

Infantile Disorder
for autonomous resistance

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"what right have you got to say this"
(Cardiff Unemployed Workers' Centre manager)

"shows a scab attitude to unions"
(SLP trotskyst)

"mickey mouse terrorism"
(Socialist Party)

"ultra-left nonsense"
(CPSA steward)

"lefties? fuck 'em all"
(ex-WAJSA activist)

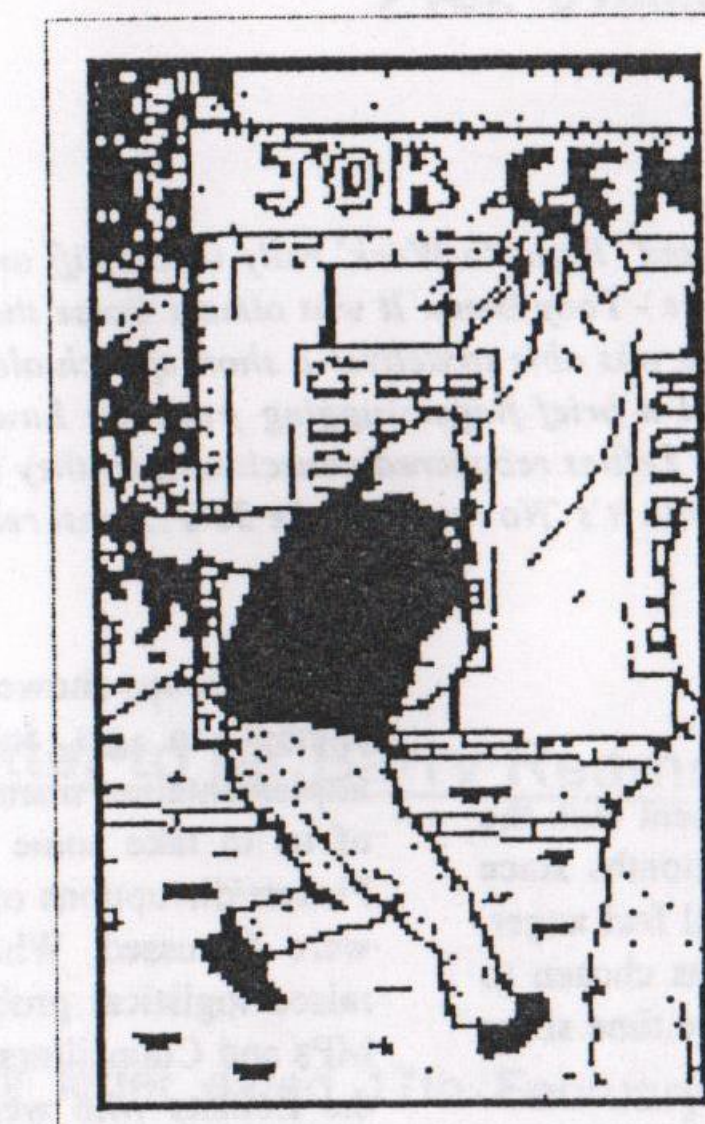
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DOLE BONDAGE

an open letter of resignation
from the secretary of
Wales Against the JSA

UP YOURS!

CLAIMANTS
ACTION GROUP



Infantile Disorder
for autonomous resistance

First edition - Cardiff, April 1997

Dole Bondage? Up Yours!

An Open Letter Of Resignation from the Secretary of Wales Against the JSA



"There was stunned disbelief at the Wales TUC organised 'Right to Work' rally in Cardiff on Saturday when an anarchist strolled from the crowd and hurled a custard pie at their deity on the stage - Tony Benn. It was almost worse than Pieing the Pope at the Vatican. so great was the shock of the assembled Lefty hacks, that our comrade was able to deliver a short speech along the lines of 'Fuck the Right to Work' before being personhandled away by stewards. After this and a brief fingerwagging from the Law, he made a hasty exit from the scene of the outrage...which was just as well because by the time the Lefties recovered consciousness, they were looking annoyed. After this brief highlight the pathetic rally droned on, sending everyone to sleep with it's 'No return to the 30's'...most reactionary Tory government since... 'garbage.'"

