

# Subversion

**Issue 14**

**FREE!**

*The paper that tightens the ligature round the throat of Capitalism.*

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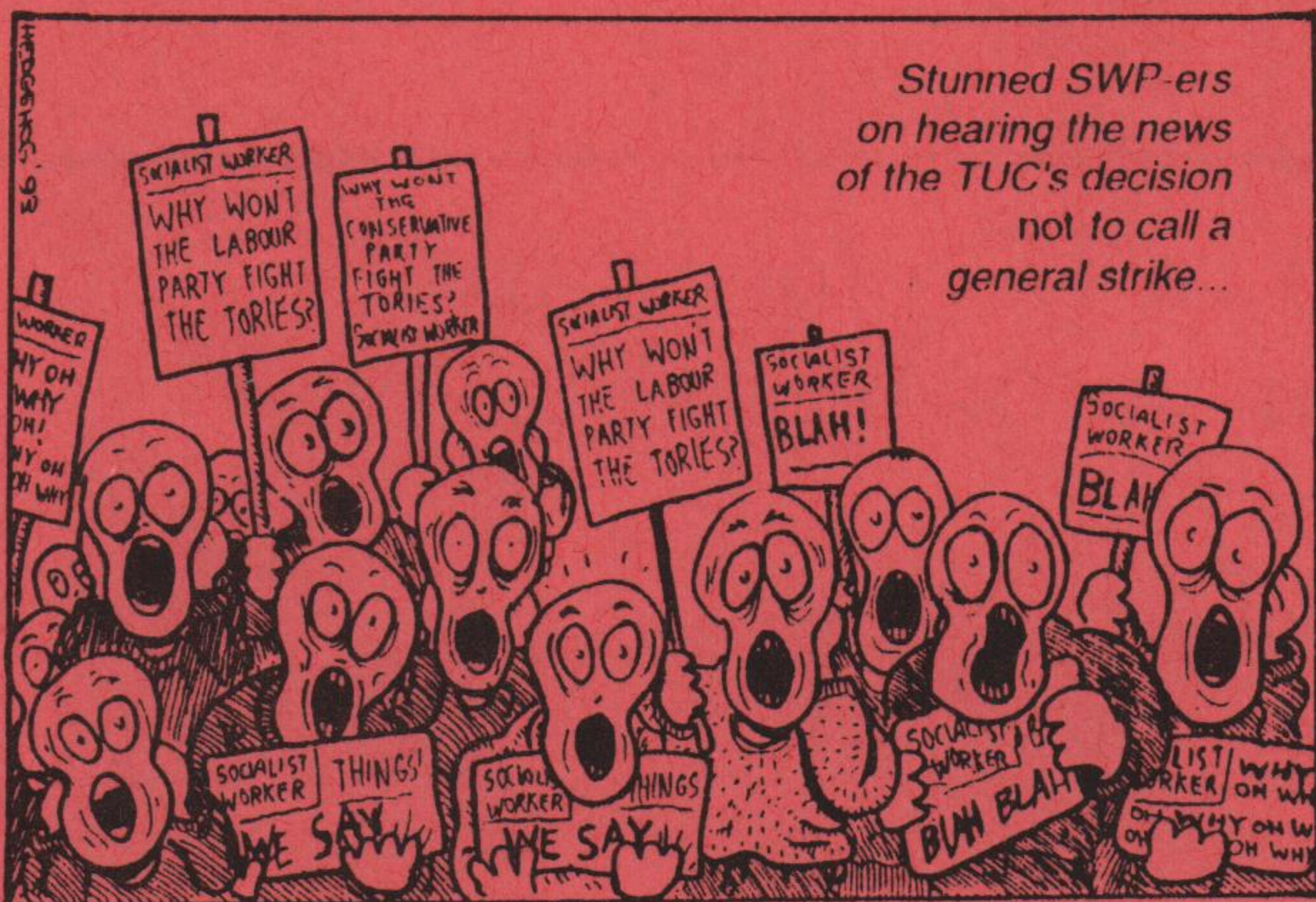
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## In this issue...

This issue of Subversion contains two articles arising out of the recent day school entitled 'Beyond Rank and File Trade Unionism' which was held in Manchester and sponsored jointly by **Subversion** and the **Anarchist Communist Federation**.

The article on Poland was written by one of the Subversion speakers at that day school and illustrates through a 'case study' how new and supposedly radical unions can end up as bad as the old ones.

The other article, entitled 'Rank and File Groups', was written by a comrade from Liverpool as a contribution to the discussion on how revolutionaries should organise for effective workplace struggle. We don't agree with everything in this article and will be writing more ourselves on the themes raised in a forthcoming issue of our bulletin. We would also welcome responses from our readers.

The only concern we wish to raise at this stage is what we consider to be the ill-advised and confusing use by the author of the phrase 'rank and file' to describe something other than a group subordinated to trade unionism.

Also in this issue is an article on Ireland from comrades of ours in Scotland.

Subversion welcomes articles by non-members on any subject of revolutionary or class-struggle interest. If you want to submit something, write to our box number (if possible, send on 3.5" disk, Mac or PC format).

## WANT A GOOD READ?

The following journals are well worth reading. We recommend them not because we agree with everything they publish but because we find them a stimulating read and reckon you will too.

**PROLETARIAN GOB** A must for Guardian journalists stuck for an idea for a column. From: BM Makhno, London WC1N 3XX.

**ORGANISE!** Quarterly journal of the Anarchist Communist Federation. From: ACF, c/o 84b Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX.

**RADICAL CHAINS** Theoretical and analytical articles - critically Marxist. From: BM Radical Chains, London WC1N 3XX.

**WILDCAT** Calls itself 'autonomist' these days! Good article on Somalia in latest issue. From: BM Cat, London WC1N 3XX.

**ECHANGES** Articles on class struggle from around the world. Roughly council communist in orientation. In English and French editions, the latter usually being more up-to-date. From: Echanges, BP 241, 75866 Paris Cedex 18, France.

**WORKERS' VOICE** Paper of the Communist Workers Organisation. Best of the 'left communist'-type publications. From: BM Box CWO, London, WC1N 3XX.

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# The Coming War in Ireland

**If the IRA and the British Government are talking, it shouldn't be a surprise. As the Independent puts it, maybe IRA boss McGuinness has even met secretary of State Mayhew, or IRA "Officer Commanding Ulster" Adams has had a chinwag with MI5 boss Rimington. Top dogs have a habit of sniffing up each other's bums. They don't chum it with the great unwashed.**

First, it seems pretty likely that masses of arms for the Protestant paramilitaries really were seized in the English North-East. It appears that while MI5 are backing the UDA etc. MI6 are playing their own games with Catholic Priests and Republicans. These bastards are obviously planning a treat for us.

Second, throughout the 1990's, Northern business interests have increasingly realised that the profit lies in sprucing up a Belfast-Dublin axis, not in relying upon money being pumped in from London.

Third, Major's admission that his Government has no "economic strategic interest in the North should be taken as a clear case of diplomatic understatement. Obviously the Tories are cutting State spending on the mainland - students and proletarian single parents are current targets - but getting rid of Northern Ireland would save British bosses billions.

Fourth, a British pullout, other things being equal, would hit the Protestant working class worse. Quite clearly, workers at Short's and Harland & Wolff could kiss their jobs goodbye - these companies only operate on massive state subsidies which neither the Republic nor a mini-State could possibly provide, and the EC would be unlikely to. Civil Service and local government jobs would be likely to be cut too. It is partly because of such realities, and related tensions, that organisations like the UDA and UFF have their support.

