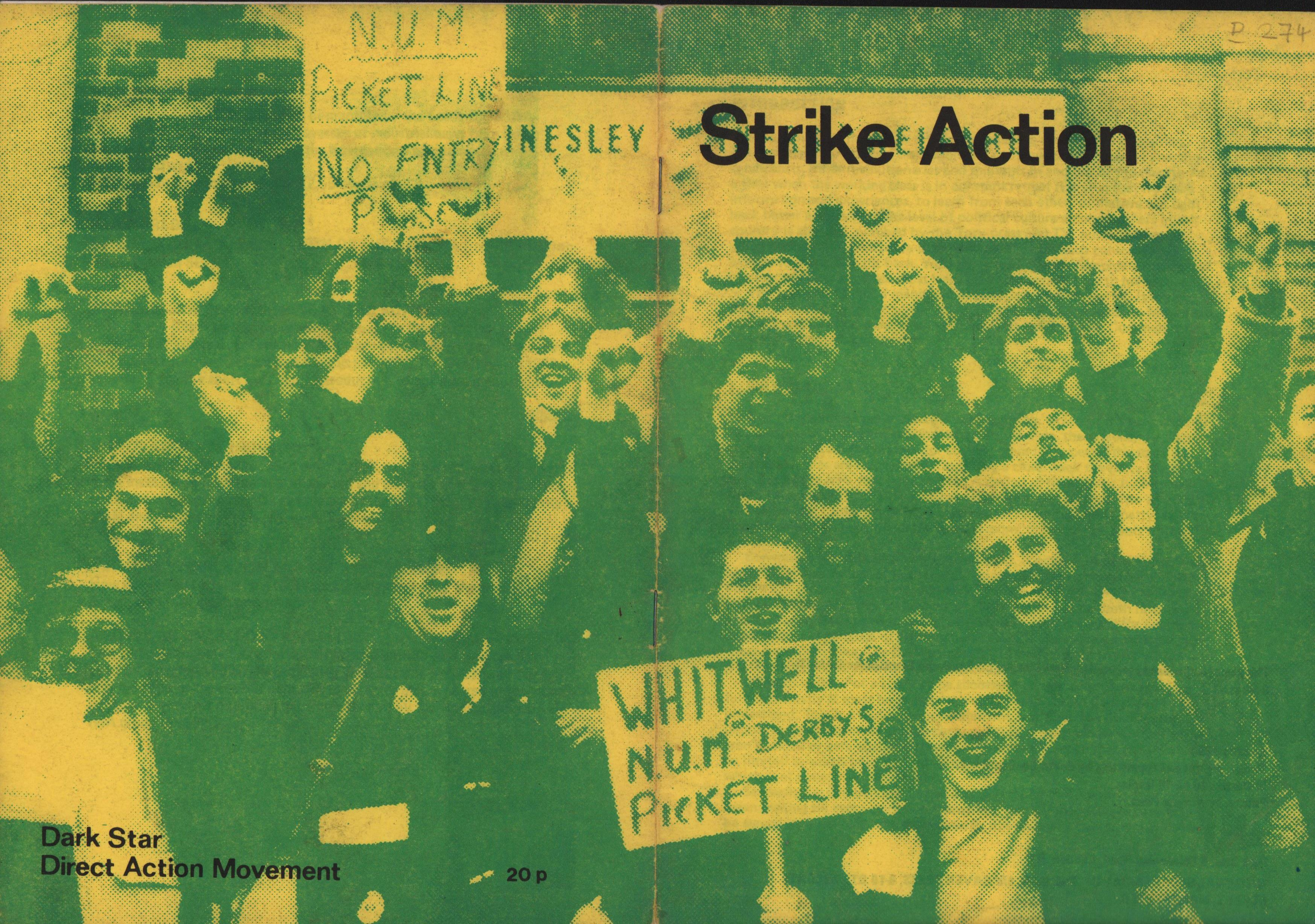


Strike Action



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INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet is intended to set out basic tactics and ways of organising, it is concerned to provoke discussion and communication between anarcho-syndicalists, other revolutionaries and militants in and out of the unions. At a time when the working class is in constant retreat it is vital that we swap information and experiences, to learn from each other, so that we can fight back better and harder. The level of political culture among workers in this country is abysmal, numbed by the Tory press and TV, pushed about by union bureaucrats, now more than ever it is time for each conscientious worker to prepare to hit back. With the spread of such pamphlets, the spread of years of experience, we must learn how to organise, how to hit back.

