

The Sheffield Red and Black Centre opened May 1st 1996

**Statement
and
Constitution**

of the

**Sheffield
Red and
Black
Centre**

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The Sheffield Red and Black Centre

We in the Sheffield Red and Black Centre don't like the way society is organised and want to build a better world. We don't pretend to have all the answers but we've got to start somewhere and we have some basic ideas. If you are interested, read on.

So, we want to change the world. Not a five minute job? But is it possible? We at the Sheffield Red and Black Centre realise that people need to work together to create a culture of resistance in the day-to-day, not just dream about some impossibly far-off future.

This pamphlet is our constitution. Below we briefly explore some of the major problems confronting all of us today, and set out some ideas for building real alternatives to improve our lives now and create a better future. These alternatives are based upon the ideals of mutual aid, resistance to external authority, workers' control of work, communities' control of communities, solidarity and freedom. The list of topics is not supposed to be exhaustive, but is merely to point out a few of the major issues, and introduce possible ways forward.



Wage Slavery

Virtually everyone depends on private business or the state for their means of survival. Most of us work with others to produce goods and services, but are paid only a fraction of their exchange value - the amount for which our products are sold. The rest goes to pay overheads, such as rents and interest payments to wealthy owners of property, or direct into bosses' and shareholders' pockets.

Then the state takes a further slice of our earnings in taxes.

The state (socialist or otherwise) and capitalists are essentially parasites who completely depend on us - yet pretend only they can provide the jobs and means of production of what we need - that

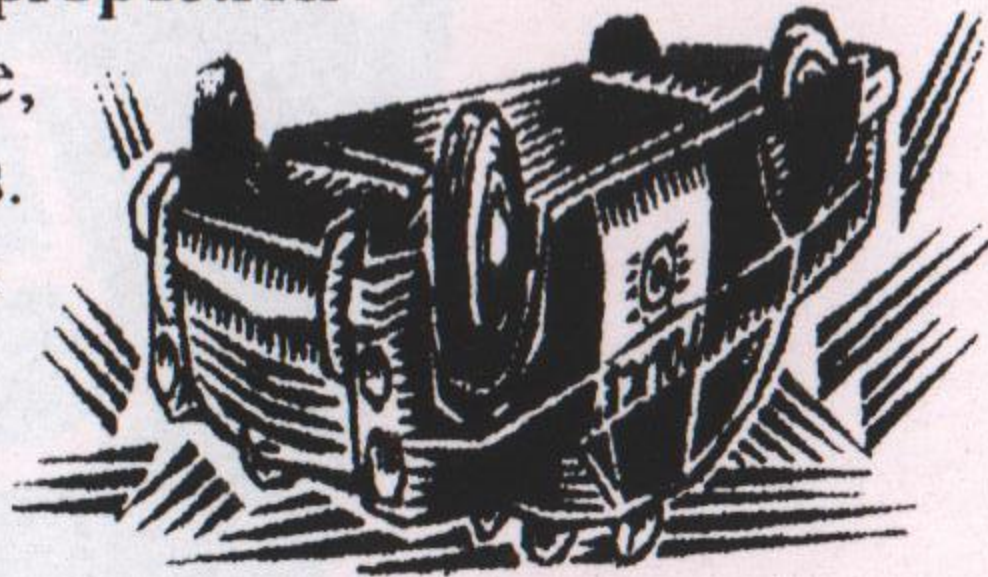


we need them to organise and control our lives for us. If we can't - or won't - find a job, we are even more dependent on the state. Since widescale unemployment is a permanent condition under capitalism, many working class people may never find a job - condemned to a life in poverty. They are blamed as if this were a failure on their part - but they have no means of making work for themselves. The problem they face is just one of many constructed by the alliance of capitalism and the state.

But the opportunities for resistance are many. Striking Liverpool dockers, betrayed by unions which were long ago compromised as token resistance to employers, have forged new alliances with dockers all over the world and with environmental protesters here. The new resistance already threatens to go beyond the control of the state. What other new forms of resistance and fresh alliances will take resistance beyond the scope of the state's limited imagination? From growing our own food to building links with other workers, there are a host of ways in which we can start to take back control.