Fifth, other things are not equal! Any British pull-out would obviously lead to full-scale war: the Protestant bigots would see to that, and without military involvement from outside Ireland right at the start the Protestant armed forces would be bound to win (they have more people under arms than the IRA and the republic put together). The immediate

future would be one of a fascist Protestant mini-State with perhaps a county or two falling into the Republic but full of refugees policed, in practice, by the IRA. This would be a situation where all the capitalist forces, separately and together, ensured a crap deal for the entire working class of the region.

Sixth, factors in operation today aren't purely economic. Since 1992 the British ideology and pseudo-constitution have started to show major cracks. Monarchy, media, church, Tory Party, army: it's happening everywhere at once. The clearest-sighted scumbags in the corridors of power are obviously jockeying, plotting and getting new bullshit ready. It may take years, but who knows what horrors they'll consider to be an adequate preliminary to the new order?

In Ireland, meanwhile, the 1990's have already seen the legalisation of divorce and homosexuality. It certainly looks as though the conflict between Catholic reaction and Catholic liberalism will come to head here before it breaks into a confrontation globally.

**Quite possibly, the British and Irish governments are getting together to start a war which they'll then both revel in for internal reasons. It'd certainly be a bowl of cherries for intelligence services and arms companies. When rulers talk of peace they're often already preparing for war. Perhaps Britain will have a war even without pulling out.**

Seventh, like all capitalist wars, an Irish war would be the application of mass murder to keep working class people divided amongst themselves but united around the flags of competing groups of capitalist gangsters. The obvious contemporary parallel is Yugoslavia, which has similar religious aspects.

One might hope that working-class people would respond by fighting back against all the paramilitary rackets, business interests and religious leaders together but only an arsehole would consciously seek war in the first place so that people might learn from it.

Eighth, the working class has suffered so much during nearly 30 years of so-called "Troubles", but what is necessary only seems impractical because it is unlikely to

happen in the foreseeable future: namely, an escape from the straightjackets of the "two communities", independence from any kind of "community leader" or God-pusher and the united assertion of working class interests throughout the North, Ireland, the British Isles, Europe and the World

**The working class, as a class, isn't yet a major player. If it were, it would be able to guarantee no war. Unfortunately, though, this isn't the case. People are just waiting.**

Meanwhile, it is certainly exciting for TV-watching ghouls elsewhere: if an all-Ireland referendum ever gets held, it could go right to the wire, especially if a change has to be backed by 50% of the electorate. Since, according to the Irish Times, two-thirds of Northern Catholics would vote against a united Ireland, there would have to be a high turnout of X-marking sheep in favour of it in the Republic if more than half the electorate are to back it. The role of the pope in such a situation (whether Wojtyla or Hume) could be even more crucial than that of the Kennedys and the White House. Clinton might be looking to force a vote, but it might not go the way he wants. What about the 8 million people in Britain entitled to Irish passports? And so on.

All of this, of course, will be worked out secretly before being played out publicly, and it is in the nature of a plebiscite that it does not actually decide anything. We only hope that war is not on the secret agenda.

*The above article was reproduced (and slightly adapted) from a leaflet produced by some autonomous proletarians in central Scotland.*

**Ireland -  
Nationalism and  
Imperialism.  
The myths exploded**

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# Flame or Ember?

## Class struggle in Europe.

Revolutionaries in Britain have witnessed the defeat of a number of important working class struggles over the last 10 years followed by a rising tide of nationalism and racism across the globe. In this situation they are understandably desperate for some good news. Articles have appeared in a number of publications heralding a resurgence of class struggle across Europe, supposedly throwing a beacon of light to militants here in our efforts to promote a fight back against the current bosses' offensive.

### FLASH POINTS

There have certainly been by comparison some impressive flash points in the European class struggle over recent months. Massive street demonstrations involving between 50,000 and 500,000 workers have taken place in Italy, Belgium, Germany and Spain against government austerity plans, redundancies and wage cuts. There have been angry and violent strikes at Air France and the state chemical company in Crotona, Italy, involving confrontations with armed police. Major strikes have also taken place amongst coal and steel workers in Germany at the heart of European capitalism. There have also been numerous smaller strikes right across Europe, east and west. Whilst all of this can only warm our hearts, there are serious worries in our heads at least, about the way things are going.

### AIR FRANCE

There have been suggestions that the bosses deliberately provoked the strike at Air France with a carefully-timed announcement of huge redundancies well in excess of those actually required at the present time, with the hope that the workers would be isolated and exhausted before a more general assault on the rest of the class. If this is true then the bosses probably got more than they bargained for. Certainly the Financial Times was sufficiently worried to bemoan the lack of trade union control over its members at Air France and to express concern over spreading militancy amongst



European workers generally.

### GERMANY AND COAL

It is noticeable, however, that the strongest opposition to austerity in Europe comes from workers in the substantial state-owned industrial and public service sectors which have generally still to see the level of restructuring and job losses experienced by those sectors in this country.

Although strikes amongst German coal miners have sometimes been 'spontaneous' and organised outside the official unions, they have quickly been brought under those unions' control. Ideologically they have been sidetracked into nationalism and corporatism (i.e. identifying with the industry rather than the wider working class) with slogans such as 'Defend German Coal'.

Struggles have been isolated with the focus on occupations of pits threatened with closure and token union-led demonstrations. There are many echoes here of the British NUM's defence of the 'Plan for Coal', its appeal for moral support from the 'general public', MPs, etc, and insistence on getting every last miner out on strike, which

prevented miners from spreading their struggle directly to other workers in the crucial early stages of the strike. There was also much wasted and misdirected debate over capitalist issues such as which energy industries did, or should, get the most state subsidies. As a result of all this the British miners for all their militancy and courage were roundly defeated.

### ITALY AND THE SCHOOLS

In Italy the 'base committees' (COBAS) had some success in organising struggles of workers, mainly in the state sector, outside and against the traditional union structures. They continue to have some influence but even here corporatist tendencies have appeared. For instance, in the schools COBAS there have been attempts to sidetrack the movement into 'advising' the government on how schooling should be planned, making the COBAS look inward towards the needs of capitalist schooling rather than outward towards the rest of the class and class-based needs. It seems that 'professionalism' for long such a barrier to 'class' resistance amongst school workers in Britain is still a force amongst such workers in Italy, despite their comparatively more militant stance.



## ITALY - SCOTLAND

There are some other unhealthy comparisons to be made. The extremely militant strike and occupation of the Crotone chemical plant in southern Italy which received the enthusiastic support of the whole town bears a number of similarities to the failed Timex strike in Dundee, Scotland:

- considerable militancy and initiative on the ground by the workers involved, but links with the 'outside' world largely left in the hands of the official unions and parties etc

- the blurring of class lines between the workers and their families on the one hand and local politicians, churchmen and capitalists on the other in 'defence' of 'their' area

- an element of 'north' versus 'south' ideology particularly strong in Italian politics today comparable to the Scotland versus England debate here, setting workers in one region against workers in another region

## CONCLUSION

Clearly there has been an upturn in the European class struggle and there exists a huge wellspring of class anger beneath the surface that could give rise to even larger struggles in the near future. The obstacles to such a movement are however very great.

Unlike the left our conclusions are that, at this juncture, we in Britain have less to learn from the supposed 'successes' of workers in the rest of Europe, than they have to learn from our failures.