This pamphlet is not a manifesto, it is not a recruiting leaflet. It is a contribution by members of the anarcho-syndicalist Direct Action Movement to the spread of ideas in our class. We hope it is useful to you. Communication is two way. Now it's your turn.

1. WHY STRIKE?

At first glance this seems a pretty stupid question. However it's very important to know why you are striking, what are the aims, the reasons, the root causes? Very often the reasons for striking seem fairly petty, the so-called tea-break strikes are an example. On taking a closer look the petty reason can turn out to be a very good reason. A period of harassment by management, or a process of sniping away at conditions, can explode into a strike. The straw that broke the camel's back can be something fairly petty, so it's important to bring out the under-lying reasons, draw out the roots of the action.

Sometimes the strike isn't an ideal weapon, it's costly, if used indiscriminately it can lead to loss of faith or confidence. So it's worth taking a look at alternative forms of direct action. Work to rules, go slows, sit-ins, sabotage, all have their place in day to day struggle. Most are less costly, both financially and in energy. Each situation has its own solution, but it's good for people to expand their experience of fighting back, there is more to class struggle than the out and out strike. The DAM pamphlet 'Direct Action In Industry' goes into greater detail about other forms of direct action and is highly recommended.

When to strike. For a strike to be successful certain conditions must be fulfilled. Firstly it must be an issue which the workers are united and fully understand. This is a fairly obvious statement, but often the unions push people to go on strike for purely party political reasons where workers really aren't united or care about the reasons. This doesn't mean that strikes should be limited to wages only, but for a strike to succeed it must be something which is of concern to the workers.

Secondly the strike should be decided directly by the workers. That doesn't mean waiting till every single worker agrees, that's impossible. Action should be agreed by a majority at mass meetings, not on postal ballots which can be

manipulated by the media, or by order from the bureaucrats at central office.

And lastly a strike must directly involve those taking part. Walking out and going home has never succeeded. Passive strikes should be avoided as much as possible.

2. THE ONE DAY STRIKE

The token one day strike is the beloved tactic of the reformist bureaucrat and politician. It achieves nothing but a days loss of pay. In my experience one day strikes are usually put forward by lazy shop-stewards as a way of heading off later trouble. It's a way to let off steam without causing any major damage.

Again the one day strike is often linked to party political moves such as TUC Days of Action (sic). Here the workers are used as fodder for labour politicians to score points off the opposition. They do nothing for us except lose us a days wages.

If we wish to make symbolic protests, express solidarity etc. other tactics are available. For example a one day sit-in could be effective. Or we could all take a day off sick. A one day work to rule to mess up the works. The possibilities are endless.

Should we be forced to go on one day strike, by the majority vote of our co-workers, then we should use the day constructively. Its a chance to communicate directly with co-workers and revolutionaries. Make contact with other workers. Set up alternative platforms against bureaucrats and politicians. Expose who is profitting by the token walk-out, ie union bosses, politicians or even the bosses themselves.

3. OFFICIAL/UNOFFICIAL

Does it really matter whether a strike is official or unofficial? In the vast majority of cases the only advantage an 'official' strike has is that you are entitled to strike pay. It really does not matter to us that a strike is unofficial. We do not need 'official' permission to take action to win our demands. In fact when a union boss tells us to go back to work they're doing us a favour they are showing us the true nature of union bureaucracy. The state needs the bureaucrats to keep us under control. By going on 'unofficial' or 'wildcat' strike we are affirming our rights to make our own decisions, we regain our own *autonomy*. In cases where the union bosses go against us we must fight the bureaucrats as much and as hard as the bosses.