(Freedom - 2nd October 1982)

It is now about two months since I ceased my involvement with the "Wales Against the JSA" (WAJSA) group...and two months since the JSA started to come into force. As I write this I still feel anger, disgust and disappointment at the path that WAJSA has chosen to take. I know other activists who dropped out at the same time share many (but not all) of my feelings.

The Decline and Fall of Wales Against the JSA

There had been several repeated attempts in the last 18 months or so to establish a anti-JSA/unemployed action group in Cardiff. Activists around the local Trades Council had attempted to start a campaign, and the handful of local anarchists and Earth First!ers were planning to try an set up a "Groundswell" group. Amongst the Leftist groups in Cardiff, Militant Labour, the Socialist Labour Party, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and Cymru Goch were all planning their own anti-JSA activity. However, due to a crossover of activists/contacts the various initiatives were combined to form 'Wales Against the JSA', during the summer.

At first things appeared to auger well for the new group. Sectarian differences between the competing politicians seemed to have been put aside. For once it seemed that the ideological trenches had been abandoned. Even more hopeful was the apparent acceptance of the concept of direct action that had been brought to the group by the younger activists with experience in the recent anti-roads, anti-fascist and anti-Poll Tax struggles. Over 10 000 leaflets and posters were produced and distributed outside Job Centres; several thousand homes, in the area of Cardiff that several of us lived in, were leafleted door to door.

However once this routine had been established the first cracks in WAJSA's "unity" started to appear. Now that propaganda was being distributed proposals to back up this "promise of opposition" by starting direct action, were made. These suggestions were not (yet) rejected outright. Instead the political specialists of the various

Leftist groups showed a reluctance to get involved themselves or to attempt to get information (such as the location of JSA implementation managers' offices) that might have enabled the rest of us to take some form of action despite our lack of numbers. Pickets/disruptions of Conservative MPs' and councillors' surgeries were discussed. When the relative scarcity of Tories in the area raised logistical problems it was suggested that we target Labour MPs and Councillors nearer by - this idea was hastily postponed by the Leftists who were/are still clinging to their ideas of "putting pressure on Labour" (not very much pressure obviously!).

Although still giving the idea of direct action some sort of lip-service the Leftists began arguing for caution and deferment and were slipping back into their tried and tested (and failed) methods of protest. Concentrating instead on "building a demo" and winning support from the Trade Unions. Crucially the Leftists saw the CPSA (the Union of many Benefits Agency and Employment Service workers) as the key to success - not us unemployed. At this stage we still hoped to get numbers of unemployed people into the campaign, hoping that such an influx (even a small one) could swing the balance of WAJSA towards a more pro-active and less mediated strategy. Therefore, those of us arguing for action compromised for the sake of "unity".

As time progressed, it became clear (to some of us) that WAJSA hadn't. The date of the demo, and of the implementation of the JSA loomed closer. WAJSA were facing a potentially disastrous demonstration. Most of those arguing strongest for the march (as opposed to direct action) seemed to be the least to build it. There was (not surprisingly) little support from the Trade Unions. Given this, it was suggested that because of a very real possibility that a minuscule turnout for what was being built up by WAJSA as an "All Wales/National demonstration" it might be less damaging to the anti-JSA campaign to either cancel the demo or consider alternative plans. A tiny march would be a display of weakness by WAJSA which could result in a total lack of credibility which we desperately needed. However for many of the leftists the demonstration was, in effect, both the culmination/peak of the campaign in some ways and the campaign itself amounted to the demo. and pleas to the "labour movement". As it turned out, around 150 people, mainly members of the various Leftist groups, trudged around Cardiff city centre in a pathetic spectacle, that at best bemused the Saturday shoppers.

CPSA? NO WAY!

By this point, an even greater problem had developed within WAJSA. Myself, and most of the other activists had effectively dropped out in disillusion and frustration.

Efforts to woo local CPSA activists by the leftists had finally paid off and several Union reps turned up for the weekly WAJSA meeting. This was seen as good news by the many who hoped it would herald a new phase for the campaign. BUT it actually caused the effective death of the sickly since birth WAJSA group.