(See the article on Timex in the last Subversion and the article on Crotone in Workers' Voice 69. For more information on the COBAS, see the pamphlet by David Brown, 'The Cobas: Italy 1986-88: A New Rank and File Movement', published by Echanges, address given elsewhere in this bulletin)

## **Subversion**

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# **Beyond Rank and Vile Trade Unionism**

First it is necessary to spell out what we do not mean - that is the myth of a 'rank and file' straining at the leash, only held back by a cunning and devious trade union bureaucratised leadership. Today it is obvious such a movement does not exist, but it is doubtful if in reality this ever was the case except for a brief period after the First World War. There have been rank and file groupings in many industries and unions, but except for isolated instances and in very specific circumstances they have not challenged the outlook or mentality of conventional trade unionism. So first we have to establish to some extent what constitutes a genuine challenge to existing trade unionism rather than merely a 'loyal opposition' to existing workers organisations. (In this regard we do not refer merely to the existing trade unions - but to the whole outlook and philosophy of what is known as 'the Labour Movement'.)

Today our contention is that what passes for the 'Labour Movement' is

entirely reactionary. We do not mourn its passing, but wish to point out the necessity of recognising this reality. Everything that has in the past been presented as the socialist project is now revealed as part of capitalism's management of its crisis. All that has hitherto been assumed as being in the workers interests - the welfare state, post war consensus politics, the commitment to 'full employment' is now revealed as merely the result of the old movements' politics to tie us more closely to the system.

As such it must be rejected.  
**Workers Movement versus the  
Movement of the Workers**

Now this might seem a rather pessimistic conclusion, but we believe it is as well to start off from a realistic appreciation of the situation so that anyone proposing either to start a 'rank and file' grouping or faced with one already in existence can begin to arrive at some kind of analysis of what they are doing. In our experience there has been and is far too much uncritical action simply for actions sake. We want to avoid the

situation where militants end up isolated, left only to protest futilely at the latest 'betrayal' or even worse in the name of some mythical 'unity' obliged to present the latest stitch up between management and unions as some kind of 'victory'. Much of the present disorientation amongst the working class is not the result of the 'Thatcher revolution' (which we are convinced will soon be revealed as nothing of the sort,) but of the fact that a sea change has taken place in politics internationally and the old certainties (held in place by the Cold War) have gone. The traditional institutions that the working class looked to for help in times past, principally the Unions and the Labour Party, are now revealed for what they are - pillars of the system and defenders of the status quo.

We propose to look at 'rank and file' groups under five main headings which although they are treated separately here for the purposes of analysis are in fact inter-dependent and inter-related. It is our view that we are working towards a coherent outlook, and one of the main purposes of attending this conference is not only to broaden



and deepen our own understanding but to see if what we have worked out strikes a chord with other participants or even if someone else has arrived at a better understanding than ourselves. However it would not be correct to give the impression necessarily that we are prepared to give up on what we have fought so hard to understand. For instance our understanding of the place of trade unions in capitalist society or the role of the Labour Party is not something we are prepared to compromise.

which is now breaking up.

In this situation it would be as well for rank and file movements to recognise their necessarily **minority** character, rather than pretending to speak for the amorphous mass of workers. If this is the case then they have no need to hold back or pretend that initially at least they are anything other than **political** organisations pursuing a particular programme. It therefore makes no sense to hide this political character rather it should be openly acknowledged. Moreover it is our view that such movements will be obliged to take on an increasingly social dimension. It is no longer possible to maintain the old social - democratic split between 'political' and 'economic' questions on which the Labour Party was founded.

The pre First World War SLP actually forbade its members from taking up union positions - again this leads us directly onto our next point, the relationship of any rank and file movement to the existing trade unions.

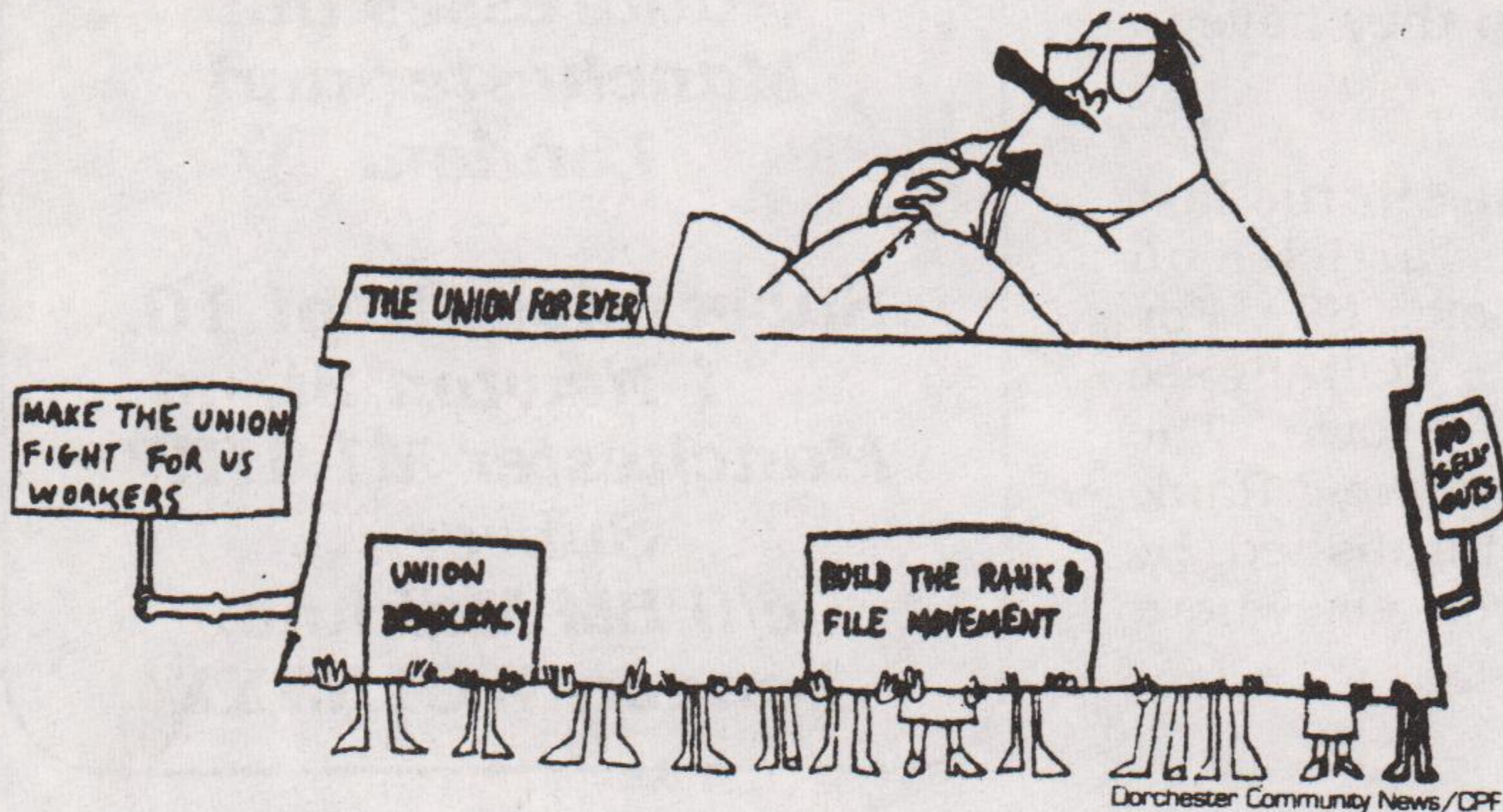
### (iii) 'Rank and File' and the existing Trade Unions

It should be fairly clear by now that we see **no role** for the trade unions in any future struggle. We do not want to make a fetish of this, it obviously depends on circumstances. But even where a movement utilises the existing union base machinery (for example combine committees, or local area committees) and it is looked on favourably by the local trade union bureaucracy (as regards funds, premises, printing facilities and so on) at crucial moments (that is the only ones that matter) this dependence will be the undoing of the movement. A classic example of this was the London Busmen's Combined Committee broken by Bevin and the TGWU in 1937.

