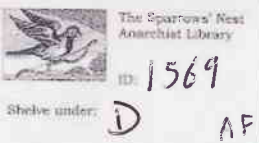


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# DAM AND THE TRADE UNIONS

A DAM PUBLICATION



DAM/IWA (anarcho-syndicalist organisation)  
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## The union makes us strong

"The union makes us strong is an axiom most people would agree with, but if we look at the question closely doubts appear.

Consider the trade union movement as a whole, the numbers are there, when Callaghan left office the T.U.C. had a membership of some 13 million out of a workforce of 20 million. This meant that over half the working population were organised. It is in this organisation that the weakness is apparent, the movement consists of separate organisations catering for sectional differences at the 'expense of the whole. It is not unknown for there to be as many as eight different unions on one shop floor. In one factory there are eight unions, the major union is the A.U.E.W., and this has ten branches throughout the town. We then find operatives in the same factory, in the same union, separated amongst different branches of that union. In the G.M.W.U. it is forbidden to contact other branches.

The union structure exists largely outside the workshop, with officials totally divorced from the reality of the factory floor struggle. Yet experience tells us that the workplace is where the working class power lies, and power there is. If the trade unions ever had a high summer it was during the period of the Heath Government when the nearest thing to a General Strike since 1926 occurred. Dockers were released from jail, the government's Industrial Relations Act was defeated, and ultimately the government brought down, all by working class action, i.e. strikes. In 1979 after the 'Winter of Discontent', the militant action of the lower paid workers effectively caused the fall of the Labour Government, even though the strikers actions were often sabotaged by trade union leadership. When Moss Evans (a left-wing leader) was asked why the T&G.W.U. had made the lorry drivers



strike official, he replied that it was easier to control this way. This would appear to be the role of the trade unions, a practical example would be the action of the Union of Postal Workers leadership during the Grunwick dispute in withdrawing the union cards of members who blacked postal traffic to and from Grunwick. This poised the question to postal workers of "solidarity or the sack". Without a union card they could not work, without their support the strike at Grunwick was lost.

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## Wages

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It has been said that the trade unions main priority is the wage question, but if we judge them on results they lose even on this basic level. The trade unions, as a recognisable entity, date back to the 1790's when the government of the day brought in legislation to limit the rights of working people to combine and organise for better wages and conditions. In effect they have had 200 years to get their act together, yet we find in a European League for wages, Britain is 12th out of a league of 14. Only Ireland and Spain come below. What a miserable performance for the biggest and oldest trade union movement in the world. Today we have nearly 5 million people out of work. It is usual to blame Thatcher and her cronies, but we do not need to be historians to realise that unemployment has risen since the mid-sixties, starting with the Labour Government of 1964. The cost of this nightmare in financial terms is 17 billion per year and in health and lives the cost is incalculable. However the payment is made by the rank and file member. The most shattering thing of all is the knowledge that we have no need to tolerate this catastrophe. When we have sub standard houses why are building workers on the dole? Why do we accept an educational system that produces children who

cannot read or write and who lack numeracy, when we have capable and competent teachers on the dole? For 20 years the trade unions have watched unemployment grow steadily well beyond the total for the 'dark ages' of the thirties. If anything is an indictment of the T.U.C. it is that the only answer they have come up with to unemployment is Redundancy Payment, now recognised as a form of job selling. In fact the unions have pinned their hopes on the policies of successive Labour Governments, who themselves have been responsible for much of this suffering endured by the rank and file union members over the years, through their economic policies.

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## Corporatism

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But these things apart even if the trade unions were not devious, even if they managed to achieve and maintain a tolerable standard of living for their members we could not as libertarians subscribe to the corporatist approach practised by the Trade Union/Labour Alliance over the years. In the society which has evolved as a result of this partnership, the defence organisations of the working class are effectively absorbed into the bureaucracy of the state.

This absorption began as far back as the first decade of the present century, when employers and government alike sought to woo the unions into the web of the state system through the many conciliation and arbitration committees so beloved by the union officials. How successful this has been can be gauged from a perusal of any union magazine.