Crime and Security

Crime is a major problem - it causes people to live in fear, depriving the poor of the few possessions they have. We are forced to ask the police to protect us against criminals. But they fail to protect us - they clear up only a small proportion of crimes. Instead they routinely fit up innocent people, while protecting many criminals who are their informers. These grasses are used by the police to infiltrate communities, putting us all under surveillance and under their control by spreading crime. How could drug dealers survive and get rich without police protection? Where police are excluded - as in the republican communities of West Belfast or Derry - crime rates are very low. So police encourage their grasses who are drug dealers to infiltrate these communities, and then arrest those who try to expel them. The police produce the problem of crime, and then present themselves as the only solution to it. They send people to prison knowing that prisons turn inmates into criminals. They force communities to accept control by the state by creating a need for themselves. They criminalise ethnic minorities, producing racism. Then they blame



us for the problems they've created.

Forget the stories about police fitting people up because they mistakenly believe they're guilty. They fit up those who won't collaborate - who won't become grasses. Fit-up victims who protest their innocence are given rights, so their protests can be contained within the system and used to make them seem guilty. But we can take advantage of these rights, with campaigns to free the innocent, in support of those falsely accused in courts and police stations.

Once we've deprived police of their weapon of fitting up and organised mutual support systems for when we're threatened with (say) having our children taken into care, or accused of crimes against the state or big businesses, we're on the way to ridding ourselves of police and the crime they bring with them. Perhaps we'll never get rid of crime entirely. But we'll reduce it to a minor problem and find ways of dealing with it which don't waste money and don't ruin people's lives.

Discrimination

Discriminating against someone according to their gender, sexuality, age, race, ability or disability, is prejudice. It is a vehicle used by the capitalist press and leaders to divide and rule us.

Laws against racism and sex discrimination don't work. They only serve to instil a complacency that something is being done, so therefore things must be improving. In fact they only serve to foster fascism and send it underground, to emerge in the future worse than before.

We want to see a society where we can celebrate and learn from each others' differences. We must encourage diversity without division to effectively counter discrimination.

Medicine and Health

AIDS, cancer, heart disease, food infections, psychoses, allergies - health problems are on the increase. Defined as medical problems, as if sick individuals produced them, they are given medical solutions - prescription drugs and spare part surgery. Now scientists even want to tamper with our genes. But all these health problems are produced by the polluted, stressful conditions in which we live, by food production and processing designed for profit, not the nutrition we need, and by the medical system itself. Instead of controlling private businesses that pump pollutants into the environment, or forcing food producers to provide good food, the state subsidises intensive agricultural production. Its National Health Service (paid for by us) contributes to the vast profits of multinational drug companies by buying their overpriced drugs and equipment - while failing to provide an adequate service, ensuring patients come back again and again. Even that limited service depends on the exploitation of staff dedicated to helping the casualties of everyday life. We're prevented from helping ourselves by doctors who disempower us by baffling us with science and assuming we're unable to comprehend what's wrong with us - so we leave with drugs or