Not only therefore do we see no positive role for the trade unions, but we believe of necessity that any rank and file movement can only emerge in **opposition** to them. This has been the experience abroad and especially we believe in Italy with the COBAS movement. Indeed in our opinion it is a good sign of the health of such a movement to see how much opposition from the existing unions it inspires. It also follows therefore that all attempts at democratising the unions or pressurising union leaderships to take action are futile and a waste of time and indeed positively **reactionary**.

### iv) Permanent Organisation ?

We have shown how it is impossible for new mass organisations to emerge except at times of exceptional crisis (indeed one of the ways you know you are in a crisis is the practical question of the emergence of such institutions). In our view it would be a mistake to try and artificially prolong the life of such organisations outside periods of struggle by making them permanent. If we accept that movements ebb and flow, that disputes are going to be resolved on whatever terms at least temporarily, then the need for a fighting organisation fades away. Any attempt to artificially prolong it risks ossifying it at best and at worst turning it into a fully fledged capitalist organisation (by obliging it to maintain itself with finance,



That being said our five headings are as follows:-

- \* The Distinction between Minority and Mass (or majority organisations)
- \* A 'rank and file' populism against the development of a coherent political understanding and outlook (or reformism versus revolution)
- \* The relationship between rank and file organisations and the existing trade union structure
- \* The question of the creation of permanent institutions of a rank and file nature.
- \* The relationship (if any) of rank and file movements to political parties

### (i) The distinction between minority and mass organisations

In modern capitalist society mass organisations of a genuinely representative type **no longer exist**. It is inconceivable that we will witness a rebirth of trade unions as mass organisations. It would be as well to remember that the original founding of trade unions in this country was by minorities of skilled craftsmen. Mass unionism is very much a product of modern society and modern unions owe their structure and organisation to the post Second World War consensus

This leads us directly on to our second heading concerning the question of populism versus a coherent political outlook

### (ii) Reform versus Revolution

In the past we have had cause to question what we termed 'money militancy.' By this we meant that whatever reforms we won in terms of money or working conditions, of **necessity**, such 'victories' always turned out to be short lived. Inflation always ate away at our gains. We always found ourselves in a minority shouting about a 'betrayal' - but if the union demands £10 should a revolutionary policy be to demand £20 ? Today although it is possible that a new wages movement might emerge, we doubt that it could achieve even the modest gains which were so easily wiped away in the 70s. So around what practical programme could a rank and file movement emerge ?

Today the system itself constantly proposes reforms with which it hopes to draw in any opposition, so what attitude should a rank and file movement take to this process. Our answer to this is to reject the whole project for reforming the system and to argue for its abolition. This is not to dismiss anyone who finds themselves drawn into existing organisations - it is above all a **practical** question. In the past socialist groupings had to come to practical decisions on this point .



permanent staff or the usual risk with working class organisations - the treasurer runs off with the funds)

Prior to the dockers attempts to take over (by joining 'en masse') the 'blue' union (NASD) in the 1950s, rank and file organisation was kept alive as a **political** idea not by any organisational device. It was only the fact that some dockers influenced by Trotskyism wanted to take over a union (and ultimately to have some influence over the Labour Party itself) that made them believe that they could 'take shelter' under the umbrella of the NASD.

#### (v) **Relationship to Political Parties**

If you're not part of the solution then you must be part of the problem !

We have said already that any rank and file movement is by its nature the organisation of a **political minority**. How then does it differ from any one of the different Leftist groups which are also political minorities?

Only in the ways we which we have already outlined. We have already stated our views on the old 'Labour Movement', and as there are not many leftist groups which would subscribe to them so they are almost automatically excluded.

If only life were so simple!

Apart from those movements which are merely fronts for already established parties - a genuine rank and file movement would begin by trying to outgrow its sectional roots, by breaking out of the limitations that capitalist society imposes on it and become **social** in character. Other political groupings, who of course it is **impossible** to exclude from such a development either help or hinder such a process.

**Graham**

## **Labouring in Vain**

**Why Labour is not a  
Socialist Party**

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# **Solidarnosc**

## **Ruling class solidarity against the working class**

The 1980 workers' uprising in Poland was not the first time the working class there had fought back against state capitalism. In 1956, 1970 and 1976 workers had taken to the streets when the state had tried to impose cuts in their standard of living by raising food prices.

The strength of the working class was such that, despite severe repression, in each case the state gave in. These uprisings underlined the fact that there was a line beyond which the state could not go at that time. They also meant that the state was forced to constantly rethink its strategies for increasing the competitiveness of Polish capital. The state's solution to the 1970 revolt was to try to modernise the economy by importing western capital and technology. This was to be paid for by exploiting the peasantry in order to subsidise the money wages of the workers with cheap food. After 1976 the idea of autonomy for enterprise management was introduced. This was to prove crucial in the early stages of 1980.

Despite their best efforts, the Polish state built up a huge debt to western banks by 1980 - approximately \$28 billion. Its response was to try to cut the subsidies to workers and on June 30th announced a "reorganisation of meat distribution", which meant a 60% increase in the price of meat.

The working class responded with a wave of strikes effecting factories in Ursus (tractors), Huta Warszawa (steel), Poznan (metallurgy), Tczew (transmissions), Mielec (aviation) and Swidnica (aviation).

The party's response was to try to negotiate locally. They couldn't risk losing the goodwill of the West, nor risk a major disruption of production which would endanger its ability to service the massive foreign debt. The policy of local enterprise autonomy made this policy easier to put into practice. The hope was that it would keep workers divided. The result was the exact opposite. Workers in



B. Borwick for The People

other plants saw their fellows winning demands and immediately went on strike themselves! They took the opportunity to elect strike committees and organise themselves. By July 15th there were 50 strikes going on. Two days later the city of Lublin, with a population of 300,000 started a general strike.

Even at this stage there was a major change with previous uprisings. In earlier years workers had taken to the streets, this time they remained in their workplaces to avoid being gunned down. They remained where they were strong and united.

The strike wave continued until early August. At this point the state decided on a new approach. If the carrot had failed, now they would go back to trying the stick. The problem they faced was in finding who to repress. These strikes were examples of workers organising themselves. There were no obvious leaders who had instigated it, nor easy targets to pick on. There were underground groups and "free trade unionists", but they had not played a central role in the struggle up to this point. Failing anyone else to repress, the state turned on these people.

Repression started on August 11th when a bin man was arrested for 9 hours. Two days later, 3 Lenin



Shipyard workers connected with underground unions were arrested. Up to this point, Gdansk, Sopot and Gdynia (the centres of the shipbuilding industry) had been mostly quiet. The result was a general strike that spread rapidly from shipyard to city. A strike committee of 10 was elected (including Lech Walesa who had

unions were to liberalise the Polish state and to make Polish capital more competitive. These objectives can be summed up by quoting from the founding charter of underground unions in Northern Poland drawn up in April 1978. It stated:

"Only free unions and associations can save the state, since only democratisation can lead to the integration of the interests and the will of the citizen and the interests and power of the state."

Lech Walesa was one of the signatories of this charter.

government to resort to violence or lead to its collapse. It was the ending of censorship that led to intervention in Prague. We must leave them some exits." By the time the demands had been finalised, the KOR had got their way. The state would be allowed a way out.

The government realised that it had to negotiate. On September 1st the Gdansk Accords were signed. Lech Walesa immediately called for a return to work. He said:

"The strike is over. We did not get everything we wanted, but we did get all that was possible in the current situation. We will win the rest later because we now have the essentials: the right to strike and independent unions."

Kuron, an important KOR leader, said: "The unions ought to be partners in the administration protectors of the workers."

Work resumed. The MKS at Gdansk and Szczecin formed themselves into branches of Solidarnosc. By the end of the month it represented 90% of the workers in Poland.

