAN. Information on struggles worldwide. Contact PO Box 22962 Baltimore, MD 212, USA.

The Union Makes us Strong? Syndicalism: A critical analysis

We conclude our three part analysis on Syndicalism.

CRITICISM OF SYNDICALIST methods from anarchists, starting with Malatesta, has not been necessarily due to any anti-organisational tendency or sympathy with 'Marxism'. In Europe, the militants of the Dielo Truda group of Russian anarchists in exile began to question the identification of anarchism with syndicalism and the attitude towards syndicalism which libertarians had historically taken. Their Organisational

Platform of the Libertarian Communists (1926) described "revolutionary syndicalism" as "only one of the forms of revolutionary class struggle" which, of itself contains no "determining theory". They suggested that anarcho-syndicalism had failed to fully "anarchise" unionism and that a specific anarchist organisation was needed to do this. They also argued that such a specific anarchist organisation should attempt to "exercise theoretical influence on all trade unions" since "...if trade unionism does not find in anarchist theory a support in opportune times it will turn, whether we like it or not, to the ideology of a political statist party." To a great extent the latter claim can be seen to be true when the evolution of unions such as the French CGT, or the exodus of syndicalist militants into Bolshevik parties, is taken into consideration.

The Organisational Platform did not however have a great deal to say about the function of syndicalism or trade unionism for that matter. The experience of the council movement in Germany and the various ideas that came out of it appear to have passed them by.

Simultaneously, the Japanese anarchist communist theoretician Hatta Shuzo was arguing that syndicalism, being a reflection of the structure of industrial capitalism, ran the risk of replicating hierarchical social

relations, particularly through a continued division of labour.

He argued that, because syndicalists called for the mines to be controlled by the miners, the steelworks to be controlled by the steelworkers etc. this division might end in the recreation of the state as arbiter between conflicting interests. As he put it: "In a society which is based on the division of labour, those engaged in vital production (since it forms the basis of production) would have more power over the machinery of co-ordination than those engaged in other lines of production. There would therefore be a real danger of the appearance of classes." (Collected Works: Anarchist Communism, Tokyo 1983)

The anarchist communists in Japan tended to favour a return to the land following a successful revolution, with industrial workers bringing their skills and technology back to their villages. In a predominantly rural society in an historical period where factory workers were generally still connected, through family, to the land, this perspective may have made some sense. Primitivists take note.

Working class self-organisation and permanent economic organisations

Most (but, unfortunately, by no means all) anarcho-syndicalists would agree with the ACF that the existing Trade Unions are not



vehicles for social revolution. Some may also agree that permanent economic organisations (i.e. unions) have a *tendency* to become integrated into the mechanisms of exploitation, through their role as mediators or representatives, and to develop bureaucratic structures and modes of operation. However, they would argue that, because the anarcho-syndicalist union is simultaneously an economic and an 'ideological' organisation it is resistant to co-option and bureaucratisation. The 'conscious' anarchists within the anarcho-syndicalist union are seen as the safeguard against the organisation "selling-out" and the non-hierarchical structure safeguards against a division between the rank and file and its delegates, preventing the development of a strata with separate interests from the rest of the membership. Although this idea of the 'conscious' anarchist minority in the union has been common in the syndicalist movement it has also been rejected by many 'pure' syndicalists.

Degeneration

However, we would argue that *all* unions, regardless of their initial political orientation (and that would include anarcho-communist) have a tendency to become inexorably dragged into a mediating role and to eventually become a break on autonomous class struggle. This integration into capitalism is indeed usually fought tooth and nail by revolutionary militants, often with temporary success. We believe that the historical experience of the workers movement bears this out.

How does this 'degeneration' happen? For one, anarcho-syndicalist unions, like all other unions, have to be able to get 'better deals' for workers in the here and now, otherwise they remain small, essentially political organisations. Whilst the anarcho-syndicalist union remains small and, importantly, unrecognised by the bosses, organising the most militant, class-conscious workers it can engage in 'wildcat' actions. It maintains a 'revolutionary spirit'. During periods of increased class struggle (which its activities may have contributed to) the union grows. If it can successfully

lead strikes, occupations etc. to victory it will attract more members. It is faced with the position of having forced the bosses/management to recognise it, to mediate with it. If at this point the anarcho-syndicalist union doesn't negotiate then it loses the confidence of its broader membership and so is forced to either become the recognised union body or back out of the situation. Since workers have to, at some point this side of the revolution, negotiate with their bosses, it is not surprising that anarcho-syndicalists take the former option. Once the period of intense struggle is over the anarcho-syndicalist union is faced with

a choice of carrying out all the mundane, routine jobs that any other union has to, or of returning to being a marginal force in the workplace, leaving the way open to the reformist unions. If it chooses the latter it is no longer in fact a union but a (more or less) revolutionary group within the workplace. It can be said that the anarcho-syndicalist union remains *revolutionary* (i.e. a dynamic force in the class struggle) in as much as it *doesn't act like a union*.

This process is graphically exhibited in the development of the Dockworkers Co-ordination in Spain, the Coordinadora, which emerged in the 1970s. Although this organisation was not specifically anarcho-syndicalist (or indeed syndicalist at all), it was based on an anti-bureaucratic, anti-party political, class based and highly 'democratic' structure which involved members of the CNT. Born in the struggles in the ports and in the wider Spanish working class, the Coordinadora, organising through mass assemblies, appeared to be an example of a permanent

'union' organisation which would not succumb to bureaucratisation, routinism and class-collaboration. For years the Coordinadora was involved in struggles which maintained its combatitive momentum and won the admiration of libertarian revolutionaries. With the slow wind-down of those struggles the organisation, however, became less and less dynamic and more and more like

a traditional Trade Union, despite the heroic efforts of the anti-capitalist militants involved in it. The coordinadora is a perfect example of how bureaucracy is a natural by-product of economic organisations in periods of 'defeat'.

