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Solidarity Bulletin

No.2. June/July 1993

FREE

CLASS AND CONFUSION

WHILST the bosses and politicians of all persuasions encourage the myth that class and class conflict are something of the past, mealy mouthed and suspiciously well-to-do members of numerous lefty groups earnestly assure us the opposite. So what's it all about?

There's already too much bollocks talked about class, but once you ignore the 57 varieties of bullshit peddled by politicians, intellectuals and the media its essentially simple.

Class is not simply to do with accents, dress codes, where you live, your parents' occupations, whether or not you own your own house, or even your education, although there is a class element to some of these, and they may well affect how you view class.

A DIVIDED SOCIETY

When we talk about class in the SB we're talking about a major ingredient of capitalism - the division of society into two basic classes. There's the ruling class - ie the bosses, politicians, judges, royalty - in fact all those who own and control power and wealth. Then there's the rest of us, for the want of a better term, the working class, who in general make our living by working (if you can get a job), rather than by living from the profits of other peoples labour, or from inherited wealth.

Put another way, class is about the access to the means of production of wealth. Say you work in a factory or shop and produce goods/provide services which make a certain amount of money. Your wage will be a certain (small) proportion of this dosh and the rest is creamed off by the boss simply because he/she is the boss.

It's a myth that bosses or management work harder than anyone else (some work hard, plenty do sod all), just as it's a myth that anyone can be a successful capitalist through hard work alone. Apart

from anything else, if everyone was 'a successful capitalist' who would do all the work? We'd have plenty of boardrooms full of men in suits smoking cigars but they'd soon notice that there was no-one to bring the tea round or to type their letters!

MIDDLE CLASS?

The existence and role of the middle class, people who believe (or are led to believe) they have 'professions' or 'careers' rather than jobs raises many issues, not all of which can be covered in one article. Suffice it to say that it's great for the bosses if we are duped into believing certain jobs are more 'important' or highly regarded than others.

If we spend all our time worrying that our neighbours or workmates have better cars/houses/jobs/furniture than us then we won't notice that the bosses are laughing all the way to the bank, or more likely paying someone else to go to the bank for them.

A CLASSLESS SOCIETY

These days many folk aren't sure what class they are supposed to 'fit into' if any. In contrast those in power are well aware where they stand, and what they want from us. We should learn from that and stick together ourselves. The myth that class is not important must be destroyed if the concept of class

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INSIDE:

*EDUCATION - fighting scab unions

*SOLIDARITY CENTRE INFO

*ANARCHIST ECONOMICS

*news, reviews, events and more...

EDITORIAL

Welcome to this, the second issue of the Solidarity Bulletin, a free newsheet based at the newly opened Solidarity Centre in Norwich. Our first issue which was distributed throughout Norwich and beyond, (with copies even getting as far as Scotland, Spain and the US) was well recieved and we hope that we've improved with this issue.

In future issues we'd like to start a letters page so feel free to send any news, opinion or comments. We're also on the look out for contributors to the bulletin and, equally importantly, people who can distribute copies of the SB. Fill in the coupon in this issue if you can help. And if you haven't visited the Solidarity Centre yet then check out the opening times and come and see us.

DIRECT ACTION

The Direct Action Movement (British section of the International Workers Association) have just produced a free supplement to their newspaper 'Direct Action' which sets out their strategy for industrial organisation along anarcho-syndicalist lines. It suggests realistic, practical but also revolutionary approaches to organising in ways which not only benefit us now, but also look towards creating a free and equal society in the future. Copies are available from the Solidarity Centre.

SOLIDARITY BULLETIN

Issue one is still available while stocks last. Includes articles on recession & capitalism, the hazards and remedies of VDU work, and contributions from the Education and Transport workers networks, also book reviews, fighting fascism & more. Send an SAE for a copy or pick one up at the centre.