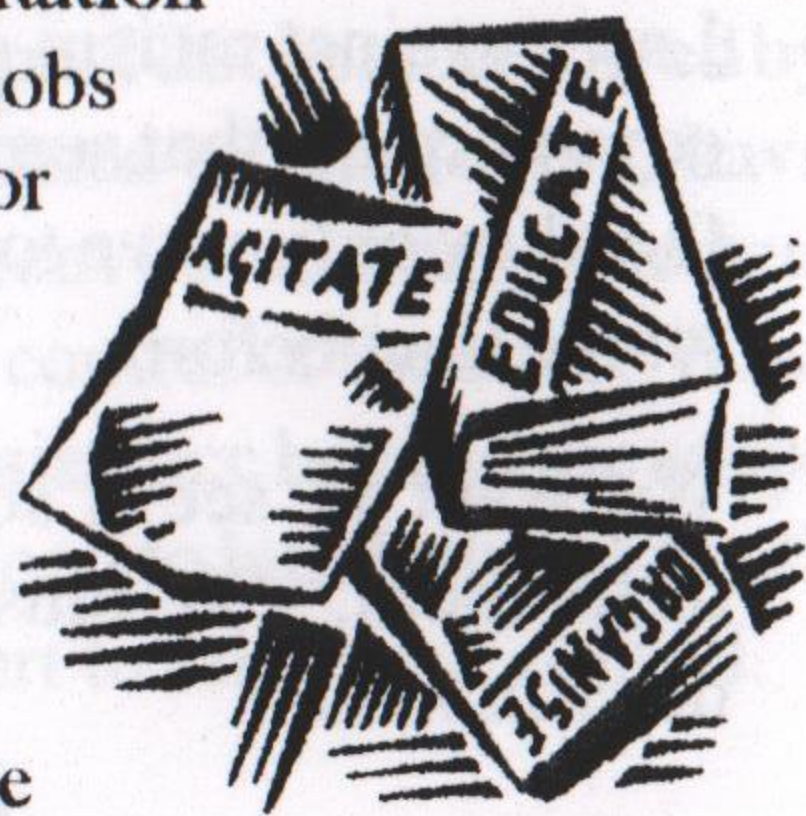
treatments we don't need, kept in ignorance of their side effects.

The sicknesses we suffer need the treatment that a health service could provide - if it were run for patients, and not for managers, senior staff, and drug companies. Alternative therapies have been systematically excluded from modern medicine by drug companies and the scientific establishment. Many are less dangerous and more effective than NHS damage limitation treatments. We can demand the NHS provide these much cheaper therapies along with what now offers. We can take control of our own health, by advising each other about the therapies that would best suit us - as well as producing good food for ourselves.

But general improvement in our health depends on taking control of the manufacturing processes that pollute, transforming work so that it is no longer stressful, and developing a vision of a health system that cares for us, not for private profits.

Education - taught to fail or learning to live?

Crucial years for our personal development, our childhoods which could be filled with the pleasure of discovery about the world, are wasted in schools where our minds are stifled by discipline and we're taught that we're failures in most subjects. Schools turn out either people without skills, resigned to lifetimes of exploitation in low paid service industry or assembly line jobs - if they get jobs at all - or people with the narrow outlook which suits them for life only as bureaucrats, managers or technicians. Because education fails to give us skills with which we can make our lives better, and frustrates our desires for innovation and change, it produces constant demands for more education spending and retraining. Blame for failure is placed on teachers and children, so the state imposes an ever more narrow, restrictive curriculum, more exams and more exclusions of the resentful children who are its own most embarrassing failures.



If committed teachers help us acquire knowledge and skills and retain the ability to think for ourselves, it's despite school and not because of it. We can convert schools and colleges into sociable, interesting places where children want to go, and where children are supported as they develop abilities and discover what they want to know. Children don't have to be forced to attend school, nor do any of them need to be excluded as long as they're valued and encouraged. Of course, those who can think for themselves, who have learned about the society in which they live, who are confident about the abilities they've developed, won't want to be exploited or accept the political system under which they live... For them as for us, reforms to the education system will never be enough.

With their help, we can transform schools and colleges into resources open to the whole community around them, where we can all learn skills, discover whatever we want to know - permanent resources to support us in carrying out all the other changes we want to bring about.

Environment

Environmental damage continues to gather apace despite the efforts of many well-meaning people involved in the 'green movement'. Just about all of us who have the choice have considered 'green products' and the like, and still, despite the so-called greening of industry, consumers and politics, we have real and rapidly growing environmental degradation on a global scale. It is not just the natural environment and the countryside which is disappearing or being destroyed, but the human environment, the cities where most people live. Our cities are full of pollution and worsening everyday living conditions.

Why is this? The capitalist system needs crises to drive it forward. The fear of ecosystem collapse, the fear of losing a competitive edge because of greener competition, and a huge range of other environmentally related fears, all help to drive the capitalist machine even faster into environmental oblivion. The environmental solution invariably presented is capitalist technology - which allows more profits to be made and the show goes on. Capitalism not only treats the environment as a free asset to be wasted at will, it uses it to generate as much profit as possible.