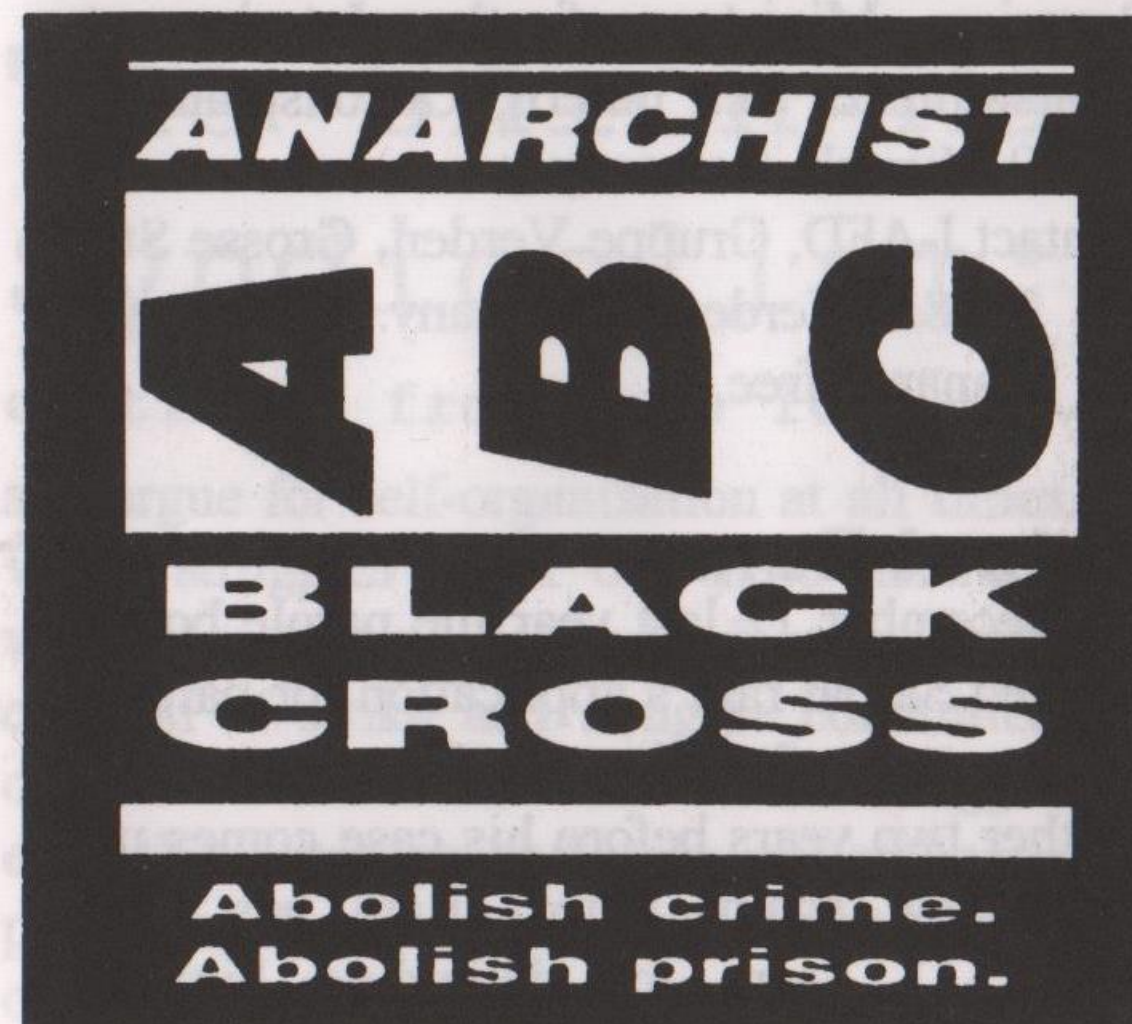
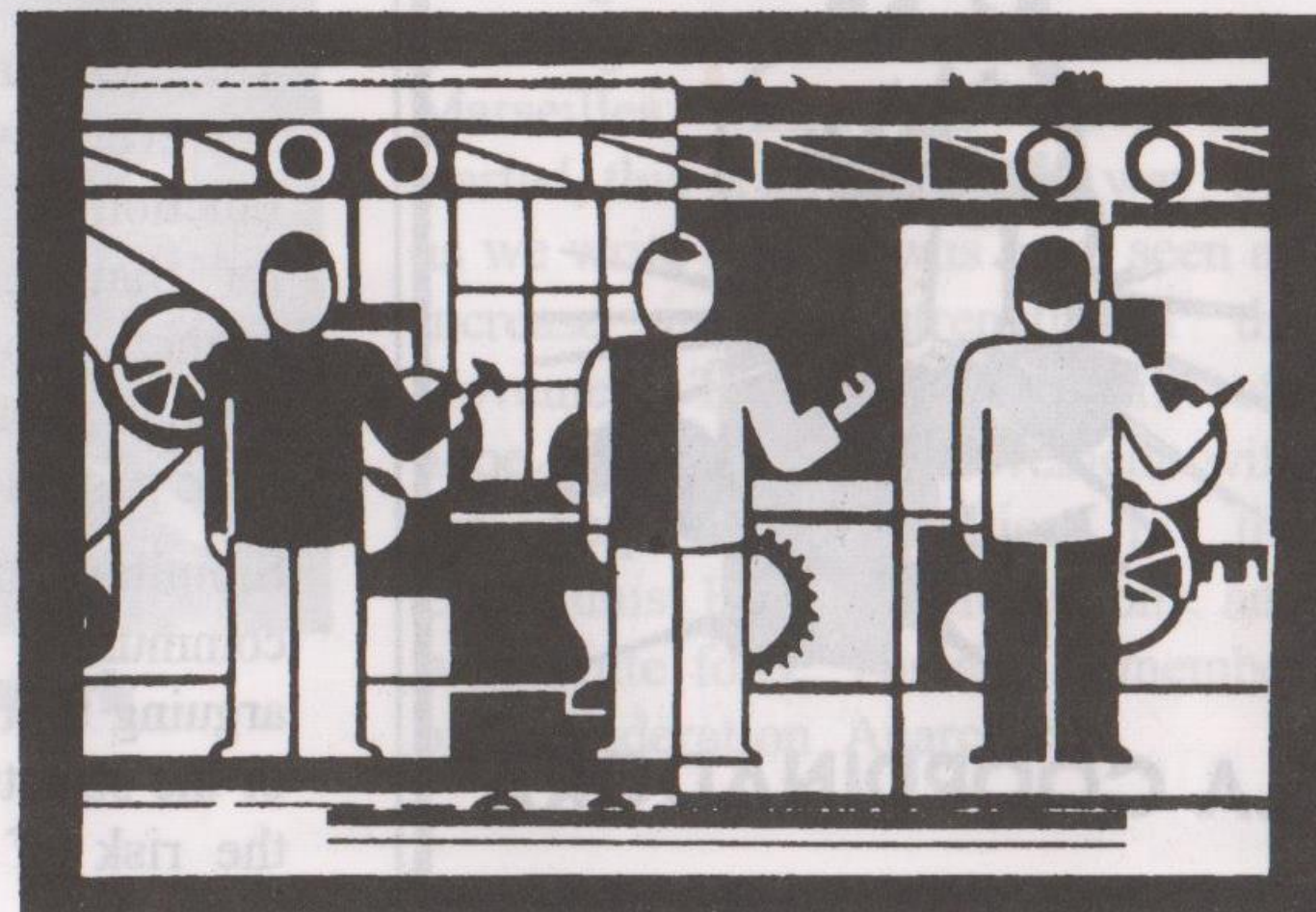
The role of revolutionaries

So, if we reject the idea of building 'alternative', syndicalist union structures, what does the ACF advocate when it comes to workplace organisation? In a sense this question is answered by the experience of the working class in struggle. In times of upheaval, industrial or communal, the working class has developed organisational forms with which to fight for its interests. The most obvious examples of this are the Soviets of the Russian revolution, the Councils of the German and Italian revolutions, the councils of the Hungarian revolution, the action committees in France during the 1980s and 90s, the COBAS in Italy in the same period, strike committees amongst the Donbas miners in the Ukraine etc. These 'spontaneous' organisations of the working class can also become bureaucratised/degenerate (think of the fate of the Soviets in the 'Soviet' Union!) but, typically, they dissolve when the task they were created for is over.

Spontaneism

Unlike some anarchists and 'councillists', who tend towards 'spontaneism' and the rejection of any organisation, we do see the need for organised intervention, in the workplace and community, by revolutionaries. In Britain, for example, the tactic by anarcho-syndicalists (Solidarity Federation) to set-up networks of militants in various industries is one we would support. Rather than being the foundation for an eventual 'general' union, however, we would see such co-ordinations as a means to building revolutionary workplace groups linking with militants locally and beyond. Such groups would produce propaganda, organise resistance groups, intervene in struggles

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Green Anarchist

Following the vicious sentences dished out to 3 editors of Green Anarchist (see last *Organise!*) the London Gandalf Support Campaign (LGSC) was launched with 85 people from a wide range of groups and organisations attending the first meeting. The 3 year jail sentences for reporting news of environmental and animal rights direct actions has resulted in the creation of the Gandalf Supporters Campaign (nationally) and a number of local support groups. Thousands are being asked to sign a Solidarity Pledge to back the continued reporting of direct actions in defiance of the prison sentences.