FIGHTING TALK issue 4

Fighting Talk, the national magazine of Anti-Fascist Action has reached its fourth issue. It includes news and views on fascist and anti-fascist activities up and down the country, articles on fascism and loyalism, advice for those arrested and it reviews the latest anti-fascist books and records, including the new LP by AFA band Bloggers I*T*A. Available for 1 from Norwich AFA, PO Box 73, Norwich NR1 2EB, (cheques payable to Norwich Anti-Fascist Action) or call into the centre for a copy.

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itself is to be destroyed, which is our ultimate aim. But the massive inequalities of capitalist society cannot be tackled by blindfolding ourselves to it. Nor can it be fought by isolated individuals, we need to organise as a class for a world without class divisions. We hope people will use the Solidarity Centre and this bulletin to play a part in this.

SUPPORT THE CRAWLEY BINMEN

We recieved the following information from bin men involved in a dispute in Crawley, it is all too typical of the result of Compulsory Competitive Tendering and will no doubt strike a chord with many public sector workers.

On 1st February 1993, Crawley Borough Councils refuse collection contract was taken over by a company known as Tylers. They won the contract by contravening health and safety laws, reducing wages to 2.75 an hour with no overtime rate, scrapping holiday and sick pay and increasing working hours. The contract was awarded in total contravention of existing employment legislation.

On day one of the new contract the bin men started work at 7am. By 5.30pm they still had 3-4 hours of work to do. The local tip was shut so they would have to leave the lorry loaded overnight with refuse, against Health and Safety regulations. More than that, Tylers refused to provide protective night clothing. The team of 5 men would not work under these conditions and were sacked. On Friday another 3 men were sacked.

Management refused to negotiate and the men voted to strike. Crawley DLO building workers struck for a day in support of the bin men.

CONSPIRACY

On the April 2nd day of strike action by miners, transport and other workers, the refuse collectors held a sitdown protest in front of one of the scab lorries. They were arrested and charged with conspiracy. The case was later dismissed in court.

COMPETITIVE TENDERING CON

Crawley refuse collectors have suffered years of wage cuts, job cuts and increased output. Local authority manual workers throughout the country will be familiar with this. Council employers always give union negotiators the same story - "We must make the cuts to defend direct labour, because of the government laws". What it really means is us giving up wages and conditions to make contracts more attractive to the parasites of the private sector.

There are at times, 9 scabs on each lorry, a health hazard in itself. They are leaving lorries full of refuse in a car park, both a health hazard and a further breach of contract. The council has said "They can do what they like". Council employers think they can pass the blame onto the government every time they carry our their rotten and corrupt policies. Enough is enough.

Messages of support and donations to: D.M. James, 336 Ifield Drive, Ifield, Crawley, Sussex. RH11 0EW.

ALTERNATIVE ECONOMICS MEETING

As part of our series of open meetings at the Solidarity Centre, Wednesday 7th April saw a meeting on "Alternative Economics for a world in crisis".

These meetings are very much intended to be discussions and not lectures, usually someone will introduce a topic to be taken up by everyone else.

On this occasion the translator of a recently published pamphlet "Anarchist Economics - an alternative for a world in crisis" (see review last issue) came to Norwich to give an overview on the subject. This consisted in part of an analysis of the ideas and actions of workers organisations in Spain in the early 1900's, although the discussion also covered more contemporary ground.

Obviously this period included the 1936-37 Spanish Revolution where in many areas of Spain workers control was implemented, doing away with bosses, politicians, and many of the other trappings of capitalist society, and often to varying degrees money itself.

NEED NOT PROFIT

Instead a system based on production for need not profit, and on solidarity, was implemented. A basic difference was that within the framework of this alternative economy people were able to have what was needed, unlike under capitalism where people can only have what they are able to afford - no wonder the rich never complain about capitalism!

Some of the concrete changes which were made during this period in revolutionary Spain were referred to to illustrate how anarchist ideas work in practice. These included replacing bureaucratic positions with delegated workers who were in office for a limited period and were recallable by other workers. And in Barcelona for example (where over half the workforce were members of the anarcho-syndicalist union, the CNT) not only were industries such as social services, education and health turned over to workers control, they were also altered in line with the anarchist ideals of freedom and equality.