The CPSA reps showed up and almost immediately launched into an unprovoked and hysterical verbal attack on me and other activists. They accused several of us of plotting physical assaults upon their union members and refused to listen to attempts on our part to explain ourselves. It was obvious that they were reacting to circulars they had seen about "Groundswell" and the "3 strikes" policy. WAJSA was technically part of the Groundswell network - although in practice all this meant was that Groundswell mailings were passed around at the start of meetings. The "3 strikes" tactic had never been mentioned in WAJSA before, never mind discussed or actually planned. The CPSA seemed to take little comfort in this. They then responded equally negatively to all prospects for mutually acceptable action. The idea of BA/ES workers refusing to do JSA work was dismissed as "ultra left nonsense" by a CPSA member -and ex-SWPie 10, who then declared that she would rather union members implemented the JSA than scabs. Suggestions to target the (mutual enemy) management, and perhaps occupy their offices, were denounced as "Mickey mouse terrorism" by a Militant member. The CPSA then stated that they would call the police if we leafleted inside the Job Centre. The Leftists who had previously supported the idea of "direct action" backed the CPSA all the way....

In a scenario that reminded me of arguments with "fluffies" during the anti-CJA struggles - it seemed that those preaching unity and tolerance, the loudest were those causing the most division and being the most intolerant of other peoples ideas.

I found myself the secretary of a group whose strategy, tactics, (and the ideology behind it) I was becoming increasingly opposed to. WAJSA's near fetishisation of the CPSA and its "struggle" had placed in a position that, it could be argued, was open collaboration with people who: on one hand were willing (reluctantly or not) to carry out the latest of the Government's attacks; and on the other hand acting as a bureaucratic block upon militant action (by us and perhaps by workers in the BA/ES). The CPSA has instead embarked upon a series of one day strikes. Such a strategy is near useless as effective resistance - it does however provide a way of making militant workers harmlessly let off steam. These strikes were also not against the JSA but for security screens to protect them from us. At the same time the CPSA were distributing circulars denouncing the Groundswell network, happily playing along with the Government's divide and rule tactics.

It would obviously have been to our advantage to have had good operational links with the BA and ES workers. But abstract calls for "unity" and "solidarity" are futile unless there is something concrete to base that unity on, and mutual actions of solidarity. No matter how many empty gestures of support and platitudes are made, the reality of the antagonistic relationships between claimant and dole worker remains to be overcome.

Effective solidarity between claimants and dole workers may well be possible, and I genuinely hope that this is happening in other anti-JSA groups. Such hopes, however, cannot be allowed to confine or define the activities of these groups as they have in Cardiff. Any grounds for building such solidarity here seem to have been sabotaged by the CPSA. The attitude of the CPSA representatives was disgraceful. They showed little or no interest in trying to actually stop (or even disrupt) the JSA. At best they were merely concerned with saving their own skins from justifiably angry and desperate claimants. At worst they got involved in order to neuter the campaign and prevent any sort of militant action. Instead of solidarity they seemed to arrive with a totally hostile attitude to the campaign.

The Leftists in the campaign (with the exception of the younger SLP members) fell in behind the CPSA. This was partly due to their own Party lines of "pressure the Unions" etc., but it was also down to the composition of membership (actual and potential): white collar, public service workers. When it came to the crunch they chose to side with their own kind as opposed to the "lumpenproletariat" unemployed.

One argument used in defence of the CPSA and BA/ES workers is that they should not be held personally responsible (either individually or collectively) because "they are only doing their jobs". "Only doing my job" has never been a justification or an excuse for anti-working class behaviour - which implementing the JSA indisputably is. The same Leftists making excuses for BA/ES workers have no hesitation in (rightly) holding scabs, bailiffs etc. responsible for their actions. I realise that BA/ES workers did not choose to implement the JSA when they first took their job. However they should not have been in much doubt as to the repressive nature of their job (although I accept that they were probably not aware of just what degree of repression). I also accept that using this line of argument, it could be claimed that anyone who engages in any economic activity (waged labour, buying, even stealing) may be playing a role in the "reproduction of capital" and therefore acting in a manner which is (ultimately) anti-working class. But there are obviously degrees of intent and consciousness of the nature of my particular activity. Scabbing is qualitatively and quantitatively more consciously and explicitly anti-proletarian than working for the dole has been. However the comparison between dole worker and scab or bailiff will, and has, been made by claimants who the BA/ES workers by their actions act in a repressive manner toward.