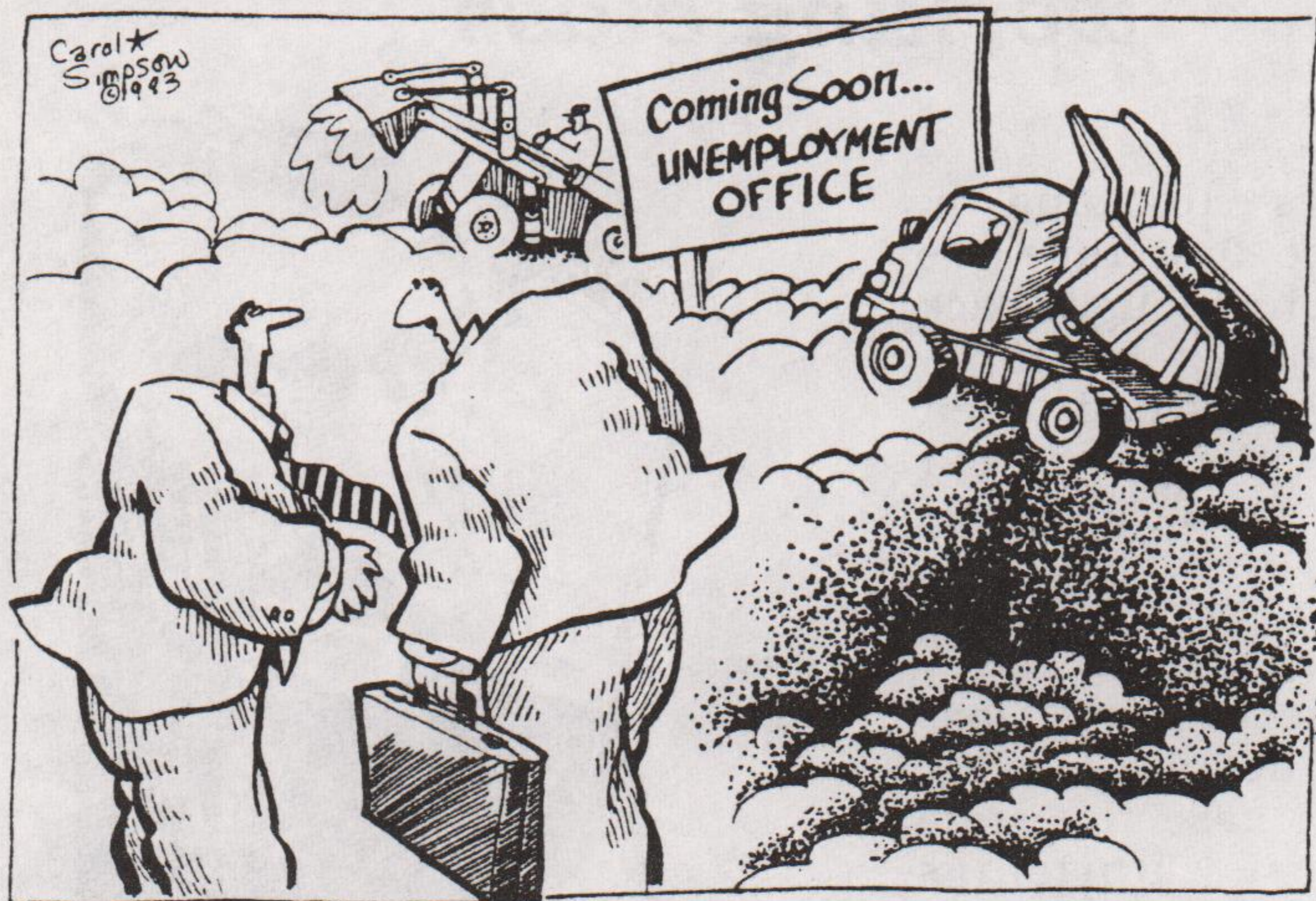
#### UNION AGAINST THE WORKERS

What was really amazing was just how quickly Solidarnosc began to act like established trade unions in the West. Its leaders quickly get themselves into positions of being intermediaries between the workers and the state. In the guise of "representing" the working class they went around stopping strikes, toning down wage and other demands in the interests of "national unity". As early as September 16th, Solidarnosc in Gdansk warned against wildcat strikes - even though it was these same strikes that had started the uprising just two months before!

The Gdansk Accords had left unsettled the workers economic demands. Very important amongst these was the right to not work on Saturdays. There were many strikes in the winter of 1980-81 over this. The Solidarity National Coordinating Committee issued a statement on January 28th asking branches not to call any more strikes. Walesa said:

"The situation is dangerous. We need national unity. To achieve it, we, government and workers, ought to seek a common path: we should unite in the country's interests. We extend our hand to the government."

The government again tried repression as a tactic. After a particularly nasty incident at Bydgoszcz in March, Solidarity was



"Another sign of a surging economy—new construction." CAROL SIMPSON

climbed over the wall when the strike broke out) which was soon joined by 100 delegates from other departments. They published a list of demands, some of which were economic, some political.

By 18th August 100 enterprises in a 100km area around Gdansk were on strike. An inter factory strike committee (the MKS) was set up with two delegates from each factory on strike. The MKS controlled the entire region and resolved all problems of food and transportation.

MKS were set up in Szczecin and the Silesian mines. The strike wave had spread all over Poland, accompanied by self-organisation of the working class that was challenging the authority of the state in a way that had never happened before in Poland or most of Europe. But it also contained the seeds of its own destruction. Soon the strike wave was to be hijacked by those with quite specific objectives that turned out to be against those of the workers.

#### ENTER THE KOR.

The repression that followed 1976 led a group of intellectuals to set up a Committee for defence Against Repression, the KOR. This was to provide legal defence for those in need and material support for families. It was to become an important centre of opposition to the Communist Party (PUWP). It was soon joined by supporters of free trade unions. The political objectives of the KOR and the free

Supporters of KOR had a lot of respect in Poland. They endured state repression and carried on their work. There is no denying that they were brave men and women. It is right to deny that their objectives coincided with the needs of the working class.

They had little role in the early days of the uprising. Ironically it was the state which turned them into its leaders. Looking for someone to pick on, it was supporters of KOR that they found. This reinforced the idea that they were the state's strongest opponents, so workers looking for new ideas increasingly turned to them for leadership. Thus it was that Walesa got elected to the strike committee at Gdansk, even though he did not work in the shipyard he represented. Other oppositionists became members of the MKS Praesidium on the basis of their being experienced negotiators.

#### NEGOTIATIONS

The original demands of the Gdansk strikers were as political as they were economic. They contained all sorts of mystifications about democracy, free elections and judicial independence, but nonetheless their central thrust was simple - to get rid of the Communist regime in Poland. This terrified the oppositionists. Bogdan Borusewicz, a leader of KOR in Gdansk said: "Asking for pluralist elections is maximalism. If the Party gave in, Moscow would intervene. there must be no demands which either force the



forced to do something when some of its organisers were beaten up by the militia. They called for a token 2 hour work stoppage. When the government refused to yield, Solidarnosc called for a general strike on March 31. In the best tradition of union bosses, Walesa negotiated with the state, got a few minor concessions and called the strike off without consulting anyone.

A pattern was beginning to emerge. Faced with pressure from the working class, Solidarnosc called for token strikes, did deals and called off strikes. A common spectacle was Walesa flying round the country in a government helicopter telling workers to go back to work.

However, the strikes continued. October and November 1981 saw the beginning of street demonstrations which the union could not control. By the middle of November there were more than 400,000 wildcat strikers in Poland.