LEAVING THE LEFT BEHIND

The discussion which followed covered many areas, particularly the comparison between the situation in Spain then and that of Britain today. Today we are faced with trade unions which won't fight and a Labour Party which couldn't even if it wanted to. The so-called "revolutionary left" amounts to a handful of sectarian cliques who offer nothing more than any other political party. Small wonder then, that fascist groups are raising their ugly heads and pretending to be an alternative.

In many ways we are left with starting almost from scratch. We don't have a similarly militant labour history to that of Spain (although a glance through some real history books will offer-up some surprises). What we need is not only to rebuild a culture of resistance and to reclaim class solidarity as more than a pleasant but meaningless slogan. We also need to avoid putting faith in either parliamentary democracy or equally bankrupt and reformist trade unions.

Organisations such as the Direct Action Movement and other sections of the International Workers Association, and the industrial networks of the Transport Workers Network, Public Service Workers Network and Education Workers Network offer a genuine and realistic means to achieving a free and equal society.

Norwich Solidarity Centre will continue to host many more discussions on a variety of subjects. On June 23rd, 8pm at the centre there will be a meeting on industrial networks/breaking free of the Labour/TUC straitjacket, with a speaker from the Transport Workers Network. It's free and everyone is welcome to attend.



OPEN MEETING

INDUSTRIAL NETWORKS - breaking free of the Labour/TUC straitjacket, for workplace-based organisations, workers' control, and effective solidarity.

SPEAKER-Tony Crowther (sacked Manchester Piccadilly guard/RMT rep) of the TRANSPORT WORKER NETWORK

WED - 23rd JUNE - 8pm

Room 13, Muspole Workshops, Muspole Street (off Duke St.) NORWICH

THE EDUCATION WORKERS NETWORK

The following two articles are taken from "The General Assembly" the bulletin of the Education Workers Network.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE EDUCATION WORKERS NETWORK

INDUSTRIAL NETWORKS

This newsletter has been created by a group of people in education from different places around the country. Our immediate aim is to bring like minded people together in a unique forum of debate, including education workers from different sectors and different occupations within schools, colleges and universities. There exists a crying need for basic information in our sector and also for basic solidarity and vision that goes beyond that of the standard unions. We, like workers in Transport and Public Service, believe that we need an organisation which is primarily workplace based and which is open and democratic: in touch with our day to day needs.

WE NEED A FIGHTING UNION

The kind of union we want goes beyond the TUC in many ways. The existing unions have shown their limitations and in many industries now offer better insurance deals, credit cards or cheaper holidays - all in an attempt to recognise our needs as workers with governments and bosses demands. They are increasingly divorced from workplace issues. Officials, supposed to 'represent' us, often simply play the role of mediators between management and us, with little comeback for us if we disagree. We are quite clear on this point: the bosses interests and ours are different.

CONTROL FROM BELOW

The so-called left has tried for years to get us to elect left-wingers onto National Executives in order to 'radicalise' the union. This 'strategy' has resulted in time and effort being wasted and has only resulted in demoralisation as these new leaders do not deliver and our real situation gets worse. What we want is an organisation controlled by us without bureaucrats to tell us when and how we can take action. Whatever affects us should be decided by us.

TIRED SOLUTIONS

These ideas are not particularly new. Workers in Britain put them into practice at the beginning of the century. Fellow workers in other countries already have this kind of union, such as in France, Italy and Spain. Like many other workers, we are fed up with the same tired old solutions. The unions and the Labour Party and the like have played politics with us for far too long. Its about time we stated to build our own form of resistance, based on relevance, solidarity and real strength. We think the first steps towards that have been made in the form of the Education Workers Network.

FIGHTING THE SCAB UNIONS

A member of the Merseyside branch of the EWN explains here how workers took on a scab union.