I am not arguing that, because of this. BA/ES workers should bear the full brunt of anti-JSA resistance. Rather, that while I would welcome any BA/ES worker who is genuinely interested in fighting the JSA; the CPSA have no right and are in no position to turn up to anti-JSA meetings and start making demands of the people that they are going to be attacking as their job (and then have the arrogance/ignorance and insensitivity to deny they are doing anything "wrong"). They cannot simply pass the buck to "The Tories". They have to accept responsibility for the position that they are in and the function they will perform i.e. the nature of their work, before there can be any basis upon which to plan meaningful mutual action and solidarity.

Unfortunately in Cardiff such solidarity, as we have seen, has been made near impossible by the stance of the CPSA. WAJSA was left with a choice as to whose side it was really on - it seems to have chosen to act more like a CPSA support group than an anti-JSA group.

The Role of the Cardiff Unemployed Workers' Centre

Another point of confusion (but not outright conflict) was the nature of the relationship with the local TUC Unemployed Workers' Centre which was being established simultaneously by several people in WAJSA.

Whilst some WAJSA activists had reservations about the Centre, most of us raised no objections and, indeed, saw the Centre as a *potentially* good thing and even got involved. It was, however, agreed to keep the Centre and WAJSA strictly *separate* in a formal sense, despite the overlap in personnel. Unfortunately some people could not keep the two separate - *using* WAJSA to build the Centre. This caused a problem (as well as general confusion) when it was realised that some of the actions being proposed might jeopardise the centre's desired funding from the TUC and the local Labour council. It was suggested that people involved in the Centre "refrain" from anti-JSA activity - when it became clear that people would, if pushed, drop the Centre rather than campaigning this matter was dropped.

Unfortunately the illusions that some involved in the Centre had in the Trade Union movement - to the virtual exclusion of everything else - meant that the dispute within WAJSA was reproduced at the Centre with the result that some of those who had walked out of WAJSA also quit the Centre.

I'm So Bored With the JSA

In addition to these problems the Leftists within WAJSA seemed hell-bent on turning campaign activity into a *chore*. Meetings and activity became *boring* and *lifeless*. Suggestions of getting a "pop group" to play at an anti-JSA rally were accepted - but the Leftists showed more enthusiasm when they were discussing which *politician* or *bureaucrat* they wanted to give a *speech*. They seemed to be under the impression that a Labour MP would be more of an attraction than the Manic Street Preachers...How can we expect anyone else to get involved in our campaigns if we make our own activities so mind-numbingly *boring* and banal?

Career Opportunities

*"Is it worth the aggravation, to find yourself a job when there's nothing worth working for?"*¹¹

Another potential source of dispute within the anti-JSA movement(s) is the issue of work.

Those anti-JSA campaigners orientated towards the TUC (and therefore this includes most of the Leftist groups) are campaigning

around the slogan of "Jobs Not JSA". This may seem like a *reasonable* demand to many liberal/Leftist campaigners who are *in work*. However most unemployed activists realise that (because of the experience of our daily lives) the JSA is designed to *give people jobs*. One major plank of the JSA is force the unemployed into work. Albeit not the kind of work that the TUC et al would campaign for. Jobs with such poor conditions and low wages that even those who believe in the dignity of labour would see the (pre-JSA) dole as a preferable option. In such circumstances to "raise the demand" of "Jobs Not JSA" is both in bad taste and patently absurd.

However, we do *not* have a scenario of the mass refusal of work. Benefit levels have been pushed so low that living on social security is not something that is commonly done out of choice.¹² *Never Work!* is not an option - just an unpleasant reality for many who have been left on the scrapheap' by capitalist restructuring. More than 20 years of such restructuring has created vast number of enforced unemployed and simultaneously has driven down benefit levels.

It must also be noted that if the current attacks are successful and the experiments in workfare are generalised - then we will be working even when we are on the dole.

Do They Owe Us A Living?

Obviously any campaign/group/movement that hopes to develop a successful strategy to resist the JSA has to have some analysis of the JSA and place it in context. Without this any strategy against the JSA will also be out of context and therefore almost certainly doomed to fail *on its own terms*.