The appeal by Noel Molland, Saxon Wood and Steve Booth is liable to be heard in July. The trials of another editor of Green Anarchist, Paul Rogers, and the Animal

Liberation Front press officer Robin Webb are due to come up. They would like their trials to take place after the appeal, although obviously the sentencing Judge and the State would like this to happen beforehand!

The LGSC are organising a Liberation Tour countrywide to raise awareness about the case. LGSC will hold a major public meeting later in the year with the screening of the Gandalf and McLibel videos.

Both Noel and Saxon have been moved from the Guys Marsh prison as they requested, to prisons nearer relatives.

Write to the GANDALF prisoners at: Steve Booth (CK4323) HMP Lancaster Castle Lancaster LA1 1YL.

Saxon Wood (CK4322) HMP Send, Ripley Road, Woking Surrey GU23 7LJ Noel Molland (CK4321), HMP Channings Wood, Denbury, Newton Abbot, Devon TQ12 6DW.

"His only crime was to defend himself"

Arthur Lee Williams II was attacked outside his apartment. In the struggle that ensued the attacker was shot. Arthur Williams later found that his attacker was a policeman (not in uniform). This was only the beginning of his experience of injustice and corruption.

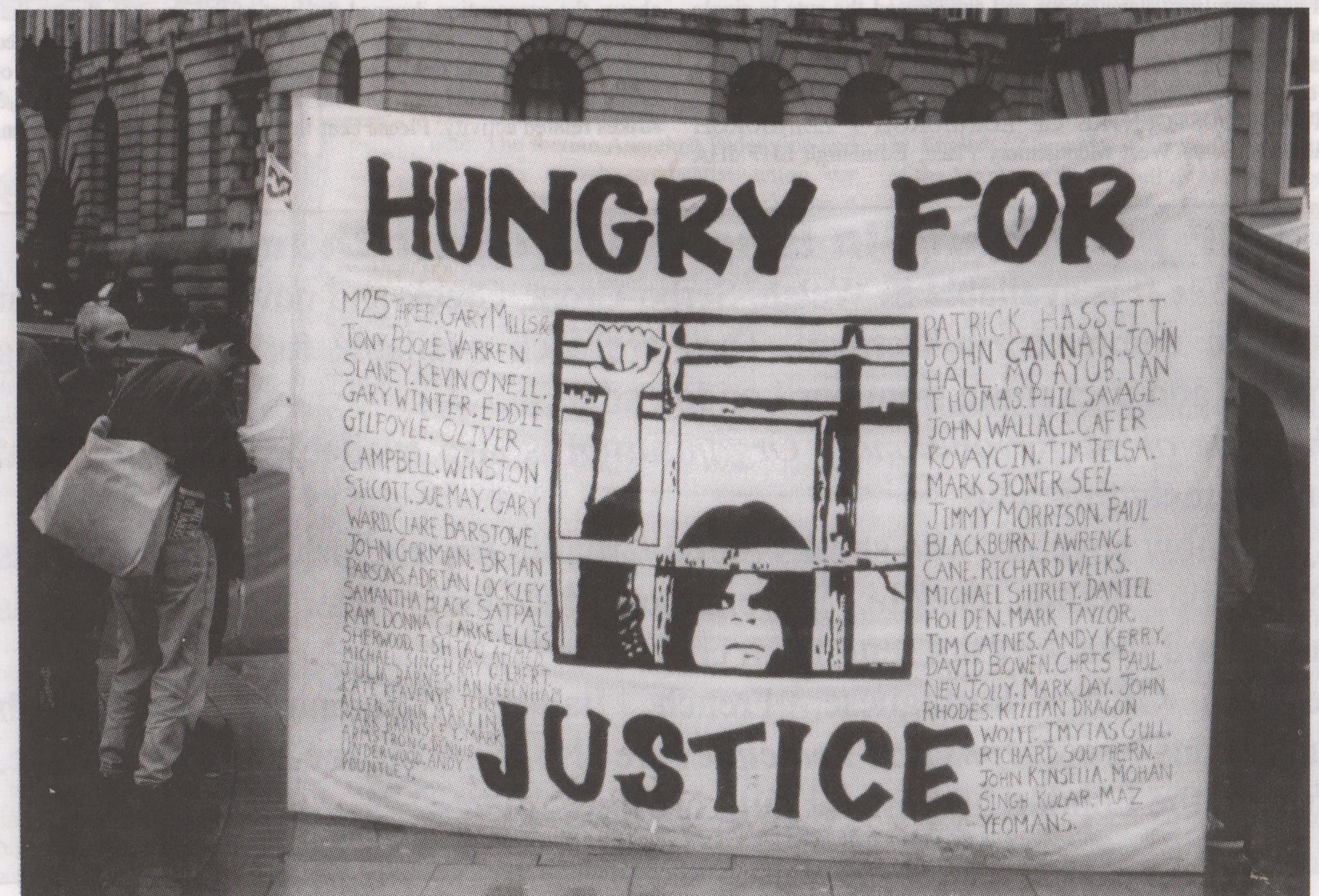
His case was heard by an all white jury in Texas. Texas has a long history of racism

and prejudice against blacks. Arthur Williams is black. the judge sentencing him was canvassing for police votes at the time of his trial. His lawyer was inexperienced and failed to bring critical evidence to the court's attention.

There is no way that Arthur Williams could have received a fair and unbiased trial with a white jury determining his guilt in a case that involved a policeman from his state, or with a judge who needed police votes.

He is appealing and waiting to be heard. Unfortunately, this does not come cheap in the USA. He needs £150,000 to cover legal expenses. All hope for paying for this lies in donations.

At the moment Arthur Williams is living in terrible conditions. He describes it as "Hell on Earth". Prisoners are only allowed out of their cells for 3 hours a day in the week; they are not allowed out of their cells at the weekend. Every time prisoners need to leave their cells they are stripsearched (often a female guard will be present). Prisoners on Death Row cannot receive packages from the outside world, they must buy everything from the prison commissary. Those without friends and family have to go without as prisoners cannot earn any money. They often do not get any medical treatment as the doctors do not see any point in keeping them alive. There are no real recreational facilities. Therefore, some prisoners commit suicide and others take it out on their fellow



prisoners by attacking and killing them for little or no reason. Texas has one of the worst prison systems in the USA and has a high murder rate not just from prisoners killing prisoners but from guards killing prisoners.

At the moment donations are needed to cover legal expenses, any donation would help. If you would like to help in other ways contact Arthur Lee Williams II Campaign, c/o IWW, 75 Humberstone Gate, Leicester LE1 1WB. In USA write to Deborah Williams, 4227 1st Avenue South Minneapolis MN 55409 USA. Any cheques or money orders to the Prisoners Campaign Group to above address.

German anarchist nicked

Hans-Georg Eberl, militant of the I-AFD (Initiative for a German Anarchist Federation) faces a prison sentence because of his antifascist activity. On 2 November 1997 in the Bavarian town of Koesching, 500 extreme right activists met to create an international of the European Right. They included leaders of Front National France, Vlaams Block from Belgium, as well as German fascists. Before the meeting 140 antifascists demonstrated outside. they were

attacked by neo-nazi skinheads, and one had his nose broken. The police protected the retreat of his attacker, after which fighting broke out between the opposing forces. The police chose to steam in against the antifascists, arresting 3. One of them, Hans-Georg, was accused of throwing a stone at a cop. His injuries were such that he needed no medical treatment whatsoever.

Hans-Georg was imprisoned from 2-14 November in preventive detention. He was obliged to work for a mark an hour, his glasses were taken away after a week, only his parents were allowed to visit, his mail was heavily censored. He was freed on bail, charged with "grave wounding" and "serious threat to public order".