After its September and October Congress, Solidarnosc started to make political demands of the state. It wanted to move towards Poland becoming a western style democracy, so it could operate as a western style trade union. Having lost much of their political control over their members, Solidarnosc's leaders hoped that such reforms would enable them to regain it.

The state could not permit such a challenge to its authority. Solidarnosc was useful when it could control the working class. Faced with a working class outside its control the state called upon the Polish military to take over and reestablish order. In 1980 the military, faced with a united and confident working class, and trusting in the Party's ability to rule, had been unwilling and unable to do this. Fourteen month's of Solidarnosc's malign influence had undermined the unity of the working class, at the same time as the Party had lost its legitimacy and ability to govern. The army took over in the first military coup in a state capitalist country. Workers fought back but were put down ruthlessly by the army. Many were given long prison sentences, others killed. Walesa was put into "preventative custody". Clearly he was not someone who should be dealt with too harshly. Maybe they saw him as a person they would need to deal with in the future.

HOW DID IT ALL HAPPEN?

It is too easy to look at the Polish uprising as being a simple case of good workers against bad bureaucrats. We have tried to show that the aims and activities of Walesa, the Solidarnosc bureaucracy and the KOR were against the interests of the working class. They were able to substitute their own agenda for that of the working class. What we have not tried to show is that the working class were champing at the bit for revolution in 1980 and only held back by the bureaucrats. Such a view, favoured by many, pays no regard to reality.

The uprising was a result of the self-organisation of the working class. It wasn't the result of any planning by underground bodies. The initial objectives of the working class were economic, but we have seen how many workers had political objectives which included getting rid of the Stalinist state.

However, most workers saw Solidarnosc as being their own creation. Even after a year of backstabbing, Solidarnosc had a membership comprising 90% of the Polish working class. There was a very real tension between the centre and the branches, with rank and file members pushing demands forward, fighting for them and then the centre acting to diffuse the situation. Within the branches there was still a healthy tendency to struggle which had not at this stage succumbed to the ideology of trade unionism. It was the failure of the bureaucrats to gain control of the branches that led the army to seize control in the end.

It is hardly surprising that for many workers Solidarnosc was a creation they supported. For years they had been fighting against the Polish state. Each time they rose up their gains were snatched back. They were looking for something that would guarantee their gains. Because they knew no different, they believed that free unions were the answer. What they had in mind was the kind of idealised conception of unions that keeps workers supporting them throughout the world. If workers here, who have years of experience of sell-outs still support the unions, is it surprising that Polish workers should see them as an advance?

Further, Polish workers knew that they were on their own. There were no similar actions in other parts of the Soviet bloc, and especially no similar activity in the USSR itself. They knew that if they pushed too

far the result could only be Soviet intervention and massacre. This situation was made worse by a strong nationalist tendency which saw the situation as being a purely "Polish" one. Active revolutionaries would have tried to spread the struggle as internationally as possible.

#### LESSONS

Any attempt by workers to set up permanent organisations to negotiate with the state and employers will eventually go the same way as Solidarnosc. Trying to fulfil that role immediately raises questions of reaching compromises, doing deals, seeing the other side's point of view. For workers that means accepting speed ups, productivity deals, lower living standards, job cuts and so on. It means accepting the boss's right to own and control the means of production.

The logic of class struggle is the opposite of this. It questions the right of the boss to manage and ultimately brings into question who controls society. It is clear to us that the only way forward for our class is to get rid of the whole buying and selling system and the state and bosses who go with it.

Despite the failure of the workers in Poland, despite their setting up of Solidarnosc, their uprising shows us many positive things.

It shows us that even in the most unlikely of situations, up against ruthless enemies, the working class is capable of fighting hard and taking on the enemy. The way they organised themselves, in their strike committees and the ways their delegates reported their deliberations were an example for others.

It shows the limits of struggles within national borders and the need to spread the struggle internationally. When our class is united and the struggle is international, there is nothing that can not be accomplished. It is international, there is nothing that cannot be accomplished.

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## Coming Soon!

### The Best of Subversion

A collection of articles from the first eleven issues of Subversion.

An excellent introduction to our politics.



# Letters

(The following letters were unavoidably held over for a couple of issues. We apologise for the delay).

## Equal wages?

Dear Comrades,

In your review of Abraham Guillen's *Anarchist Economics*, you describe your own preferred economic system as 'centralised planning by delegate bodies' without 'private property, money, wages and markets'.

No doubt you are sincere in your ideological opposition to state capitalism. However in practice the sort of economy you wish to construct would create the same problems of poverty and shortages that existed in the old state capitalist economies of the Eastern bloc.

The reason for this is your commitment to central planning. In a market system variations in profits and prices send signals to enterprises which tell them which products consumers want and which processes are most efficient. How could delegate bodies possibly gather together all the information necessary to match scarce resources with consumer demand without market prices to act as indicators. Millions upon millions of variables are involved. No computer imaginable could do this, especially as it would be issuing orders not to robots but to people who have to have their subjective feelings and opinions considered if a workable production plan is to be made.

Under state capitalism economic variables were not processed efficiently hence the shortage and waste that the system produced.

Socialists must build a system that combines the use of market prices as indicators with social

ownership of the means of production and equality.

This is possible both in principle and practice. Though Guillen himself believes that people should be rewarded according to the 'quality and quantity' of work performed he also shows how during the Spanish revolution people were paid equal wages in many areas where there was an anarchist influence. The post-revolutionary spirit of solidarity inspired them to work hard.

In a revolutionary society profits could be used as an indicator of efficiency and the satisfaction of demand without being paid to workers as an incentive. Profits could be paid into a fund for investment or redistribution to all. Workers would respond to profit indicators because of a socially motivated desire to work well, rather than competitive pressure. Workers could be directed to work in the most efficient enterprises. Again solidarity rather than the ability of these enterprises to pay more would be the incentive.

Under capitalism the uncoordinated nature of investment leads to the cycle of boom and recession. In a socialist system as long as one knew which were the most efficient, profitable enterprises, one could get them all to invest more and therefore create full employment at the same time as ensuring they were performing worthwhile activities.

It would be possible therefore to combine socialist aims with more effective means than central planning.

Jacob, a supporter of anarchism.

**SUBVERSION REPLIES:** You rightly say that state capitalism produced poverty, shortages and waste. But this wasn't because of central

planning in itself, nor because state capitalist economies supposedly lacked price and profit mechanisms. The 'planned economies' of the former Russian bloc were essentially attempting to plan the market (we went into this in more detail in an article in *Subversion* no.8). They retained price and profit mechanisms at the level of the economy as a whole. This is one of the reasons why we can describe them as a form of capitalism - state capitalism.

The presence of prices and profits has not prevented 'free market' capitalism in the West from displaying the same defects as state capitalism in the East. In fact, you could say that these features are the cause of these defects.

We are well aware of the marvellous powers attributed to the market in the realms of economic theory. But out here in the real world, you only have to look around you to see that "the use of market prices" is a very poor way of gathering information about people's needs. Do homeless people not need houses? Do starving people not need food? Of course they do. But because they have no money, they cannot "indicate" or "signal" their needs in a system where everything is produced to be bought and sold via the market. The flipside of this poverty is the waste of resources when goods are stockpiled or destroyed because the capitalists cannot sell them at a profitable price. This is why, when we are describing socialism, we say that goods must be produced to directly satisfy our needs, without the mediation of money, prices or the market.

You should think again about profits, and exactly what sort of "efficiency" they measure. Since profits arise from the unpaid labour of the working class, the most profitable enterprises

must be those which are most "efficient" at screwing surplus value out of the workers. Whenever workers are sacked, or our wages are cut, or we have to work harder or for longer hours, isn't it more often than not in the name of "profits" and "efficiency"? Is this really what you want to carry over from capitalism into socialism?