Unfortunately too many liberals and Leftists involved in WAJSA have made little attempt to place the JSA in context. Some merely see it as an *unprovoked* attack upon the unemployed/low-waged, made because of malice upon the part of "The Tories" and/or as a means of reducing social security spending in order to give pre-election tax cuts. No doubt the government will milk as much electoral propaganda as it can out of "cutting spending - cutting taxes" and "clamping down on dole scroungers". But the JSA was not introduced in an attempt to swing a few floating votes - this is merely a *bonus*.

Others have identified the JSA as the latest in a series of attacks upon the working class. Unfortunately this analysis was not followed through and was left as an almost *moralistic* view. Only seeing it as an attempt by "The Tories" to drive down wages and conditions with no explanation as to why...other than painting it in simplistic "Tories and Bosses versus labour movement" battle terms.

Viewing it on this level has left the Leftist groups pursuing the usual tortuous arguments about *pressurising* the Labour/TUC readerships and talk of "anger at the Tories". Given the Labour Party's (and TUC's) current and historical support for measures along the lines of the JSA,¹³ the bankruptcy of this strategy and analysis should surely be obvious.

I make no claim to present a complete, or even particularly incisive analysis of the JSA. But, I will make a few observations that will hopefully provide a modest contribution to the debate.

The JSA is only a part of an *international* trend. Across the world governments are introducing various forms of "austerity measure"; we only have to look at recent struggles in France, Greece, Belgium, Spain, Germany, Denmark, Canada and Australia (to name but a few) to see how widespread and varied these measures are (and the resistance to them). In the EU these measures are often in the guise of striving to meet the *self-imposed* conditions for EMU - the reality of this is an attempted crack down on wages, conditions and spending across the EU. The JSA is one part of the British governments' strategy to shift to a lower-waged economy with a smaller and more restrictive welfare state.

This international shift by Capital follows the *destruction* of the post-war "Keynesian" compromise. In an attempt to pacify the "revolting" international working class Capital pursued a policy of "full" employment, rising living standards, higher wages etc. However the revolts of the late '60s and early '70s wrecked this policy. Proletarians had TVs, fridges and holidays in the sun but they still weren't happy! The combativity of the working class forced Capital into a crisis. Capital has responded with "long term austerity with the purpose of enforcing work".

*"The purpose of the capitalist strategy is to tilt the relationship between unpaid and paid labour, between capital and wage, back to a position that forcibly re-establishes the pre-eminence of unpaid over paid labour".*¹⁴

More work - less money.

Capital launched a massive attack upon wages and conditions coupled with the deliberate creation of mass unemployment. Simultaneously an equally massive attack was launched upon the rapidly increasing levels of benefit.

Given the militant resistance some governments are facing to their austerity measures - and the memory of the way in which working class revolt destroyed the Keynesian compromise before it - the JSA is also useful for the British government in the way that it will divide and weaken the working class. The relationship between some claimants and some dole workers illustrated in this letter is a graphic example of this. The JSA will also, as *has* been seen by the Left, weaken collective action by workers because of increasing pressure upon the unemployed to take any job, including scabbing, and the increased *fear* of unemployment for those in work. Such a weakened and scared working class will prove easier to inflict further attacks upon.

It is interesting to note that most of the *effective* struggles in recent years have been *outside* (and sometimes *against*) the traditional *cops* of the Left/Trade Union leaderships. In Britain the anti-roads, anti-Poll Tax, anti-Live Exports movements, the Liverpool Dockers, Reclaim The Streets, postal service wildcats etc. (and lorry drivers actions EU wide) show hints of a small, but potentially significant shift towards struggle *outside the agreed lines* of the TU/Left methods of one day strikes and days of action. These trends and the links/generalisations being made between the various struggles *could* prove an explosive headache for the Government when the next wave of attacks are introduced.

Of course, the current "crisis of representation" does not mean that the Left and the Unions have lost their ability to recuperate struggles - as the example of the Miners in 1992 or the CPSA's current strategy show. Indeed the Unions and the labour movement are capable of a shift "left" if they need to, the Unions seem to be doing this in the current Renault dispute. The launch of the SLP in Britain may possibly provide a left cover for such during a Blair government....then again it may not.

The JSA cannot be looked at in isolation:

*"to fight on single issues in isolation is to fall into a carefully prepared trap - we cannot even win the argument."*¹⁵

The JSA is part of a generalised attack upon our class. Our response has to be equally generalised.