Failing to crack this apparent catch-22 situation can only make the ecological crisis worse. The capitalist answer to global warming is to increase economic growth to give more profits to spend on controlling the situation, or some such folly. This does not mean that technology is itself inherently evil. Far from it; it is the way in which technology and innovation is managed and driven by our economic system which ensures that technology which does not lead to profit is not developed, while that which does is.

There are, however, real solutions to the problem and these need to be developed before we can be sure of any sort of quality of life in the future. These solutions must be based on rational and sensible use of the environment within known sustainability limits; for need, not profit. We cannot ask the capitalist system to reform itself to achieve the goal of sustainability, because the two goals are mutually incompatible. The green party and environmental groups may make us more aware, but they cannot prevent capitalism from managing the environmental stage for increased profit. We must act now to protect the environment directly - and that means the replacement of profit-led capitalism by a system based on consensus as to the appropriate use of human and natural resources to maximise sustainability and quality of life. There are no alternative short term solutions to achieving the goal of environmental sustainability.



The Media

The TV helps us to relax, the Sun gives us a few laughs so what's the problem? For one thing most of it is rubbish - the same old stories repeatedly told with different characters and different scenery. Most of us recognise this but we go on watching, just like we go on smoking and drinking even though we know it is bad for us. The media - television, the movies, the press is just another drug and like all drugs it has its drawbacks. The main problems with the media are that it makes us passive, it misinforms us and it constantly tells us how to act. All the time we are watching TV we are not out on the streets, talking to our neighbours, sorting out our problems. Every time we watch the news or read a paper we get fed the views and ideas of the rich and the powerful - a small change on the stockmarket is more important than libraries being closed down and the size of Fergie's ass is more important than a thousand deaths in India. Fashion, DIY, Cooking and Car programmes and magazines constantly tell you what you should be wearing, building, eating and driving and that you must be a pretty sad character if you don't. To make sure we get the message the papers endlessly report what is happening in the Soaps and tell us what the 'Stars' are up to endlessly trying to get us hooked on more and more TV magazines films and movies.

We are not a bunch of puritans that see TV as all evil but we do believe that things can be a lot better. By collecting and publishing information we think is important we can have a better idea of what is going on. By making our own entertainment we can make positive statements about diversity and escape from the world of fashion with its anorexic teenage models and ridiculously expensive clothing.



If we stop listening to the same old lies about how the strong wise (rich) men will make the world safe for us we can start to think about how we can solve problems for ourselves, make our own entertainment and ensure that we get free and unbiased access to information.

Developing a culture of resistance

It's easy to blame our problems on capitalist businesses and the state, but they're also the organisations that provide the jobs and services we need to deal with these problems. By creating the problems and providing the solutions, they make themselves indispensable.

We could try to reform them, so they create fewer problems and provide more solutions, but who benefits from these reforms? Those who can take advantage of them - the wealthy and privileged, people who own and manage businesses, people working for the state. So we are divided ever more strongly along lines of race, sex, and where we live, by uneven distribution of resources like schools and colleges, hospitals, work opportunities, living conditions - but above all by where we get our money from and

how much we get: by class.

Realistically, the only people who are going to do anything to challenge the systems that disadvantage them are in the working class, because it's in their interest. There's no point in appealing to members of the ruling class to join us, because they will not only find the changes we propose are unacceptable - they won't even understand the point of them. Anyone is welcome to join us, but we assume only members of the working class are likely to do so. As we develop and put into practice our programmes of change, we must be prepared for direct conflict with all those whose interests and entrenched positions they challenge: the owners of capital, the controllers of the state and all allied with them - managers, police, etc.

This is because all our proposals aim not at reform or at making people's lives better just so that their everyday life in present conditions becomes bearable - we do not aim to defuse or resolve conflict. Whatever we do is aimed at exposing clearly how dire present conditions are, and forms a step towards transgressing the limits set by the conditions and the government under which we are forced to live now - by helping ordinary people to take control over their own lives, not by taking control and imposing our own ideas.