When we advocate central planning, we are not saying that all decisions will be taken at a global level (though some will). Most issues will easily be able to be sorted out at various intermediate stages - regional, local, community, etc. Viewing things on this scale, we honestly don't see what will stop people getting together to determine their needs and the best ways to go about satisfying them. And if we do encounter any difficulties, we certainly won't solve them by resurrecting some of the features of the old system we'll just have overthrown.

We have many reasons for hating capitalism. Here are just a few of them...Because we can only gain access to the means of existence by selling our labour power (the wage system). Because the bosses grow fat on the fruits of our labour which they rob from us (the profit system). Because we are constantly denied the things we need and want because we can't afford them (the price system). Now tell us what it is that you hate about capitalism, because frankly we can't tell the difference between the "socialism" you propose and the very system we are out to destroy.

### **Back issues**

If you want to receive free copies of back issues, just write to our Manchester address.



## Who are you, anyway?

Dear Subversion,  
There are a couple of questions I would like answered:

1. Is it correct to assume that no one associated with Subversion is, or could be, a member of a trade union.

2. Having read your column of aims and principles there doesn't seem to be anything new. So how come you claim to be leaving the rest of us (revolutionary anarchists /anarcho-syndicalists) behind? What is it precisely that you are advocating apart from council communism?

for solidarity, mutual aid and direct action.

R. Avon.

### SUBVERSION REPLIES:

Dear Roy,

You raised two points. The first was the old thorny union question.

The first thing we would say is that unions do not exist to unite workers. They divide them into different sectors and groups. They then set about pitting the "interests" of one group against the "interests" of another. So we see union bureaucrats trading off jobs for pay, or trying to persuade bosses to make one group redundant instead of another. This is the inevitable consequence of setting themselves up as permanent organisations to negotiate with the bosses, which inevitably means accepting the logic of capitalism and the rights of the employer to hire/fire and make a profit. It is fair to say that this is true for all unions everywhere, whether they be traditional or syndicalist. We don't think that even One Big

Union would make any difference. It would still have to negotiate with the bosses within the framework of capitalism. It would still end up their partner in the exploitation of the working class. We plan to deal with this in detail, in a later issue of Subversion.

Most of the members of Subversion who are in work do belong to trade unions. We do this for a number of reasons. One is that they provide certain basic legal protections at work. Another reason is that, at least in Britain, most discussion about collective action takes place initially at union meetings. It would be difficult to discuss with fellow workers by shouting from the outside.

The whole point for revolutionaries is not to accept this starting point as the end. Any major struggle that remains within the confines of a union will inevitably be defeated. Indeed our personal experiences only reinforces this point. Every struggle we have been involved with has pitted us as much against the union as the bosses. What workers need to do is to break out of union imposed isolation, link up to other groups and spread the struggle.

However, being well aware of the nature of the unions as an integrated part of the management of capitalism, none of our members are paid officials or hold positions on union committees and the like. To do so would mean not only representing the wishes of fellow workers, but of representing the union to workers. As it is this second activity that is so often in conflict with the interests of working class people we feel that it is incompatible with being a revolutionary.

We know that this can pose a dilemma for revolutionaries. At times

some of our members have held positions as local reps, simply to get meetings organised.

We would agree with you that there is little new in our What We Stand For statement. That is because we think they represent the minimum points for agreement between revolutionaries. Our point is not that we are leaving others behind. We do do something that many others don't or can't do. We write and produce a fairly regular bulletin which we hope is fairly readable. And apart from the SPGB, we are the only group in Manchester who organise meetings to discuss revolutionary politics. We do this to spread socialist ideas and hopefully along the way to bring people round to our viewpoint. But our viewpoint is not unique. We think it is a revolutionary communist one. As such it is shared by many who call themselves anarchists, council communists and marxists.

We believe that these days these labels have little of value to offer. Many who historically called themselves marxists turned into statist monsters, many anarchists either became "marxists" or idiotic liberals. The point is that they all ended up pro-capitalist. Many council communists seemed to end up as worshipping spontaneity, merely commentating on the class struggle, having nothing to offer except advice that was too late and never reaching those it was intended for.

If we are prepared to admit that most of those who claimed these labels in the past have nothing to offer, what are we left with? We are left with a core of revolutionary politics which is shared by many who call themselves "marxists" and "anarchists". We simply prefer to ditch the labels. We believe that our What We Stand For goes some

way towards describing that core of ideas. So it is hardly surprising that as a revolutionary you find little new in it.

So what are we advocating? We are advocating a society without bosses or wage slaves, a society without buying and selling, without money, without states, nations or blocs. We are advocating a society where each person freely gives of their best and takes what they need, a society based on co-operation and mutual aid. We believe that this can only come about by the self activity of the working class, a class that becomes aware of what it wants and acts without leaders telling it what to do.

We believe that all those who share these views should work together to help bring them about. So we work with other groups of revolutionaries, hopefully in a non-sectarian way. We also think that people who agree with us and are able to work with us should think about joining.

## Prison Life

*This piece is extracted from some letters from Stephen Windsor, a prisoner whose story we told in the last issue.*

Being in prison is a hard life for anyone no matter what the crime.

Being in prison is soul destroying for some one like me who has committed no crime at all. The only benefit for most in similar positions as I find myself in, is that you do gain great strength from the fighting that you are forced to do.

Most men and women who are fighting their convictions get locked away in solitary at some stage.

I was locked in a room with a toilet and a sink which was no bigger than the average loo in the average



## Prison Life, Continued.

house; for 14 months solid - try sitting in your toilet for 14 months.



The most important thing a prisoner can have is some source of communication. Letters are vital and the more the merrier. You cannot begin to imagine the feeling at receiving a letter even from a complete stranger; someone who is showing a tiny bit of interest or even concern.

Prisoners ask for little and most will not impose on those that write. Letters from the occasional stranger kept me sane, kept me alive when I was way down the hole that was seemingly getting bigger. No way out, just never ending constant mental brutality inflicted by warders. The physical torture one is forced to endure.

Two men hanged themselves during this 14 month period and at least one a week tried to do so, and in so doing caused serious damage to himself.

Often one cannot tell one's family what is happening to them in prison but can relate this to a complete stranger who occasionally writes.

It matters not what anyone writes to me about. I always find time to reply and believe it or not give advice when I feel I can.

The knowledge that someone has bothered to write does give you hope when there is nothing else except four walls and 17 screws every time your door is opened.

Thanks.

Stephen Windsor is in HMP Noranside, Fern-by-Forfar, Amgus, Scotland.

# BBC BULLSHIT!

As an angry parent of a child depending on high level hospital care, one of our Subversion members was involved in a campaign to save Booth Hall Children's hospital in Manchester. This was most revealing of the attitude of the media and showed most clearly whose side they are on.

Our member took part in a radio phone-in (in a moment of high dudgeon). This left the BBC with her telephone number on its records. A week later Operation Irma began in former-Yugoslavia to bring seriously injured children to Britain for hospital care. Amidst great surprise, the BBC rang to ask her opinion for radio and T/V! Shortly after the family had waved farewell to the sound and lights crew the phone rang-Radio Merseyside wanted a "statement" saying that The People Of The North West did not want to see outsiders brought in taking valuable hospital space from poor British children. When our member naturally refused to say anything of the kind they immediately lost all interest.

They were aiming to create xenophobic attitudes out of thin air for the sake of entertainment. What Scumbags. The truth should never be seen to get in the way of a good story no matter what hatred, deaths and agony should result. The whole operation was simply a whitewash of the effects of war and the capitalist owned media were simply continuing the hatred it creates to divide and rule. There is no difference between what Merseyside Radio wanted said and slogans printed in the Sun during the Falklands War except as a matter of scale.