The conclusion I have drawn from all this is that the implosion of WAJSA (as a campaigning group) was a product of the political poverty of the Left. As such its failure is liable to be reproduced in any similar "united front". Each of the conflicts about tactics, the CPSA, the Labour Party etc. sprang from ignorance of the reality of everyday life in the *social factory* for large sections of our class who do not work in stable, organised, unionised workplaces (or who do not work at all) coupled with a failure to place the JSA within the context of an international, generalised and long-term *strategical* assault upon the working class. The vacuum left by this lack of analysis was filled by the tired ideas of the Leftists that have made many a struggle impotent. The lack of understanding of the intra-class conflicts that the JSA was designed to inflame led to the application of so-called workerist ideas. Unfortunately the only workers the Left seemed to see were the CPSA and their "struggle". WAJSA's tactics were also designed to *appeal* towards the TUC/Labour Party and those who have illusions in them. Unfortunately decades of pandering to such illusions has left the Left unable to raise *themselves* above "Trade Union Consciousness". Such a futile strategy has left WAJSA unable to win even its own limited goals - the defence of the status quo...and they wonder why the unemployed and low-waged ignore them.

*"there is a certain kind of professional who claims to represent us ...the MPs, the Communist Party, the Union leaders, the social workers, the old-old left...All these people presumed to act upon our behalf. all of these people have certain things in common...THEY always sell out...THEY are all afraid of us...THEY'LL preach towards keeping the peace...and we are bored...poor and very tired of keeping the peace...To believe that OUR struggle could be restricted to the channels provided to us by the pigs, WAS THE GREATEST CON. And we started hitting them."*¹⁶

Wales Against the JSA is dead, the Left carry on - *ever get the feeling you've been conned?*

Stuart Bracewell
(ex-Secretary, WAJSA)
December 1996

FOOTNOTES

- 1) Of a group that never consisted of more than 20, 7 or 8 of us quit more or less simultaneously, over roughly the same issues. Unfortunately our experience with WAJSA has left us with little enthusiasm or energy to establish any alternative.
- 2) Unfortunately there were not enough anarchists or EF!ers to re-launch the by now dormant Cardiff EF! group let alone anything else.
- 3) "Groundswell" is an autonomous 'national' network of anti - JSA and claimants action groups.
- 4) Although the activists were *almost* exclusively based in Cardiff the couple who weren't and the various groups involved (using their contacts/numbers) hoped to spread WAJSA across Wales (this never *really* happened, although the group remained in contact with scattered people across South Wales).
- 5) Possibly to the small sizes of each group and a specious unity in opposition to/competition with the absent SWP and perhaps due to the turns many of these groups are making to woo the "young eco-warriors" to their side. Groups "represented" included: Alliance for Workers Liberty, Anarchist Communist Federation, Cardiff Anarchists, Cymru Goch, Earth First!, Militant Labour (now the "Socialist" Party), Socialist Labour Party, Workers Power and WRP (Workers Press). The rest of the left (CPB, SWP) and the likes of the Labour Party and Plaid Cymru were also approached.
- 6) Apart from (as we've seen) the trades council and ironically the MSF branch that some of us who had placed no emphasis on the unions at all belonged to.
- 7) For example the CPSAs "three strikes and you're out" memo to their ES section in Leeds condemning "various fringe anti - JSA groups around the country operating under the banner of Groundswell".
- 8) Having said this, I discussed three strikes with some of those who dropped out and the feeling amongst many of us is, maybe we *should* have advocated three strikes *from the start*!
- 9) I was put on JSA during one of these one day strikes so they are obviously not *that* effective!
- 10) Despite the SWPS' (relative) strength in the CPSA in Cardiff, they were conspicuous by their absence from WAJSA apart from the usual "placards and papers" on the demo. They did have a couple of members show up, but only as representatives of the CPSA. One long term SWPer explained to me that their absence was due to the fact that they'd "had enough of meetings and that during the poll tax".
- 11) Oasis "Cigarettes and Alcohol", Creation Records.
- 12) Currently changes to Housing Benefit are proving equally effective in attacking the unemployed. In my case I can handle the JSA (so far!) but housing benefit changes have effectively cut my giro by around ten pounds a week. It is also interesting to note that these changes follow hot on the heels of the squatting laws in the CJA.
- 13) Both the Labour Party and the TUC have supported "work camps" for the unemployed in the past.
- 14) Midnight Notes, "Midnight Oil" Autonomedia, 1992, p-122.
- 15) Law, Larry, "The Bad Days Will End", Spectacular Times, 1983, p-13.
- 16) Angry Brigade Communiqué 7, March 18th 1971.