The stated aim of the T.U.C. is to work with the government of the day and this it does even today with a government that supposedly seeks 'to destroy the unions'. Within a few months of Thatcher getting in it was revealed that the T.U.C. had been holding secret meetings with the Tories. The T.U.C. still



retains its place on the many tri-partite bodies including N.E.D.O. and it is part of the E.D.C and Sector Working Parties, 'where government, employers and unions can discuss the economic problems of the country'. There are other bodies such as A.C.A.S., and the Health and Safety Executive, as well as the Manpower Services Commission. All in all the integration of the trade unions into what is after all a 'Capitalist State', is well advanced. Under the infamous Labour government of 1979 which is remembered for the winter of discontent, the T.U.C. was described as 'camping out in the dining room of No. 10.' In reality the trade unions are the allies and paymasters of the Labour Party, this was one of the reasons why the wages of the lower paid workers were deliberately held back to further government policies under Callaghan. At the Labour Party Conference the trade unions hold about 90% of the votes and most of the money raised nationally for the Party comes from the unions. At local level there is a mirror image when most of the finance comes from the local unions. One well known A.U.E.W. convener in the North West claimed that his local union alone paid over 80% of the local party money. All in all the Labour/T.U.C. marriage is complete if not exactly final. An article in the Financial Times of 12-8-83, forecast that in the immediate future there would a move away from the established policies on three major issues.

1. The T.U.C. will ditch the anti-working class "Alternative Economic Strategy" in favour of more immediate changes.
2. The T.U.C. will drop their opposition to all government policy and only oppose sections of it.
3. The T.U.C. will distance itself from the Labour Party.

What is happening is simply that the T.U.C. is dropping the pretence of opposition to the class

policies followed by the Conservative government, in favour of close collaboration.

The stage has been reached in class collaboration where marchers on a T.U.C. march for jobs could not shout anti-government slogans such as 'Maggie Out'. The T.U.C. stewards did not hesitate to use force to stop the sloganising and expel the culprits from the march. But this is light relief when we consider the overwhelming trend in corporatism. With the world slump there has developed a need amongst Capital in the U.K. to retrench, to re-invest, to bring down inflation. They feel the need to control more closely the events that are affecting them. The result is an hard nosed government that seeks to cushion Capital at working class expense. A large proportion of the unemployed are out of work by government design, the Tories are using the workless as a means of reducing prices. As a further step in this direction the government, with the connivance of the T.U.C. and their Labour Allies, through the Manpower Services Commission are compelling 400,000 school leavers to take jobs at a wage rate of £25.00 per week. Thus forcing them to undercut established wage rates. No Work No Dole. Already 17 so-called trainees have died in industrial mishaps, and several hundred injured. Taking advantage of the uncertainties of the situation the E.E.P.T.U. has agreed to a reduction in the wage structure for electrical apprentices. The participation of the "T.U.C. Lefts" add a degree of respectability to this charade. They gave it a respectability the scheme would not otherwise have, at the same time making it more acceptable to the youth by pretending to improve pay. One great victory was to achieve the £25.00 weekly wage. When members of the union lost their job, formerly they lost their membership of the union, and whatever protection and rights that gave them.



Pre-war the unemployed were driven to join the National Unemployed Workers Movement. This severely embarrassed both the governments of the day and the tame trade unions by its militancy. The advent of mass unemployment has caused a rethink amongst both the T.U.C. and the government. In 1981 the T.U.C. applied for and received a massive dose of funds from the M.S.C. and as a result of this unholy alliance (M.S.C./T.U.C. and Local Labour Councils), the T.U.C. developed the Centres for the Unemployed. There are now about 200 of these all geared to controlling the out of work and gelding them as a force for change. One T.U.C. official brought especially to open one of these centres in the North of England was quite adamant when he stated 'we have to be sure that these centres do not become Maggie Thatcher bashing shops.' The trade unions have many more state institutions to get involved in and membership of some of the quango's bring in a substantial sum of money in remuneration to many a starving bureaucrat.