In all cases union bureaucrats, full-timers and lazy (or corrupt) convenors or shop-stewards have no place in running our disputes. It is up to the workers themselves (and not a conscious minority either) to make all the decisions as to how a dispute is run.

Union-employer agreements are not commandments never to be broken. The struggle between workers and bosses never stops; it's going on all the time, agreements try to contain the struggle, try to gain advantage over us. If agree-

ments need to be broken then they must be broken. Agreements, pacts etc should not get in our way. In a strike we must know what we want and how to get it. The bosses are only ethical when it suits them, the working class must be the same.

4. ORGANISATION

The dustcart workers in Wandsworth learned the lesson too late. The same sector of workers in Bury learned the lesson late but managed to rectify the situation just in time. The workers need organisation all the time. If the boss doesn't attack today he'll get you tomorrow. In strike after strike, struggle after struggle, we find the workers unprepared, disorganised, engaged in sectional squabbles. Yet the bosses are always well organised, united, efficient and confident. No wonder the working class is in retreat.

retreat. The bosses learn from each other, we never do. The dustcart workers are a case in point, the council in Wandsworth learned from the council in Southend, the council in Bury learned from the council in Wandsworth.

In most works, factories or offices, there are usually a number of unions, (but always one management). Workers have different stewards, different structures, different levels of experience, this always breeds distrust and sectional squabbles. The first, most important, step is for the creation of works (factory or office) committees which contain delegates from all the unions, from all sections of the works. These committees must unite every group of workers, whether they are blue collar or white or NUPE or NALGO etc. They must meet regularly, get to know each other, swap info, pool their experience. There will be a tendency to get bogged down by personalities etc. All delegates to the works committees must be elected at works meetings by the workers involved, they must report back and, this is vital, be subject to instant recall and replacement should they not come up to scratch.

With a sufficient and healthy organisation, made up only of workers and not full-time officials, communication and confidence can be at a peak. With permanent works committees such as these the workers should be able to face up to the bosses at all times. In the event of strikes the works committees can either become the strike committee or be a pool of shared experience to help in the direct election of a strike committee.

In many ways the existing Joint Shop Stewards Committees are similar to the works committees we have in mind. But the direct election and instant recall we believe are vital are not always carried out. Many shop-stewards can become lazy, a brake on our autonomy, they must be opposed. I know from experience that many Joint Shop Stewards Committees are just talking shops with no input from the work force. This is a direct consequence of apathy and self-seeking stewards. Apathy is often a response to a total lack of communication and information from the union. It is the task of militants to try and dispel the apathy, a bit of humour doesn't go amiss. It's a fact that at the present union activity is often boring and divorced from day to day shop-floor reality when it shouldn't be so.

The strike committee in most cases at present is usually the shop stewards

committee. If works committees were active and well organised that wouldn't be so bad. Another tradition is the election of a strike committee at a mass meeting of all workers. Both ways are useful, but a strike committee is only as good as the individuals and groups it represents. Full-timers and head office should not be allowed to run the strike. All decisions must have the support and understanding of the strikers. In negotiating with the bosses as many delegates as possible should take part to avoid sell outs and back door agreements. Negotiating with only one or two delegates and the rest made up of bureaucrats and bosses should be avoided as much as possible.

It's stupid to make strict rules and regulations about how things should be done. Each work-place is different, each strike different. These notes are only intended to provoke ideas and discussions on tactics and organisation.

5. CASH

If a strike is to last for a certain amount of time then finance should be sorted out as quick as possible. Unions often set up fighting funds but these seldom last very long. In 'official' disputes strike pay can usually be arranged, but it's not very much. In 'unofficial' disputes strike pay from head office is not available. A section of the strike committee (or works committee if one exists) should be given the responsibility of raising funds.

Factory collections are the usual source of money. Appeals should also be made to all unions, at all levels. Letters are one way, but actual visits by strikers are usually better. As well as collections at branch meetings, it is possible to raise cash at work places in the morning or clocking off time.

It's unlikely that any money could be gotten out of the DHSS but attempts should be made. Benefit gigs and discos are another source of funds, but unions often steer clear of this area. Concerts aren't difficult to organise and can yield results not only financially but by making new contacts with people outside the unions.