Postscript

Since this letter was written little has changed. WAJSA claims to still exist. This existence consists of meetings and a proposed "Trade Union Banner March" (!?) in May. No further efforts have been made to organise the unemployed against the JSA. The rift highlighted here between the CPSA (and their supporters) and the unemployed activists has been mirrored both nationally and in some other local anti-JSA groups (See appendices 2,3 and 4 for an example of the CPSA's attitude to one of its own members' campaigning). Groundswell continue to organise, with recent action in the North West being particularly notable.

Appendix 1, an article from the CPGB's *Weekly Worker* (October 10th 1996) seems to echo the author's sentiments amongst other ex-WAJSA activists.

The Leftist groups mentioned continue to "trot" along as usual, many having moved on to concentrate their "efforts" on the Liverpool Docks dispute. Opting to "strike by proxy" and engage in "support" work rather than doing the, admittedly, much more difficult work of resisting the JSA. Hopefully the Dockers will not allow these groups to divert their struggle. The links the dockers are making with groups such as Reclaim The Streets offer hope that they are beginning to reject the dead end of mediated struggle in favour of more direct methods.

For many of the activists in WAJSA the debacle was the final straw. Several have dropped out of political activity all together. Those who remain active are wary of trying to work with the Left ever again.

Despite the negative tone of this letter, we hope that its publication and circulation will prove once again the banality and bankruptcy of much of what passes for the revolutionary movement in Britain. It is time to nail the final nail in the coffin of the obsolete "communism" of the old old left and start afresh.

Infantile Disorder
Cardiff, March 1997.



Appendix 1

"Cardiff JSA campaign demobilised"

"Saturday October 5 saw a march in Cardiff against the Job Seekers Allowance. This was the culmination of a number of months work by the Cardiff section of the national campaign run by the TUC unemployed centres. Unfortunately the event was very poorly attended, with only around 150 marchers. This reflects the dire political problems and divisions surrounding the campaign in its penultimate weeks.

The campaign meetings were initially marked by a pleasant fraternal atmosphere with a wide range of political groupings in attendance (Socialist Labour Party, Militant Labour, the Alliance for Workers Liberty, Cardiff Anarchists, Cymru Goch and Workers Power).

Initial problems came about as a result of the interventions of a number of representatives from the local TUC unemployed centre who consistently clamped down on the ideas of those attempting to push the campaign in a more militant anti-Labour direction.

This was seen as threatening the establishment of an unemployed centre for Cardiff, deemed to rely upon the goodwill of various reactionary Labour councillors. This consistent inability to see the difference between the campaign and the proposed centre effectively tied the hands of the activists from day one.

The Trotskyist groups (WP and ML) proved unable and unwilling to confront these problems. When a number of anarchist and SLP members argued that non-violent direct action through the occupation of local job centres would be excellent publicity, the debate was hysterically pushed onto the practise of "Three strikes and out" (which was never proposed by activists).

By forcing the debate onto these controversial grounds, the aforementioned trotskyists formed a bloc with the TUC representatives to effectively move the campaign against any form of direct action, preferring to rely on leafletting and eliciting support from local trade unions. This led to a number of activists quitting the campaign, including the secretary, a well known local anarchist.

The way in which the march was built resulted in almost no representation from unemployed workers on the demo and therefore represents a failure in the strategy which dominated the campaign. Activists were consistently told that direct action in job centres which affects CPSA members was anti-working class and threatened unity.

Of course, this is a pretend unity. Unity between unemployed and CPSA members has to be won on the basis of mutual respect. Civil servants should respect non-violent direct action on the part of the unemployed and the unemployed should respect striking CPSA members. In the absence of this unity the Cardiff campaign was strangled by those who consistently pretended it existed, giving activists no space in which to relate to the interests of the unemployed.

This is indicative of the social base of the various Trotskyist groups who are commonly organised amongst white collar workers. Their strategy in the Cardiff campaign against the JSA has less to do with unity than with narrow self-interest. a tragic way for a once optimistic campaign to end."