It is clear that corporatism is not just an ofchance of T.U.C. policy, an accident rather than design. The unions have over the last eighty years at least, become part and parcel of the state. The situation has been reached where they have become a positive danger to the working class. They must be exposed, challenged and replaced, the question is how?

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## **The anarcho-syndicalist alternative**

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We need not strain our eyes looking for an alternative to the present trade union organisation. The history of the working class throughout the 20th century shows the way most clearly.

In both Russia and Britain at the time of the

Russian Revolution, when organised working class fought not only the state but the union bureaucracy, there emerged the concept of 'Factory Committees'. In Russia the practical demonstration was crushed by the Bolsheviks in their bid for power. Their aim had no place for an independent working class. In Britain the idea got hardly past the theoretical stage. The concept of Factory Committees was an anarcho-syndicalist one and as such was anathema to politicians of all kinds who instinctively rejected a system that opposed the idea of leaders and led. All of a sudden the wage slaves were moving and not just asking for more money, but were seeking to control the environment they lived in and ultimately their own lives. In Russia the anarcho-syndicalists disappeared into exile or jail, and even death was inflicted on them for their temerity in challenging the belief of the Bolsheviks.

In Britain the flame faltered with the mistaken idea that what had happened in Russia was a thriving revolution. All of a sudden, working class direct action was suspended for the delusion of political goals.

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## **Factory Committees**

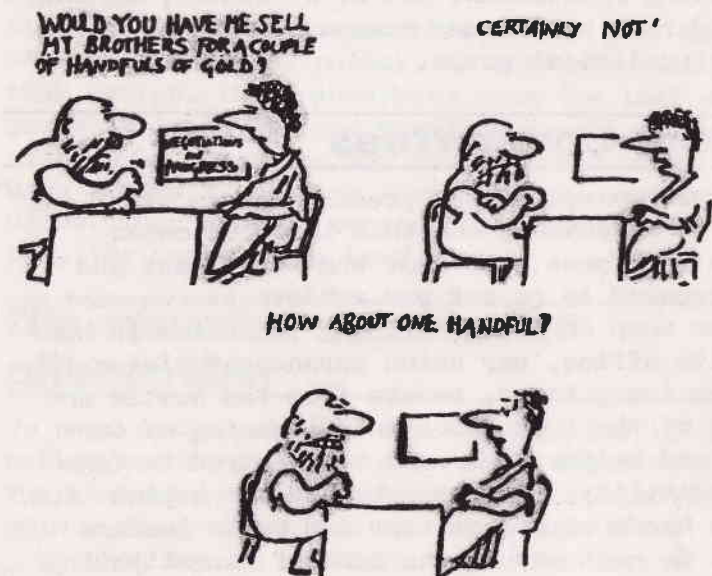
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Whatever we replace the present system with, one thing is essential, and that is an educated active workforce, who know what they want and are prepared to go out and achieve it. We want neither shop convener, sitting full time in her/his site office, nor union bureaucrat living in his/her ivory tower, remote from the hustle and bustle of the shop floor and disposing of our lives and welfare. We must be prepared to take responsibility for ourselves and our actions out of the hands of politicians and union leaders alike. We must assume the task of 'emancipating

the working class' ourselves, through our own working class organisations. All delegates must be elected from the factory floor at department level, and subject to instant recall. When all departments have elected their delegates and mandated them, then the delegates meet in the Factory Committee. All the major decisions of the committee will then be referred back to the department for discussion and voted on at mass meetings. The Factory Committees will be federated to others in their industry and to factories in a geographical area.

These federations will hopefully do 3 things:

- A. They will be instruments to defend working class living standards from Capitals assault.
- B. They will be a means, through the General Strike of bringing down the present unequal society.
- C. They will be a method of organisation designed to run and co-ordinate the future society.



## 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 the workers themselves and must unite rather than divide the workers movement. Any and all delegates and representatives 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 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.



**This pamphlet, essential reading for everyone involved or interested in trade unions, outlines what is wrong with the unions today and presents its own alternative of anarcho-syndicalist factory committees.**