Repression against antifascists and anarchists has always been an instrument used by the State. But for several months, the German state has considerably toughened its stance, banning antifascist demos and persecuting militants. In response the I-AFD has demanded that all charges be dropped against Hans-Georg. Send letters of protest to Herr Beckstein,

Bavarian Minister of the Interior at Staatsminister des Innern, Odeonsplatz 3, 80539 Munich, Germany.

Contact I-AFD, Gruppe Verden, Grosse Str. 62, 27283 Verden, Germany. e-mail: i-afd_anarch.free.de

Satpal Ram

On December 12 last year the parole board rejected Satpal ram's application for parole, consequently Satpal will have to serve another two years before his case comes up for review again. Satpal Ram has now served 11 years for defending himself against a racist attacker (who subsequently died). In those 11 years he has been moved 53 times, an abuse in itself, and has been regularly victimised by various prison regimes. He says "I am often held in total isolation in solidarity confinement, having to endure prolonged periods of deprivation, psychological abuse, intimidation, starvation diets and physical torture". the fight to free Satpal continues. you can write to him at Satpal Ram E94164, HMP the Wolds, Brough, Everthorpe, North Humberside.

Three strikes and you're out! *Continued from page 6*

Protesters gave out leaflets bearing her photo, detailing how she had consistently harassed claimants and tried to cut their benefits on 8 documented occasions. The leaflets denounced Labour's New Deal as compulsory slave labour and condemned the cuts in single parent's benefits. Police arrived, but were too late to stop the action, there were no arrests. We won't be intimidated by the police and courts. The 3 strikes resistance continues.

AUTONOMOUS CENTRE OF EDINBURGH / EDINBURGH CLAIMANTS, 17 West Montgomery Place, Edinburgh EH7 5HA

Scotland. 0131-557 6242 (ansaphone) anarchy@cablenet.co.uk pager 01426 128984 (v.short message only).

LEGAL NOTE - In court the claimant pled guilty to the charge as above; the prosecution dropped the part of the original charge that he made "abusive, offensive and threatening remarks". He stated that although he had delivered the letter, he was not a member of Edinburgh Claimants nor had he been involved in any other 3 strikes related activity. Please bear this in mind in anything written.

ACF pamphlets in languages other than english

As We See It is available in Welsh, Serbo-Croat, Greek and now, thanks to our Austrian comrades, in German. They are each available for 70p including postage and packaging from our London address..

The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation is also available in Serbo-Croat for 70p including p&p.

If you know anybody who speaks Serbo-Croat in Britain, or you have contacts in Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Slovenia or Macedonia where Serbo-Croat is understood then why not send them copies?

German, Greek, Portuguese, French, Italian, Esperanto and Spanish translations of our *Aims and Principles* are also available for 20p plus postage. Write to the London address for bulk orders.

The Union Makes us Strong?

Syndicalism: A critical analysis

continued from page 10

and argue for self-organisation at all times. When struggles break out these networks would co-ordinate action and promote the creation of strike and struggle committees outside of union control. When struggles end, these groups maintain an organised presence, bringing together militants in order to build for further struggles. Such groups would be linked, not by a union-type structure but organically with both the revolutionary organisation and the local libertarian movement.1

the Soviet Bloc) increasing numbers of working class militants are looking for

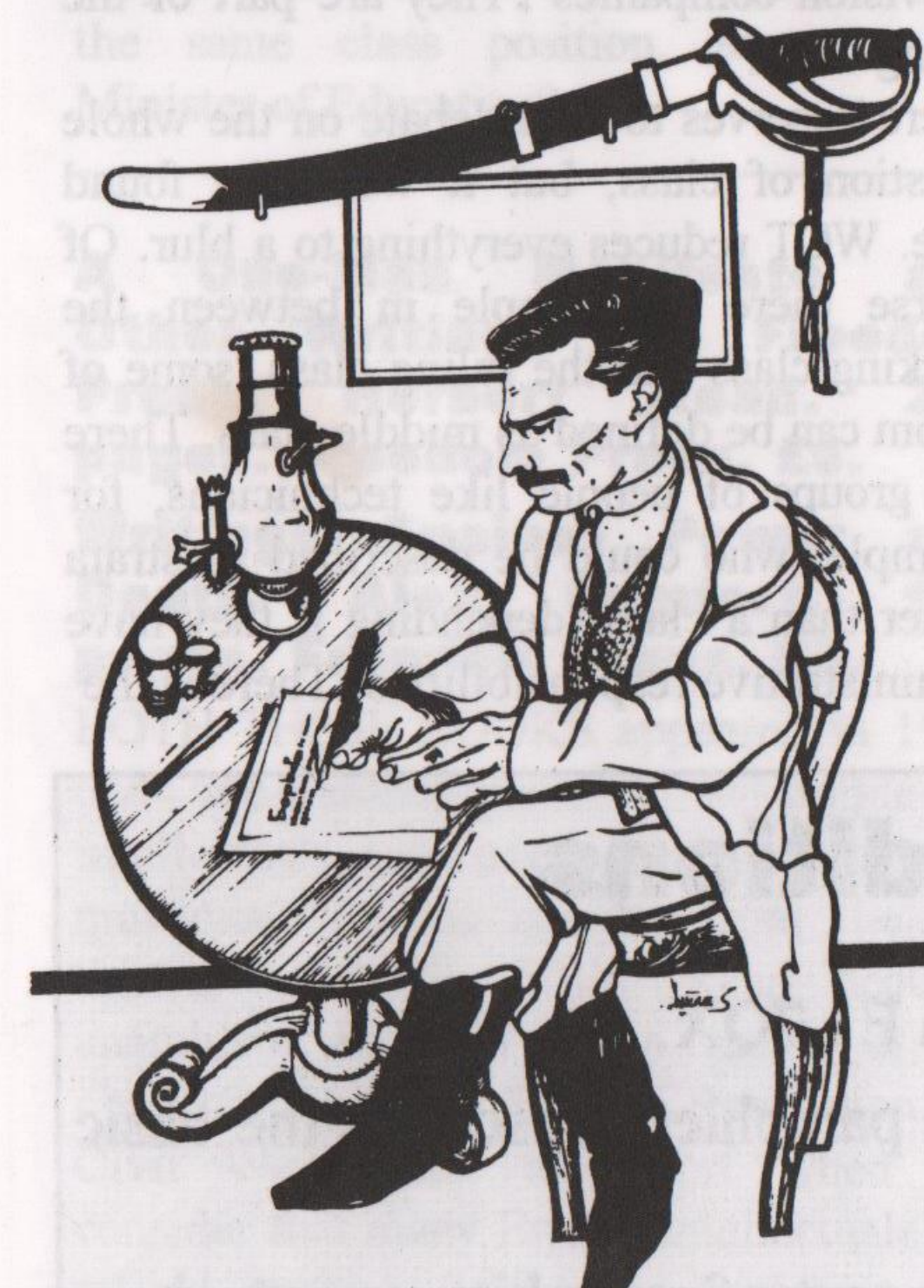
alternatives. Syndicalism appears as a 'ready-made' alternative to the Trade Conclusion

As we stated in part one of 'Syndicalism: A Critical Analysis' (*Organise!* 46), anarcho-syndicalism is in a state of resurgence on a world scale. With the collapse of 'actually existing socialism' (ie state capitalism in Unions and their Social Democratic/Leninist defenders. What our article has wished to do is promote a critical debate on whether the syndicalist (including anarcho-syndicalist) model is the way forward in the struggle. We believe that it is

not and that libertarians must give serious thought to the whole question of workplace organisation and beyond. We welcome further discussion in this area.

1. For a detailed outline of the ACF approach to workplace struggle organisation send an A4 SAE to the London address, asking for out 'Strategy and Tactics' document.