SCABS IN EDUCATION

Whilst many education workers and students have a good record of solidarity and militant opposition to the bosses there has also been an undercurrent of scabbing in education. One form this takes is the formation of scab unions. In Further Education where I work we have to contend with a snivelling, toadying organisation called the Professional Association of Teachers. In my place of work we successfully saw off an attempt by PAT to establish a base. Our experience may be of use to other workers and students faced with a similar threat. Remember that you won't get much help from the official unions but in your favour is the fact that these organisations mainly attract people with little fight in them

COMBATTING THE SCABS

The first line of attack was to remove, secretly, any posters, notices etc. that they had put up. This got them hopping mad and resulted in them crying to the management and our union officials. Everyone knew who was responsible but we admitted nothing. It was great being quizzed by the boss who knew we had done it but was equally aware that he would never be able to prove it. The scabs gave up when we not only removed a notice but nicked the board as well! (I suppose we should expect this tactic from Merseyside EWN! - SB typist)



We did some research into past pay rises. Every year the scab union accepted the bosses' first offer while the official union put up a token fight occasionally resulting in industrial action. Usually we were able to win an improved offer which all workers recieved, including the scabs. Over a few years this meant that their approach would have cost the workers a lot of money and resulted in inferior working conditions. Most workers resented the fact that the scabs benefited from our sacrifices and this really isolated them from the rest of the workers. Indeed the PAT boasts that it has a no strike clause in its constitution! I believe that this small effort put into research paid off. I doubt they picked up a single member after that.

DISCIPLINARY CHARGES

We soon discovered that the PAT was unwilling to take on the management even in individual cases where its members faced disciplinary charges. The first time this happened we watched as one of their members recieved sympathy from the PAT but no advice or representation. We had a good record of winning such cases and when the individual concerned was forced to come to us for help we greeted them with good grace and got them off a sticky charge. We did this on one other occasion and then announced we would refuse to take any more similar cases. This left the remaining members feeling very isolated and insecure.

STUDENT ACTION

Finally we involved the students by naming the scabs. I was pleasantly surprised with the level of support we recieved. Most students ageve the scabs a hard time in class. This removed the PATs claim to be putting the interests of the students first.

VIGILANCE

We won in this instance but we remain vigilant. I strongly urge all workers and students to stamp on these scab outfits as soon as they emerge. Don't wait until they get too strong to take on. Finally, in fighting scab unions you may inadvertantly be promoting 'reformist' trade unionism. Be careful,

WHY FIGHT?
-THEY'LL SOON GET FED UP
TAKING OUR MONEY...



but your militant stand will be recognised by most workers and students as being far removed from the 'official' teaching unions' approach.

Contact the Solidarity Centre for more information about the Education Workers Network.

FOR MORE COPIES OF THE SOLIDARITY BULLETIN FOR YOUR WORKPLACE ETC... FILL IN THE BOX
AND POST TO PO BOX 73, NORWICH, NR1 2EB.

Please send another _____ copies each issue.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

DON'T DELAY!
DO IT TODAY!



WHAT USE POLITICAL PARTIES AND HAMSTRUNG TRADE UNIONS?

The following article is taken from issue 5 of Transport Worker, the paper of the Transport Workers Network.

During recent one day strikes we have noted that the Labour Party refused to support rail, bus and mine workers. When pressed by Tories to support or condemn the strikes, the response of the Labour leadership was to say nothing and hope no one would notice. But behind the scenes they, along with the TUC, informed the unions involved of their displeasure on the grounds that the strikes would alienate public opinion.

Few trade unionists are shocked by the antics of the Labour Party - indeed, there is a growing mood inside at least one transport union, the RMT, to disaffiliate from the party. The problem is, though, that while people are turning away from the Labour Party in increasing numbers, they tend to give up "politics" or join with the growing numbers who are looking towards the formation of a new socialist party.