It's important to spread support and knowledge of the strike outside the confines of 'union' struggle. Each strike is a battle that involves the whole community. Social clubs, tenants associations, youth clubs etc should be informed of the strike and asked for support, financial as well as physical. No avenue should be avoided when it comes to collecting funds.

Needless to say every penny should be accounted for. Any distribution of the fund should be made in a way agreed at the mass meeting. This will often cause problems but it must be done and be seen to be done.

6. PROPAGANDA

Information is important at all times, in times of strikes even more so. The mass media will lie and distort everything, the strikers will never receive a

fair reporting from the media. They will be accused of everything, from holding the country to ransom to being in the pay of Moscow, even to being anarchist scum.

Where works committees are in existence regular bulletins and newspapers should already be in existence. Often each union publishes its own bulletin (if at all seen by the members). Where there are a number of different bulletins in a single works these should be amalgamated to represent the entire works. Where no bulletins exist one should be started. A works bulletin, with regular mass meetings should keep everyone informed of what's going on.

For the general public leaflets and papers should be prepared and distributed as widely as possible. Regular press releases should go to the media and to political groups and revolutionaries. Other leaflets could go to trade unionists local residents, etc. You will always have to fight the smears and lies.

Delegates elected could attend branch meetings of other local works or the branches of the unions involved. Local street and public meetings could also be used to get support or contributions.

Where immigrant groups are involved use of minority languages must be made. Racism must not divide us. Explain what's going on to the communities involved, use their press. Too often minority workers are poorly represented. It's up to us to change all that.

International solidarity might also help, especially if a company is multinational or has overseas links.

Groups such as the Direct Action Movement are also willing to help, either on picket lines or with distribution (or production) of propaganda. Political parties may offer support, but beware of those that try to take control. At all times the rank and file worker must remain in control.

And finally let it be stressed that there is nothing like personal contact between co-workers to get the message across. Don't let bureaucrats or experts run the struggle. Spread the message yourselves, in factories, pubs, in the streets. Also use the left press and papers like *Direct Action*, *Black Flag*, *Workers Playtime* or *Fraud (Ford) News*, to get the message across.

7. DIRECT ACTION/SOLIDARITY

The most common form of direct action in strikes is picketing. However it's not the only action and not even the most effective. For example at Warrington the thousands of mass pickets were shocked at the violence of the cops attack. And in the end it didn't even stop Eddie Shah. However if other workers had shown support by cutting off the power, stopping supplies, cutting off the post and phones etc how long would Shah have gone on? That is the key to ultimate success. Spread the strike as much as possible. Each attack on one group of workers is an attack on us all. For example, Eddie Shah wasn't acting alone, he had the full support of the capitalist press and the capitalist class who were *learning* from the experience.

To stop scabs it is useful to wreck (or remove) vital machinery or information to make continued work impossible. Scabs can also be followed home and have their homes picketted, or worse.

Whilst the laws on picketing are fairly strict we all know they must, and will be broken. Mass pickets will provoke police attacks so we must learn how to look after ourselves, how to defend ourselves, anti-snatch squads will be needed to stop arrests. Also it's a good idea to picket not only the works

but suppliers, the bosses home etc.

However only by spreading and generalising the strike into a widespread social struggle would we have a better chance to succeed.

Direct action while on strike is useful, and is good for morale. Sabotage and occupations are especially useful, (see *Direct Action in Industry*).

8. THE LAST BIT

Does the struggle end with the end of the strike and a return to work? Definitely NOT! Maybe we have merely repeated the obvious in this pamphlet, but we feel that too often not enough attention is focussed on the basics. Not everyone who reads this pamphlet is an anarcho-syndicalist (we hope), but the experience and ideas expressed here are of use to all working class militants. But we as anarcho-syndicalists are struggling for more than just better pay and conditions (though that as well). Our ultimate aim is the destruction of class society and the wages system, we are working for a free society based on production for need not profit. To achieve this free communist society we believe that the working class must take over society and the means of production. The social general strike is the weapon with which the working class will make the social revolution. Until that time we feel we must encourage our co-workers to take independent class action to gain confidence in their power and with experience and knowledge begin the social revolution.