## GUARDIAN GARBAGE!

### In Gob we trust . . .

**WE LIKE** the magazine *Proletarian Gob*, but *Proletarian Gob* doesn't like us. "You only have to read the newspapers or watch the television news," it declares, "to realise what a stupid bunch of gits journalists, newsreaders, commentators and their camera operators are."

Yeah? Prove it. "They only tell us half the story; they repeat police reports, or press releases; they are lazy; they sensationalise; they lie; they pester people; they are smug and ugly." *Ugly?*

*Proletarian Gob* advocates class war. You can tell how anti-establishment it is because, on its cover, it has the words: "More tea, Vicar? Or how about a punch in the face?"

But back to the reasoned criticism. "The 'news' is very important to our rulers, not because it provides information, but because it keeps us distracted, fills our head with crap, and sells lies to us. The 'news' is not news, but propaganda."

Fair enough. "For example," the *Gob* offers, "the rightwing will say that striking workers should not have attacked the police; the

leftwing will say that the police provoked them or started it. No one will be saying that attacking the police in general is a positive thing." Which it is, of course.

"Again, we are constantly meant to think about the best ways to run the economy; we aren't meant to think that we'd be better off *without* an economy."

But back to journalism. "The sight of journalists in 'war torn' or famine areas is particularly revolting. Their high wages and the expense of carting themselves and equipment around is supposed to be justified by their 'telling the world the truth' or 'making a difference'. Of course we aren't told the truth — ie that capitalism creates the economic rivalries that causes wars and that war is actually good for business, or that famines are caused by the world economic system."

So what's to be done, *Gob* old chum? "There is a saying that the first casualty of war is truth, well the first casualty of the class war should be journalists."

Try telling that to the family of Farzad Bazoft, Mr *Gob*.

This load of garbage appeared in the Weekend Guardian a few weeks back. It tried to take the piss out of **PROLETARIAN GOB**, a "sister" paper of **SUBVERSION**.

As the **GOB** said, "Journalists today in fact fulfil a similar function for Authority as priests used to do in medieval Europe....filling peoples heads with useless ideas and debates .... and spying on people. Don't trust journalists - their humanity has been squeezed out of them and their brains are on auto-pilot."

The article above about the BBC just shows how true this is.

For a **free** copy, write to: Proletarian Gob, BM Makhno, London WC1N3XX





## MILITANT'S MILLIONS

Here is yet another damning report of a Trotskyist political organisation in this country, and comes from a meeting held in Manchester in November 1991 by the group in question - Militant.

"One of the most important assets of a political organisation like ours is its revolutionary consciousness and politics and the revolutionary consciousness of its members and if you could price that, a revolutionary consciousness starts at £35 per month (subs to the group that is).

"We carry out work in 58 countries and we have councillors, MPs, Trade Union officials and organisers. We are the only revolutionary organisation this country has ever seen". These are the words (reproduced from memory) of Dave Carr, full-time organiser for Militant, spoken at the above meeting.

When Militant (now known as Militant Labour) appear on the streets with their newspapers, stickers, collecting tins, appealing for funds like the Sarah Thornton campaign, anti-fascism and stop the BNP - none of that money goes to the cause. Not one penny. So do not give them a penny.

One of the gimmicks used to stop you in the street is "Sign this petition against ---". If you stop to sign the petition you will be asked do you want to buy a paper (this line is always a good one). If you say no then you will be asked "would you like to make a donation to the campaign". If you do make that donation then the money goes straight to Militant and the petition will be torn-up later on (the only reason for a petition is that it is easier to ask you for money plus they have your name and address), maybe on that same day - a SUBVERSION member witnessed Margaret Manning, a Militant councillor, tearing up Sarah Thornton campaign petitions just after she had prepared to bank the campaign money into Militant's own account.

In 1991 Militant's account had over 40,000 just sitting around gathering dust and cobwebs in a capitalist bank - money collected by Militant's fronts goes the same way. In the case of Sarah Thornton, when she killed her cruel husband Militant hit the streets with FREE SARAH THORNTON NOW stickers. Sarah Thornton herself received not one iota from the stickers or her campaign - the money went straight to Militant. YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED

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## REVIEW: CARRY ON RECRUITING!

Why the SWP dumped the "downturn" in a "dash for growth" and other party pieces.

TROTWATCH. c/o Box NDF, 72 Radford Rd, Hyson Green, Nottingham NG7 5FT

No, this is not a little-known carry-on film with Sid James as Tony Cliff, but a new pamphlet by Trotwatch which carries on from where our predecessor group Wildcat left off with the pamphlet 'How Socialist is the Socialist Workers' Party?', written at the time of the Miners' Strike.

Many of our readers will know just how disgustingly reactionary, deceitful and hypocritical the SWP are; that they spend half the time contradicting what they say the other half of the time; that their paper-sellers' memory extends no further back than the last zig-zag of the party line etc., but this pamphlet explains why they behave in the way they do.

The main points covered are:

1) The reasons for the "downturn" policy a decade ago and the "upturn" policy more recently. The pamphlet argues that, rather than a change in the material circumstances of the class struggle, as the SWP argue, it is purely the differing needs of the SWP apparatus that determined these turns (in particular the presence or absence of a significant rival in the shape of the Labour Left).

2) The relationship of the SWP to both the T.U.C. and Labour Party bureaucracies, showing how the SWP criticises them (indeed even says at times that the TU leaders are incapable of changing because of their position in society) and yet never countenances a break with them, nor fails to call on them for leadership.

The reasons for this inconsistency (perhaps the most consistent feature of the SWP's policies) are explained.

3) The initial lack of interest by the SWP in the anti-Poll Tax movement (which was reversed when this latter grew to become a mass movement) is located (according to the pamphlet) in both sectarian hostility to Militant (which was doing well out of it) and its refusal to take seriously any struggles not based in the workplace.

4) The thoroughly undemocratic internal structure of the SWP. The well-known division between immovable leaders and an obedient, passive mass of paper-fodder is discussed and explained.

A possible criticism is that the pamphlet is unclear as to what significance workplace struggle has - is it just the same as struggle in any other arena? Subversion believes that, although the workplace is not the only arena of class struggle (the anti-Poll Tax having been one of the best examples in recent years), none the less it is on the whole more important, the first among equals, if you like.

Another possible criticism is the extent to which we can really say that the Poll Tax was defeated. But, quibbles aside, we recommend our readers without hesitation to get hold of this excellent pamphlet.



## WHAT WE STAND FOR

We meet regularly for political discussion and to organise our activities. The following is a brief description of our basic political principles:

- We are against all forms of capitalism; private, state and self-managed.
- We are for communism, which is a classless society in which all goods are distributed according to needs and desires.
- We are actively opposed to all ideologies which divide the working class, such as religion, sexism and racism.
- We are against all expressions of nationalism, including "national liberation" movements such as the IRA.
- The working class (wage labourers, the unemployed, housewives, etc.) is the revolutionary class; only its struggle can liberate humanity from scarcity, war and economic crisis.
- Trade unions are part of the capitalist system, selling our labour power to the bosses and sabotaging our struggles. We support independent working class struggle, in all areas of life under capitalism, outside the control of the trade unions and all political parties.
- We totally oppose all capitalist parties, including the Labour Party and other organisations of the capitalist left. We are against participation in fronts with these organisations.
- We are against participation in parliamentary elections; we are for the smashing of the capitalist state by the working class and the establishment of organisations of working class power.
- We are against sectarianism, and support principled co-operation among revolutionaries.
- We exist to actively participate in escalating the class war towards communism

# Subversion

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This advertisement first appeared in Industrial Worker.

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