Reviews



The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays. Nestor Makhno. Edited by Alexandre Skirda. 114 pages. AK Press. £7.95.

"Organisational responsibility and discipline should not be controversial: they are the travelling companions of the practice of social anarchism".

THIS COLLECTION OF articles was mainly published in *Dielo Trouda*, the excellent anarchist communist review produced in exile in Paris by Makhno, Piotr Arshinov and Ida Mett. Many of the articles address themselves to the problems of the Russian Revolution, and above all, the insurrectionary movement in the Ukraine, the Makhnovschina, inspired by Makhno himself. Others address themselves to the false accusation that Makhno and the movement were anti-Semitic and carried

out pogroms against Jews. The Dielo Trouda group correctly analysed the role of the Bolsheviks and the nature of Soviet society. As Makhno remarks: "It has come to pass in History that the workers have defeated Capital, but the victory then slipped from their grasp, because some State power emerged, amalgamating the interests of private capital and those of State capitalism for the sake of success over the toilers".

Also of great value are Makhno's reflections on the Spanish Revolution of 1931. He notes with uncanny foresight that: "The FAI and the CNT (Reviewer's note: The Iberian Anarchist Federation and the mass anarcho-syndicalist union the General Confederation of Labour) ...must not be afraid to assume the reins of the strategic, organisational and theoretical revolutionary leadership of the toilers' movement. Obviously they will have to steer clear here of unity with the political parties generally and with the Bolshevik-communists in particular, for I imagine that their Spanish counterparts will be worthy imitators of their Russian mentors...So they will inevitably betray their allies and the very cause of the revolution". If only the Spanish libertarian movement had heeded these words in 1936! Indeed Makhno has sharp criticisms of the Spanish movement, apt for anarchism internationally and still pertinent today. "...because anarchism possesses no hard and fast program, because the anarchist activities that have been carried out have been, and are still, conducted amidst the most utter dispersion, rather than springing from a tactical unity determined and enlightened by a theoretical unity, by a single shared goal".

This leads on to Makhno's observations on organisation, some of which are included here. In his direct, no-nonsense way, he effectively argues for the need for efficient organisation and saying that: "Anarchism can no longer remain walled up inside the narrow parameters of a marginal thinking to which only a few tiny groups operating in isolation subscribe".

Throughout this collection of articles one is conscious of the intransigent and clear sighted revolutionary spirit of Makhno. It is a pity that this is not adequately served by the book. The original French edition included, in addition to the articles printed in English, Alexander Berkman's account of the Makhnovists, as well as *Memories of a Makhnovist Partisan*, by Ossip Tsebry. Now admittedly, this last text has been issued as a separate pamphlet by the Kate Sharpley Library, but it would have been nice to have had this edition in its entirety, especially given the price! Similarly, the translation work is sometimes sloppy. So we can read that Daniel Guerin was at one time the "Secretariat for History of the French Anarchist Federation". This is nonsensical as the term implies more than one person, and in fact the original reads "on the Secretariat". Similarly we see the following nonsensical reference, saying that: "He (Voline) told him that Arshinov, an intellectual and Makhno a peasant" were a "team" and that they had to remain "inseparable". The original reads: "He told him that he, an intellectual, Arshinov, a worker, and Makhno, a peasant...". Despite these reservations, the book should be read by all libertarians and those searching for alternatives to Leninism.

Offence **Issue 1**
£1.50
Animal: The Football
Special Issue 2
80p

Offence is the fanzine-style magazine of the Libero! Football Supporters Network which appears to be a campaigning group opposing the increasing authoritarianism and 'moral policing' found in professional football. The politics appear libertarian and anti-state, albeit with a nod to 'new laddism'. It contains several quite interesting articles, not least one which plays down the hard-line Loyalist and fascist tendencies which exist amongst Glasgow Rangers fans as "...the superficial appearance of religion and Ireland". Yeah, right.

We say appear because a (not too) closer examination reveals that the glossy and expensive (20 pages) 'zine' is in fact a product of the terminally dodgy Revolutionary Communist Party and the Football Supporters Network is their latest front organisation (like Workers against Racism, Irish Freedom Movement etc.). Why a football front? Well, having given up on the working class as a bunch of losers the RCP focus on middle class intellectuals (such as themselves) as the vanguard of the revolution. Seeing the influx of middle class -types into football it's an area that they obviously feel they can organise. Therefore, despite all the (accurate)

criticism of the anti-fan activities of clubs, government and police, you will be hard-pressed to find any mention of *class* in the pages of Offence.

Unlike Animal, for whom class is number one on the agenda. Not surprising as Animal is produced by people involved in Class War and the Movement against the Monarchy. The Animal Football Special is a bit of a mixed bag including an article on recent football protests 'When the Fans Hit the Shits', an interesting piece on the Dublin Riot a couple of years ago by Larry O'Hara and an eulogy to Eric Cantona (!). An anarchist apparently (hmm...). Animal isn't a slick production and obviously isn't following any party line. Since this Football Special is a one-off, it begs the question if there's a need for a regular football fanzine with a working class anarchist perspective? The football fanzine explosion of the past 15 years has seen a number of 'zines with decent politics and attitude, perhaps there's a place for a revolutionary alternative to shite like Four Four Two et al.?

Offence isn't it, but it's worth a look. Just approach with caution. It's available from Libero! 1 Darwin Road, London N22 6NS. Animal Football Special is available from P.O.Box 467, London E8 3QX.

Working Class Times
Volume 1 Issue 1

This four sided newsheet draws inspiration from the ideas of Andy Anderson, who used to be in Solidarity many years ago and wrote some good articles at that time. Since then,

he's developed a theory of the middle class as the real enemy. As the paper says "The middle class as a whole.... run everything" and "This economic system was created by the middle class for their financial benefit..."

But surely the expression "middle class" means that it is between two other classes- the working class (the mass of the population) and the ruling class. Working Class Times (WCT) confuses the class structure of this society. Those who own the wealth and land, the bosses, royalty, aristocracy, big land lords, big farmers etc. as well as those who politically administer capitalism- the top civil service, the government, the top echelons of the police, military and intelligence, the media barons and controllers, the judiciary etc. are the ruling class. To these could be added those who run the political party structures and the union bureaucrats. It is not the middle class as WCT says that "run the press...run the BBC, and all those who own and run the television companies". They are part of the ruling class.

There deserves to be a debate on the whole question of class, but it won't be found here. WCT reduces everything to a blur. Of course there are people in between the working class and the ruling class, some of whom can be defined as middle class. There are groups of people like technicians, for example, who could be described as strata rather than a class (depending if they have administrative responsibilities). There is the

petty bourgeoisie-small shopkeepers, etc. There is the mass of the police force, below the command structures, the prison officers, the lower ranks of the civil service, the mass of the armed forces, those who run the media, journalists and presenters for example. Some of these are highly paid, some are not. Some of these, like cops or soldiers, may have come from the working class. They are no longer working class, because of their position as agents of repression of the mass of the population. To say as WCT do that "All who run the three armed forces, from the Minister of Defence down to the 2nd lieutenants, are middle class" removes the distinctions between say, a General (part of the ruling class) and a second lieutenant (part of the command structure but at a much lower level). Yes, all of these are our enemy, but they are in different class positions. As I said, there deserves to be a debate. What about academics, university teachers, indeed teachers in general? Where precisely are they in a class society? Is a teacher really in the same class position, as say, the Minister of Education?

A One-Man Manifesto and Other Writings for Freedom Press. Herbert Read. 212 pages. Freedom Press. £6.

Writings Against Power and Death. Alex Comfort. 168 pages. Freedom Press. £5.