Here at Transport Worker, we feel that both positions are wrong. The problem lies not in what type of political party - more militant, Marxist or reformist - but in the nature of political parties themselves. Political parties represent an artificial divide between economic and political struggles. All economic struggles are political by their nature. Thus a simple dispute about break times soon turns into a dispute about management's right to manage. The miners' strike soon became not just a fight against pit closures but a fight against the state's attempt to smash the miners along with the rest of the trade union movement. Similarly the one day rail strikes are not just about compulsory redundancies but management's systematic attempts to break unions and conditions in the run-up to privatisation.

The trade union movement, when it took up the Labour Party as its "political wing", went against this basic truth. By limiting themselves to pay and conditions, not only were the unions making the fundamental mistake of not seeing these issues as a vital part of a far wider struggle which had to be fought on a class-wide basis, they were also limiting their own power. Hence, with the collapse of the post-war economic boom and the election of the Thatcher government, instead of organising a class-wide attack against a class enemy, the unions limited their role to defending jobs within their own industries, allowing the Tories to pick off one industry at a time. This process has not ended yet, witness the rail unions refusing to join with miners and London Bus workers at the head of a campaign against privatisation on the grounds that this would be political.

Nor is this stunting of power the only detrimental consequence of the split between the economic and political. The idea that the unions and the Labour Party are equal partners in the same movement, pursuing the same ends, is little more than a myth. The aim of political parties is to gain power in a society, based not on workers' control and self-government, but on rulers and ruled. If, in a political party's search for power, the interests of workers comes into conflict with party interests, the party will always come first. This has been the history of the Labour Party and of all political parties, Marxist or non-Marxist.

At Transport Worker we believe in trying to avoid the mistakes of the past and are against trying to build a new socialist party. We state quite clearly that we are independent of all political parties. This does not mean that we see ourselves as non-political, just the opposite. We seek to build a politicised union movement, one that does not divide the political from the economic but starts by seeing the fight for pay and conditions as part of an on-going struggle between capital and labour. It will be a movement, not just based in the workplace but also in the community, that will unite large sections of the working class into one organisation, whose long-term aim will be a new society based on workers' control. This is not, we might add, a new way of organising but one with a long tradition in the workers' movement.



NORWICH

Solidarity Centre



ROOM 13 , MUSPOLE WORKSHOPS,
MUSPOLE STREET (off Duke Street),
NORWICH.

The **SOLIDARITY CENTRE** has been established to provide a resource and focus point for all those in struggle, be it in the workplace or in specific social areas. Recognising the need for more than piecemeal political and economic change, the Solidarity Centre aims to unite all working for comprehensive social change.

THERE CAN BE NO SEPARATION BETWEEN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL AREAS: We reject all political parties and the concept of distinct political and economic organisations. Only through organisation by industry and locality, on a unitary basis and subsequently federating, can we deal with all the issues that face us.

FOR WORKERS' SELF-MANAGEMENT: The profit-oriented industries and services of existing society cannot meet the needs and aspirations of the majority of people, only the rich. We advocate workplace organisation which is not limited to trades union demands on pay and conditions, but also organises to fight for workers' self-management of industry and public services as part of a social revolution.

DEMOCRATIC: The Solidarity Centre is run by and for it's members. All tasks and involvement, be it in working groups at a specific post, are on the basis of full accountability to the Centre's general meetings, which are open to all members. All tasks are periodically rotated to facilitate full participation and the opportunity to develop skills and experience, as well as to avoid any abuse of position as is so common in trade unions and political parties

UNCOMPROMISING: The fight for greater freedoms, pay and working conditions, and ultimately social revolution, can best be won by **DIRECT ACTION** - action which relies on solidarity and organisation to win, not the promises of politicians and leaders. It includes working to rule or grade, boycotts and occupations, as well as strikes. The best way to win should be decided by those in dispute.

FOR UNITY: We actively fight racism, homophobia, nationalism, and all other attitudes which divide and oppress working class people. An injury to one is an injury to all.