Can we succeed, when the media tell everyone that only existing institutions can help us cope with the problems that they've created? Yes: because we can build a positive set of ideas, a comprehensive toolkit of direct action methods to be shared by all; we can all co-ordinate our different resistances; we can demand more than capitalism and the state can ever give us, until our demands can only be met by us taking over our workplaces, the state's resources and the places in which we live, and transforming them beyond recognition. This is our culture of resistance - recreating the world for ourselves by doing our best to enjoy it now.

Constitution of the Sheffield Red & Black Centre

Membership

Membership of the Red and Black Centre (hereafter, the 'Centre') is open to anyone who agrees with all the aims and principles laid out in this document and keeps up their regular subscriptions to the Centre (as determined from time to time). Exceptions to this are capitalist bosses, police and the armed forces, prison staff, scum landlords, and members of political parties or religious sects. The reason for these exceptions is that the actions of these people necessarily perpetuate the status quo which we are dedicated to overthrowing.

All members have a right to;

- free expression of their ideas as long as they are not contrary to the aims of the Centre
- have their physical and moral integrity respected
- attend all events organised by the Centre
- not have their work criticised except openly in Centre meetings
- have full access to information about all the Centre's activities
- remain in disagreement with any ratified decisions of the Centre

All members have the following duties;

- to participate in, defend and support the Centre and its aims and principles to the fullest extent of their ability
- to maintain their subs.

Grounds for expulsion

The following specific grounds exist for expulsion from membership of the Centre;

1. Active membership of a political party (Marxist-Leninist, Labour etc.)
2. Abuse, actions or comments based on personal prejudice
3. Abusive or threatening behaviour or language
4. Contravening the aims and interests of the Centre
5. Falling more than 3 months behind in subs.

Any member of the Centre has the right to institute proceedings aimed at the expulsion of a member. The process is as follows;

Where possible the problems should be discussed between any members directly involved with a view to a quick resolution of the issue. In the event of the issue not being resolved, the problem should be discussed at the next two Centre meetings and then

voted on (see below).

Meetings

General Meetings are held fortnightly. The agenda for a general meeting will be posted in the Centre at the close of the previous meeting. Other items for discussion must be added to the posted agenda no less than seven days before the relevant meeting, to allow all interested members time to be made aware of its inclusion in the agenda. Any topic that arises within seven days prior to the meeting may be included on the day of the meeting, under 'any other business' on the agenda, for discussion but cannot be voted on. Such business will then be placed in the full agenda for the following meeting, at which time it can be both discussed and voted on.

The 'Chair' of a General Meeting will be decided at the beginning of each meeting, as the first order of business. That the meeting, and ensuing discussions, remain free, fair and orderly, with all members being both allowed and encouraged to take full part therein, without prejudice, shall be both the responsibility and duty to the meeting of the 'Chair'. The second order of business shall be the allocating of the position of 'minute-taker'. It is both the responsibility and duty of the 'minute-taker' to take full and complete notes on the meeting and to make these notes available to the Centre for filing. All filed minutes shall be available to all members, without prejudice. Both these positions to pass freely around the membership without prejudice.

Items for regular inclusion on the agenda shall be:

- membership- with reference to both proposal of new members, and any problems with present members;
- finance- with reference to the overall financial situation of the Centre, and to include both the payment of pledges and any problems arising from such (non-payment, deferral etc.);
- the election of a 'Secretary' and 'Treasurer' for the following 4 meetings (see 'duties and responsibilities of elected representatives');
- any other business'.

Extraordinary General Meetings

These can be called at any time by any member over any issue thought too urgent to wait until the next scheduled General Meeting (responsibility for the perception of relative urgency to lie with those calling the meeting). Upon an Extraordinary General Meeting being called the present 'Secretary' shall be required to notify as many members as possible as to when the meeting will happen, and the issue to be discussed. A notification of the meeting shall be posted as soon as possible, with all relevant information. The meeting will be 'Chaired' by the member calling it and the allocating of the position of 'minute-taker' shall be the first order of business (the responsibilities and duties of the 'minute-taker' shall be the same as specified under 'General Meetings' above).