BOTH THESE BOOKS appeared in 1994, and are anthologies of a couple of intellectuals associated with the anarchist movement in this country from the late thirties until the fifties. Read declared anarchism in 1937 as a result of his observations of the Spanish Revolution and Civil War- quite an effort when you consider that many British intellectuals had rallied to the Soviet lie-machine (an experience that was to be repeated with a passing adulation among some for the 'achievements' of Maoist China). Both he and Comfort were to provide articles and sometimes speak at public meetings, although neither involved themselves in day-to-day practical activity like the production of propaganda. Read saw the future society as anarchist communist, but along with many others of the day, thought that this would be achieved through a syndicalist strategy. "On his return from the United States...he came to see me and talked mostly about supermarkets, which he had seen for the first time, and which interested him because people took what they wanted from the shelves; it seemed to him that, if only the cash desks at the entrances could be removed, the supermarket would be the perfect model for free anarchist communist distribution..."

(Recollection of George Woodcock, quote in Read book). Certainly Read's early writings collected here are staunchly revolutionary in particular his *The Method of Revolution*. However by 1947, Read's

revolutionism was beginning to wane and he turned increasingly to the quietist, non-violent ideas that were beginning to emerge within the movement, that would sap it (and continue to sap it) for many a year. Take for example his *Anarchism Past and Future*, a lecture delivered to the London anarchists in 1947. "The word revolution should largely disappear from our propaganda, to be replaced by the word education..." He goes on to call for the discarding of the romantic conceptions of anarchism, including insurrection and the arming of the working class. "All that kind of futile agitation has long been obsolete: but it was finally blown into oblivion by the atomic bomb. The power of the State, of our enemy, is now absolute. We cannot struggle against it on the plane of force, on the material plane. Our action must be piecemeal, non-violent, insidious and universally pervasive."

Defeatist

This defeatist 'educationalist' and non-violent approach was to reach its climax in Read's acceptance of a knighthood for his contribution to the arts. Read's feeble excuses for why he accepted this are re-printed in the book. From this moment on he had little to do with the movement. Dying in 1968, he left a legacy of revolutionary writings from the forties, some re-printed here.

Comfort was to gravitate to the anarchist movement as a result of his opposition to all wars, including the Second World War. This anti-militarism or pacifism, was not one weighed down with false ideas of non-violence. Comfort welcomed popular resistance and was to remark upon the Allied slaughter of tens of thousands with its bombings of Dresden and other German towns that: "Not one political leader who has tolerated this filthy thing, or the indiscriminate bombardment of Germany which preceded it, should be permitted to escape the consequence of what he has done".

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However, unlike Read's anarchism, at least in the forties, Comfort's was not based on class struggle but on the revolt of the individual. As he himself mistakenly remarked: "The war is not between classes. The war is at root between individuals and barbarian society". Thus, his anti-war articles contained in the book under review, whilst they heartily denounce the World War and the atrocities of both Axis and Allies, always fall back on a call for individuals as individuals to disobey. His other post-war articles gathered here because it is assumed by the compiler that they contain some libertarian interest, range over topics such as the American novel, George Orwell, Whither Israel, etc. provoke a big Why? from this reviewer.

Comfort and Read, like George Woodcock, were intellectuals who rallied to the anarchist movement for several years and then moved off again. Meanwhile others got on with the donkey-work of the incessant propaganda and agitation. Are these books produced because they are the writings of celebrities? Is it not the case that the value of these intellectuals is over-estimated? Was there not a disdain, from Woodcock at least, for working class anarchists? Would it not be the case that a number of liberal ideas were imported by Comfort, Read and Woodcock into the British anarchist movement? I'd finish by saying that Read's book is worth a read, whilst Comfort's is of peripheral interest (dare I assume!) to the reader of *Organise!*

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Making Progress is out of print at the moment

Cornelius Castoriadis 1922-1997

Cornelius Castoriadis was born Kornelios Kastoriades in Istanbul to a Greek family. Growing up in Athens he joined the Young Communists in 1937 and the Communist Party in 1941. During the war he read "several books that had miraculously escaped the auto da fés of the dictatorship: Souvarine, Ciliga, Serge, Barmine". He joined a group on the extreme left of Trotskyism, and was involved in the resistance to the German occupiers. At the end of the war he was physically threatened by both fascists and Stalinists, forcing him to leave for France. Here he joined the French section of the Trotskyist Fourth International, but broke with it in 1948. Along with Lefort and Lyotard, he helped set up the Socialisme ou Barbarie group, (S ou B) initially made up of ex-Trotskyists and ex-Bordigists, often writing in its paper of the same name under the pen names of Pierre Chaulieu or Paul Cardan. He broke with Leninism, thinking that the revolution could be made only by the workers themselves, not by the party. Workers' councils would be set up in the early stages of the revolution. He did think that some form of revolutionary organisation would be essential, uniting the revolutionary forces, and that once the revolution began, the revolutionary organisation would have to fight inside the organisation of councils to stop possible Leninist take-overs. Similar ideas are expressed in an ACF pamphlet The Role of the Revolutionary Organisation.

In the first issue of S ou B, the group denounced the Trotskyist characterisation of the Soviet Union as a "degenerate workers state". They developed this in No 2 and 4, applying a Marxist critique to the Soviet Union itself, saying that the Party bureaucracy had collectively taken over the means of production and surplus of labour. By 1960 they were saying that the fundamental contradiction of capitalism, defined as the need to reduce workers to simple order-takers opens a crisis which touches every aspect of life. From 1964, in No 36 up to the last issue of the paper No 4, Castoriadis definitively broke with Marxism.

The S ou B group exerted their influence outside France with Correspondence in the USA, Unita Proletaria in Italy, and the Solidarity group in this country. Indeed, Solidarity published many works of Castoriadis under the name of Cardan, and he influenced many libertarian socialists and anarchists. The influence of the group was apparent also in May 1968 in France, even though the S ou B group had dissolved 2 years before. As D. Blanchard, a former member wrote in Courant Alternatif, paper of the Organisation Communiste Libertaire "...The activity of the group was not limited either to a critique of Stalinism or the publication of a review. On the theoretical level, the analysis of the bureaucratic phenomenon in Eastern Europe found its echo in that of the bureaucratisation of workers organisations-unions, parties- and in the bureaucratisation of the vital organs of capitalism, the State, business corporations. To this study largely contributed... the daily experience of comrades in the workplaces. Finally, very conscientially, we were preoccupied with enlarging the field of political analysis in extending it, as had already been done by the workers movement in its most fertile moments, to the situation of women, of youth, the content of work, education, urbanism, leisure, consumerism, cinema etc."

In his last period, Castoriadis directed himself towards philosophical investigations, to

psychoanalysis. In this period, his lack of knowledge of current social events and movements led him towards a tentative defence of the West - because struggle still remained possible within it-against Stalinist imperialism. After the collapse of the Soviet Union he revised his ideas, returning to a critique of market capitalism and globalisation. However, whilst he was full of sarcasm for the bosses and the madness of the system, there was a distinct streak of superficial sociology in his writings. When asked whether the work abandoned by S ou B should be taken up again, he replied that, in the absence of a social movement that took on the critique of capitalism in its most modern forms, this was not possible!

The best of Castoriadis' thought lies in his radical libertarian vision which puts at the centre of a critique of capitalism, not economic laws or a fatal contradiction leading to its collapse, but the action of people attempting to take back their lives at every level.



letters

Dear Organise!

If your periodic 'analysis' of syndicalism is not a defining characteristic, then what other purpose does it serve? You know perfectly well that anarcho-syndicalists are as opposed to mere trade unionism as is the even tinier anarcho-communist element yet any casual reader would be hard-pressed to discover this from the pages of your comment paper *Organise!*. A little defining 'sectarianism' probably does no-one harm, however, and we've grown used to these 'attacks' over the years.