We are not politicians, neither Marxists nor Liberals, we do not wish to take over on behalf of the workers. We simply believe that the liberation of the workers is the task of the workers themselves.

DIRECT ACTION MOVEMENT

The Direct Action Movement is an anarcho-syndicalist federation of workers. We are the British section of the International Workers Association, the anarcho-syndicalist International, founded in Berlin in 1922.

Anarchism is a political belief that all forms of government are wrong. We believe that so long as the State exists, exploitation, wage-slavery, war and oppression will exist. Syndicalism is a belief that the workers should take control of society and re-organise society on the basis of the workers organisations.

Anarcho-syndicalism combines the two, the best of anarchism and syndicalism. We believe that the social general strike is the way in which the working class will over-throw the State and begin to create an anarchist system of self-management and freedom.

The DAM has branches in most parts of Britain. Our national publication is *Direct Action*. Several local branches also produce their own bulletins. We are involved in all sections of the social struggle, in the unions, anti-war, unemployed groups, squatting, the womens movement etc. If you wish to know more about DAM, or have any comments or criticisms of this leaflet please get in touch.

AIMS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE DIRECT ACTION MOVEMENT

1. The Direct Action Movement is a working class organisation.
2. Our aim is the creation of a free and classless society.
3. We are fighting to abolish the state, capitalism and wage slavery in all their forms and replace them by self-managed production for need not profit.
4. In order to bring about the new social order, the workers must take over the means of production and distribution. We are the sworn enemies of those who would take over on behalf of the workers.
5. We believe that the only way for the working class to achieve this is for independent organisation in the workplace and community and federation with others in the same industry and locality, independent of, and opposed to all political parties and trade union bureaucracies. All such workers organisations must be controlled by workers themselves and must unite rather than divide the workers movement. Any and all delegates of such workers organisations must be subject to immediate recall by the workers.
6. We are opposed to all States and State institutions. The working class has no country. The class struggle is worldwide and recognises no artificial boundaries. The armies and police of all States do not exist to protect the workers of those States, they do exist only as the repressive arm of the ruling class.
7. We oppose racism, sexism, militarism and all attitudes and institutions that stand in the way of equality and the right of all people everywhere to control their own lives and the environment.
8. The Direct Action Movement is a federation of groups and individuals who believe in the principles of anarcho-syndicalism; a system where the workers alone control industry and the community without the dictates of politicians, bureaucrats, bosses and so-called experts.

DIRECT ACTION

Paper of the DAM-IWA, published bi-monthly by the Leeds DAM-IWA Group. The paper gives in depth coverage of industrial news from home and abroad, as well as coverage of the international anti-fascist, anti-militarist struggle.

Subscription for one year £2.00 (£2.50 overseas).

NEW WORLD

INTERNATIONAL NEWSBULLETIN OF THE DAM-IWA from 121 Railton Road, London SE24.

ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM HISTORY AND ACTION

Who are the Direct Action Movement? Who is the International Workers Association? Where does anarcho-syndicalism get its ideas from? These are just some of the questions answered in this pamphlet, first published in 1983. Without a doubt a short but useful introduction to our movement and its aims.

21pp.

30pence

DIRECT ACTION IN INDUSTRY

Wildcat strikes, slowdowns, good work strikes, sabotage, sick-ins and many more methods to fight the boss, discussed and analysed in this very useful pamphlet which draws on the experience of the IWW, CNT, AIT, Solidarity, DAM and the international labour movement.

24pp

50 pence

ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM AND THE TRADE UNIONS

How we see the trade unions today and do they still serve the working people who they claim to represent?

WRITING ON ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

This pamphlet contains a collection of articles written over the past forty years by anarcho-syndicalists explaining what anarcho-syndicalism is, and how we hope to achieve our aims. All the articles first appeared in the anarchist press. It was first published in pamphlet form by the Huddersfield DAM-IWA group in 1982.