Making decisions

All decisions must be passed by consensus and all individuals and meetings must adhere to the principles of direct democracy. Decisions will either be passed as majority or non-majority decisions. For a majority decision to be made more than 20% of the membership must be present (minimum of 7). The minutes shall clearly indicate which kind of decision has been taken. Any decision passed is then put on the agenda for the next meeting as a 'Decision to be Ratified'. The ratification vote for non-majority decisions must be passed as a majority decision. No decision will become active until such time as it has been ratified.

If a decision fails to receive consensus, the question shall be put on the agenda of the next meeting for further discussion, at which time a further vote shall be taken, which, if passed, shall pass onto the next meeting for ratification. If consensus still cannot be reached, after discussion and votes at two separate meetings, and it is felt that no further discussion will alter this position, but there is 80% majority who feel a decision should be reached, which will be adhered to by all members, including those in dissent, then a decision can be passed, by a simple majority, where more than 20% of the membership is present (minimum 7). This procedure can also be applied to votes on ratification.

Extraordinary Decision Making Procedure

If it is felt that a decision is too urgent to pass through the ordinary decision making procedure, it is possible for a member to ask for an 'Extraordinary Decision' to be voted on. Such decisions must be supported by 80% of those present, which must be a minimum of 20% of membership (or 7, whichever is greater). This procedure allows any decision made to become immediately active. It shall be noted in the minutes as an 'Extraordinary Decision'. It shall be included in the agenda for the next meeting, at which time it shall be discussed, and a vote taken as to whether to ratify or revoke the decision, this vote complying with the standard ratification protocol, as stated above. While this procedure may occasionally be necessary, its use is discouraged due to its

less democratic nature, and careful consideration should be taken when considering a request for an 'Extraordinary Decision' to be made.

Officers

All officers of the Centre will be instantly recallable. Officers can serve up to a maximum of 3 consecutive terms.

The Secretary

This position shall be elected at every 4 meetings. The duties and responsibilities of this position shall be:

- to file and make available to all members minutes of all meetings;

- to post all agendas at the relevant time, and to pass on finalised agendas to meeting's 'Chair';
- to contact all members, where possible, should circumstances dictate (i.e. the calling of an 'Extraordinary General Meeting'), and the providing of all relevant information to said members;
- to maintain all files in good order;
- to oversee the continued good order of the Centre;
- to update and maintain the timetable of the Centre's future usage;
- to inform 'General Meetings' of any problems arising from the running of the Centre.

The Treasurer

This position shall be elected every 4 meetings. The duties and responsibilities of this position shall be;

- to collect and bank all subs, pledges and donations;
- to collect and bank all excess cash generated through special events, etc..;
- to maintain accurate accounts of all funds into and out of the Centre moneys and ensure that they are available for inspection at every meeting;
- to make all payments that are sanctioned by meetings, and only these payments.

Other Officers

Other duties which may be required will be shared and will be taken on by individuals appointed as officers as required.

Responsible Committees

All members are expected to contribute to the Centre as they feel able to. However, day to day tasks may be co-ordinated by responsible committees. Their tasks will be to deal with Centre issues and activities such as press/propaganda, external relations, finances, archive, library/bookstall, prisoner support etc.

Finance

All decisions relating to Centre finances will be made at general meetings. Members subs/pledges and other income will be used for Centre activities e.g. rent, bills, supplies, political materials, bookstall, gigs, propaganda etc.

Money donated or given to the Centre by other organisations will only be accepted where no conditions are attached and where it is given within the principles of solidarity. Specifically, no money will be accepted from the state, state authorities or capitalist sources under any circumstances.

Links with other organisations

Since we recognise that capitalism can only be overthrown by world-wide action, we actively seek to build links with other like-minded revolutionary organisations in different geographical areas. The global nature of the struggle continues to become more fundamental as the globalisation of capitalism continues.

Dissolution

If, at a general meeting, the members decide that it is necessary or advisable to dissolve the organisation, the Secretary shall call a special meeting of all members of the Centre, of which not less than 21 days notice (stating the terms of the resolution to be proposed) shall be given. If the proposal is confirmed in accordance with the decision making procedure, then the Secretary shall have the power to realise any assets held by or on behalf of the Centre. Any assets remaining after the satisfaction of any proper debts and liabilities shall be given or transferred as decided by the members.