You rightly point to the counter-revolutionary activities of anarcho-syndicalists during the Mexican Revolution. This may have been due to a lack of information as to the reality of the situation in the south, it does not lessen the naiveté of the anarcho-syndicalists who participated but neither does it follow that modern anarcho-syndicalists would take a similar decision.

"Many of the earliest critics of Moscow were not syndicalist however but Marxists..." (*Organise!* 46). How early is early? Golos Truda, an anarcho-syndicalist paper, was warning of the dangers in issues No 13, 15, 3rd & 6th November 1917. Anarcho-syndicalist criticism of Bolshevik machinations continued throughout the revolution as a little more reading would show. It is also disingenuous to imply that anarcho-communists were more or less immune to the pseudo-libertarian slogans of the Leninists statist.

I've no idea where Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin got the idea that anarcho-syndicalists believe, "...that somehow the unions are progressive, and what's more the unions are some kind of force that can not be revolutionised" (*Organise!* 46). Unless, of course, he was talking of syndicalism, which, as we know, does not have a libertarian revolutionary perspective. I think anarcho-syndicalists and the ACF would agree that industrial workers can be 'revolutionised' and that this grass-roots break with trade union reformism is an essential prerequisite to the libertarian confrontation with capitalism. Workers' Councils or Workers' Assemblies? Not much difference really, but anarcho-syndicalists recognise the need for these to co-ordinate in order to make them effective - it is this horizontal co-ordination that names the worker's union.

Readers could be forgiven for thinking that Malatesta never made a mistake as he is obviously the last refuge of simple insurrectionism, not that he was very

successful in that. However, he did suggest anarcho-syndicalism as a cohesive force for the diverse anarchist groups at a conference in Amsterdam 1907 (Brenan, p172) so his antagonism couldn't have been that strong. The ACF is unwilling (for reasons of definition and survival) to recognise that we are working for the same goal by slightly different (anarchist) methods. If it cannot find anything more relevant with which to fill its pages than attacks on fellow-militants then it's time it gave up the ghost and accept its 'lack of success' with good grace. Not much chance I fear, so when is the 'analysis' for 1998 scheduled?

TS (Somerset Solidarity Federation)

Reply: Thanks for your letter. It's good to know that revolutionaries are thinking critically and you have obviously been thinking critically of us comrade!

We're sorry to hear that anarcho-syndicalists have grown used to "attacks" over the years, but we can assure both you and our other readers that *Organise!* has not been "filling its pages" with "attacks on fellow militants" and our Syndicalism: A Critical Analysis is intended as a contribution to a much needed discussion, not an exercise in sectarianism.

Note, comrade, that we said that many of the earliest critics of Moscow were not syndicalists. This does not deny the validity of the criticisms made by the anarcho-syndicalist Golos Truda any more than it denies the criticism made by the anarchist Nabat group. Indeed, the Golos Truda comrades were in advance of many anarchists of the time when they said that the trade unions were dead organisations and the Factory Committees were the form the struggles of the revolutionary proletariat would take in the future.

Anarcho-communists "immune" from the siren call of Bolshevism? Far from it! Countless anarcho-communists were attracted to Bolshevism. This was, partially, a failing of traditional anarcho-communist thinking and organisation, but the attraction of an ostensibly successful revolution was a bigger factor.

The ACF is of the opinion that anarcho-communists and anarcho-syndicalists are working towards the same goal- a classless, stateless, marketless world (communism), and as such we embrace them as comrades in struggle, but we disagree with the method chosen i.e. the syndicalist (unionist) method, which we believe to be fundamentally flawed (see our article in this *Organise!* for details). Our "lack of success", I think you will find, is shared by revolutionaries everywhere. We hope they (or you) will not "give up the ghost"- you can rest assured that we won't. The 1998 analysis? It starts right here comrade...

Dear Organise!

On a technical note on the article in the last *Organise!* on the European Anarchist movement. I believed Solidaridad Obara are actually Madrid based and a split from the CGT, this is unless the group that you are referring to is a more recent Catalan split from the CNT ructions there of the last couple of years.

AF (Dublin)

Reply: Yes, we appear to have mixed up the 2 groups. We meant the Madrid organisation. Whilst we're on the subject, we left out Ireland in the survey on European anarchism (as well as England, Scotland and Wales). For this omission, due undoubtedly to an institutionalised colonialist attitude, the editorial board intends to scourge themselves mercilessly and roll around on a bed of nettles.

Dear Organise!

I have only just seen your Spring issue (*Organise!* 45) with the article on 3 Strikes which largely focuses on attacking an article by me in Socialist Outlook.

You write that my article was 'remarkably ill-informed' and give 2 examples. First of all, you rubbish my suggestion that Groundswell had changed its position on 3 Strikes. However, Subversion no.20 contains a detailed account of the debate within Groundswell and states "Unfortunately, the following Groundswell conference abandoned 3 strikes as a collective policy because of the arguments of Brighton" and that "the policy has no nationwide face". Secondly, you dispute my claim that some anarchists and syndicalists were opposed to 3 Strikes. well, that has been my experience with syndicalists in my area and they were the source of the statement which is simply a fact, unpalatable as it may be to *Organise!*

Now to look at some of the political arguments. Are anti-JSA and anti-Project Work campaigns strengthened or weakened by adopting 3 Strikes? My original article was written from the experience of the anti-workfare campaign in the Hull area. We built a campaign against Project Work which included CPSA members from both the job centres and the DSS offices. We couldn't have done that if 3 Strikes had been our policy. Unemployed activists viewed the CPSA activists as allies rather than part of the problem.

Is it 'ludicrous' to put pressure on Labour and the Trade Union leaders?

Well, we forced the Hull City Council to boycott Project Work thereby dramatically reducing the number of placements available. That seems worthwhile activity to me and similar actions have been taken in

other areas faced with Project Work. Similarly we fought inside our unions for all the unions to oppose Project Work. Again we were successful. Overall, we tried, and to an extent, succeeded in building an alliance of the unemployed, the trades council, local trade unionists including CPSA and PTC, the council and voluntary sector against Workfare. Obviously, we have no illusion in Labour's policies on the JSA and Workfare. However, the battle to win over those influenced by the Labour Party is important. In the same way, we have tried to win over CPSA members through work by socialists in that union. Ultimately the aim is a mass movement that unites the unemployed and the employed, job centre workers and claimants and a wide range of left activists. To talk of those socialists who oppose 3 Strikes as having a class divide between them and the unemployed is sectarian nonsense which does nothing to help build campaigns against the JSA or Workfare.

KS (Hull)

Reply: Your bold statement that 'ultimately the aim is a mass movement that unites the unemployed, job centre workers and claimants and a wide range of left activists' shows that your perception of what is happening inside the welfare state system is very different to our own and to that of many claimants. If there were the slightest chance of job centre workers taking effective workplace action motivated by support for the unemployed the ACF would be encouraging joint action as a major tactic. In practice, job centre workers, the CPSA and trade unionists generally object to welfare legislation when I. their own safety/working conditions are threatened and II. when there are political points to be scored against their political enemy. The fear exhibited by trade unionists and groups like your own about claimants acting autonomously results from an outdated and entrenched view of current class structures. The Left talks of the unemployed as a lesser class of 'worker' with no economic clout and therefore answerable in struggle to 'real' workers like those in unions.