THIS IS ANARCHO- SYNDICALISM.

THE SOLIDARITY CENTRE'S SERVICES & ACTIVITIES

INFORMATION and RESEARCH: * Reference material, including health and safety issues and law, pensions, benefits, equal pay and all areas of working conditions, industrial and union law. * Information on Company accounts. * A database is being built on specific industries, on methods of organisation and workers' direct action in various industries, world-wide workers' struggles... Co-ordinated by a working group, the emphasis is on providing accessible information, free of legal jargon, and in particular material for distribution and use in workplaces.

DISCUSSION MEETINGS:

* These are occasional and informal meetings. If any individual or group would like to initiate a discussion on any topic please get in touch.

INTER-NETWORK MEETINGS:

* A monthly forum for discussion and advancing anarcho- syndicalism in the workplace. By sharing experience and discussing problems faced at work these meetings provide that which Trade Unions neglect - active solidarity and genuine debate. * Support for establishing networks in other workplaces and industries. * Solidarity with all workers in struggle. - see article on Industrial Networks.

LIBRARY:

* A wide range of books are available on radical & working class topics, history, fiction, analysis and theory. More books are gratefully recieved and needed.

CONTD OVER

BOOKS, PAMPHLETS & PAPERS for sale:

* From current issues, organising manuals and theory, to history, community politics and loads more. Also available are T-shirts, badges & stickers...

SOCIALS:

Social in early July - Bar-B-O, booze, music and interesting conversation! Get in touch for more details.

OPENING TIMES: * TUESDAYS 7pm - 9pm, (first four of month). * WEDNESDAYS 5.30pm-7pm,(first four of month). * first SATURDAY of month 12 noon- 4pm.

* GENERAL CENTRE MEETINGS - first Tues of each month, 7pm * INTER-NETWORK MEETINGS - fourth Tues of each month, 7pm

TO FIND OUT MORE.....CALL IN!

The address for all mail/correspondance is:
PO Box 73, Norwich, NR1 2EB.

INDUSTRIAL NETWORKS

Created to gain higher wages and a shorter working week, trade unionism achieved these and found itself at a dead end. In the long run what is the point of wage increases in the face of inflation? The trade unions have no intention to do anything beyond sell our labour power to the bosses, a road littered with compromises and sell-outs.

Obviously we still have to use unions to defend ourselves where we can, and encourage other workers to do so; but we don't have to accept the status quo.

Tinkering with trade unions isn't enough, we need something better.

The setting up of revolutionary unions, which unite people, not on the basis of their skill or what tools they use, but on the basis of the industry that they work within, avoiding sectionalism, will allow us to build true solidarity.

Obviously such unions are not built overnight, so we support the setting up of industrial networks. These currently exist in transport, the public sector and education. Networks bring together like-minded activists to exchange ideas and circulate information, to engage in solidarity activities, and over time to set up an anarcho-syndicalist union.

This means building an organisation that is workplace based, open to all grades of workers, based on direct action and decision making on an open and democratic basis, without bureaucrats or careerists. Our aim is not to see workers divided according to skill or union, but all equally involved in addressing and taking initiative on all matters that concern us, wrenching away the monopoly of control held by union officials and politicians.

What we propose is not new, in many other countries workers organisations have and are functioning successfully on this basis, (in Europe, South America, until recently the Despatch Industry Workers Union in London winning many strikes where the TGWU made no impact at all). Whether it be called revolutionary unionism, anarcho-syndicalism or otherwise, it is workers taking charge of their own struggles, fighting a system set up to screw the working class.

Join the Solidarity Centre and industrial networks in the fight to reclaim our lives and the wealth we create; to prepare through taking control of our own struggles, for the day when we take control of our own industries for the benefit of the community as a whole, on the basis of need not profit.

* TRANSPORT WORKER NETWORK, PO Box 73, Norwich NR1 2EB.

* EDUCATION WORKERS NETWORK, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW.

* PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS NETWORK, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester, M15 5HW.