You fail to see that Job Centre Staff have been set up by the last government and New Labour to protect the State from the unemployed who it is in the process of abandoning and demonising. The rightwing CPSA in particular has stood by and let this happen. Job Centre staff no longer facilitate access to the welfare state for the poor, they police the welfare state with the threat of class violence: intimidation, criminalisation and poverty. The power given to them, that of both initiating or managing the process whereby claimants can become destitute and homeless as the result of sanctions imposed, increasingly even by 'front desk'

staff, places them in a very different position from the vast majority of similar ranking civil servants, whose managers are usually the only ones with the power to, for example, cut off housing benefit, throw an immigrant out of the country, take a child into care and so on. Some do their job resentfully and reluctantly and do what little they can to help claimants, and they are most unlikely, by definition, to be the targets of '3 Strikes'. Some take out the frustration of their miserable job on the unemployed, and 3 Strikes is a very benign and non-violent response to this in comparison to some acts of retaliation by more isolated and frustrated claimants (this in itself raises more interesting and pertinent questions e.g. does 3 Strikes in fact dilute class anger?)

So the Labour Council in Hull boycotted Project Work! They did the same in Nottingham, as did the Council for Voluntary Services, for which the local anti-JSA group, which implements 3 Strikes, can take some credit. In practice these boycotts were just a protest at Tory legislation. What is 'ludicrous' is the idea that such posturing would sabotage PW. Pilots in Hull and Nottingham were, in terms of the legislation, successful; claimants were simply placed on non-council placements, often actually in the voluntary sector which the CVS was in practice powerless to prevent. Furthermore, in Nottingham, some of these organisations actually receive council funding! And where are the boycotts of Labour's New Deal? Local councils will be the main implementers of the 'Environmental Task Forces' and voluntary sector leaders are already actively collaborating. How does any of this help us deal with the frustration of daily life on the JSA, Incapacity, or whatever benefit we manage to prise out of the State?

As to whether 3 Strikes is effective for anti-JSA/Project Work campaigns; it isn't primarily a 'campaign' weapon, it's to help survival on the dole. Effective in that sense it is, because more than one 'troublesome' claimant has found front desk workers to be suddenly more cooperative, and at least 2 of the nastiest Job Centre Managers targeted have taken lengthy leaves of absence. If claimants want to spend the time and emotional energy they were expending coping with the dole on campaigning work, great!

Highlighting differences in a unified approach amongst anarchists is a red herring. Some, including us, support it, some haven't decided, and evidently some don't agree with it (we don't

know any of the latter except those you refer to having spoken to, and their comments would be most welcome). So what! Such an innovative tactic as 3 Strikes is bound to create waves and the debate around it is important and inevitable. We are, after all, questioning the class interest of a group of workers and recognising that the class make-up of society has changed and made redundant the idea that all workers have common class identity. But we should point out that at least one activist dole office worker and CPSA member we know of thinks there is nothing wrong with 3 Strikes in principle, but that claimants groups should let left-wing CPSA members tell them who are the real bastards in the dole offices that deserve to be targeted! Hmmm! we don't have a problem with trade unionists having different views on a new working class weapon - it's an important debate. But we do have a problem with you telling claimants what they can and can't do in their own defence.

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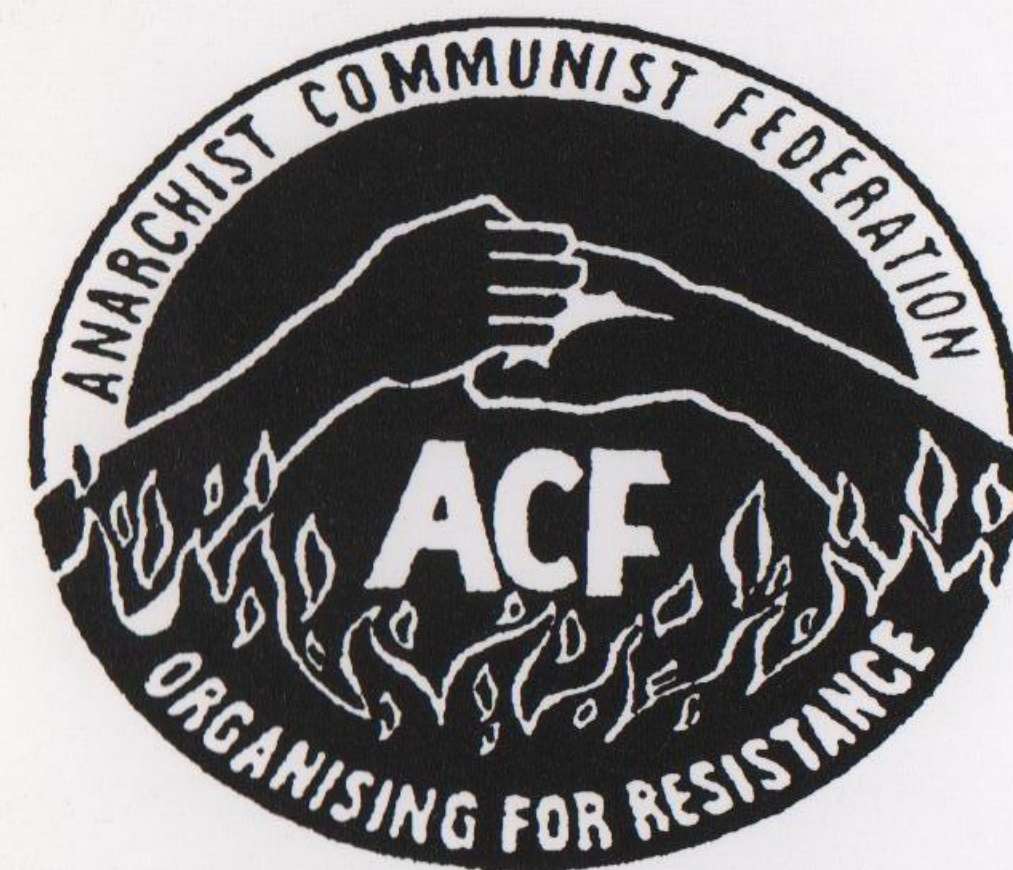
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 Issue 31: Somalia; Travellers; Natural laws.
 Issue 35: Rwanda; Italy; Carmageddon; Poetry and revolution.
 Issue 37: Pornography; Booze, cigs and dope; Moral panics.
 Issue 40: Work; Job Seekers Allowance; Art As A Weapon.
 Issue 41: French Revolt; Scargill's SLP; Racism.
 Issue 42: 10 years of the ACF special with History of anarchist communism in Britain.
 Issue 44: Underclass; Surrealism; Eco-Fascism.
 Issue 45: Albania; Ecology; Industry; Voting.
 Issue 46: Lorenzo Kom'Boa Ervin, Syndicalism.
 Alternatively send us a fiver and we'll send you one of everything plus whatever else we can find lying around.

Anarchist Communist Federation

The Anarchist Communist Federation is an organisation of class struggle anarchists. For contacts:

ACF, PO Box 375, Knaphill, Woking, Surrey, GU21 2XL

London: ACF c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street London, E1 7QX

Wales: PO Box 10, Pontypool, Cymru, NP4 8YH

Merseyside: Merseyside ACF, PO Box 110, Liverpool L69 8DP

Newcastle: ACF, PO Box 11A, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE99 1TA

ACF International Contacts

New Zealand: PO Box 6572, Wellsey St. Auckland. New Zealand

Holland: Postbus 93515, 1090 EA. Amsterdam. Netherlands

Want to Join the ACF? Want To Find Out More?

- ☐ I agree with the ACF's Aims and Principles and I would like to join the organisation.
☐ I would like more information about the Anarchist Communist Federation.
☐ Please put me on the ACF's mailing list.

Name.....

Address.....

Please tick/fill in as appropriate and return to: ACF, PO Box 375, Knaphill, Woking, Surrey, GU21 2XL