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Our ref: PKW/BR

17 February 1997

Mr Lee Rock
Leyton Employment Service
Jobcentre
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Walthamstow
London E17 9PT

Dear Lee

ES Worker - ES bulletin of the Socialist Causes - December 1996

I am writing at the behest of the national executive committee to express very serious concern at the above edition of your so-called "ES Worker". There is much in it to disagree with, but the NEC were particularly incensed at the sentence in the article headed, "National Union refuses to back ES fight", bearing your name, which states "we must continue to campaign, alongside unemployed groups such as Groundswell, against the JSA".

It is well documented that the tactics employed by Groundswell include harassment and intimidation of ES and BA workers (the majority of whom are CPSA members) employed to work on JSA. The most notorious example is their "three strikes" policy.

The NEC was absolutely astounded to see the name of a prominent activist such as yourself wishing to be so closely identified with, and giving support to Groundswell.

I am sure you are aware of CPSA Rule 2.1 (a), which is that the first object of the Association shall be to "protect and promote the interests of its members".

The actions of Groundswell are manifestly against the interests of those members who work on JSA, and therefore I must insist that you explain how you came to publicly support such a body, and in doing so, used the title of your official CPSA position.

I require a response, which will be put to the NEC, by Friday 28 February.

Yours sincerely

Dictated by
Barry Reamsbottom
General Secretary
and signed in his absence



The Civil and Public Services Association

Lee Rock
E.S. London Regional Organiser

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Tel: (0181) 520-5500

Date: 3 March 1997

Mr B Reamsbottom
General Secretary
CPSA HQ
160 Falcon Road
Clapham Junction
London SW11 2LN

Dear Mr Reamsbottom

Re: ES Worker - ES bulletin of the Socialist Caucus - December 1996

1. I am in receipt of your letter to me of 17 February 1997, which appears to have crossed in the post with my own letter to you regarding comments directed at me in the February meeting of the National Executive Committee (NEC).

2. In your letter you suggest that by the fact that I have written, in a personal capacity, an article criticising the role played by the National Disputes Committee in the campaign against the JSA, and specifically stressed the need for worker/claimant unity in that 'we must continue to campaign, alongside unemployed groups such as Groundswell, against the JSA' that I must therefore support every policy decision and every tactic adopted by the various unemployed and claimant groups involved in Groundswell. Let me state for the record that this is not the case. I am in general support of the excellent work that Groundswell has done in supporting the campaign against the JSA, this of course does not mean that I have supported every tactic that every group in the Groundswell network has adopted.

3. You also state in your letter that 'It is well documented that the tactics employed by Groundswell include harassment and intimidation of ES and BA workers (the majority of whom are CPSA members) employed to work on JSA. The most notorious example is their "three strikes" policy.' I would appreciate you sending me copies of the documentation you are referring to. As there are approximately 60 independent groups involved in Groundswell I await with interest your documented proof to substantiate the allegation that 'harassment and intimidation of ES and BA workers' is the policy of Groundswell as you so confidently assert.

4. As regards the NEC being 'absolutely astounded to see the name of a prominent activist such as [myself] wishing to be closely identified with, and giving support to Groundswell' I am proud to be associated with these activists who have demonstrated a commitment to the anti-JSA campaign that has so far put the CPSA NEC to shame.

5. It is my view that the actions of Groundswell are not 'manifestly against the interests of those members who work on JSA' and that I have not broken any rules of the Association. In fact the sentence in the article preceding the one you chose to quote states: 'While all CPSA members are aware of current problems the real increase in attacks on the unemployed, and the associated dangers to front-line workers, will occur from next April when new targets are set by ES management.' As someone who works in a Jobcentre and deals with the public virtually every day maybe you could inform me, and the thousands of other CPSA members in the same position, what you are doing to protect us and the unemployed and how refusing to even ballot us for strike action alongside our colleagues in the BA helped the campaign? This was indeed the thrust of the article, which you may have picked up via the heading 'National Union refuses to back ES fight', and the points you choose to ignore

6. I must stress that as the CPSA ES London Regional Organiser I am a delegate to London Against JSA and as such I will continue to fulfil my duties as an elected official in the campaigning work against the JSA, which includes working alongside a variety of groups some of which we will on occasion disagree with.

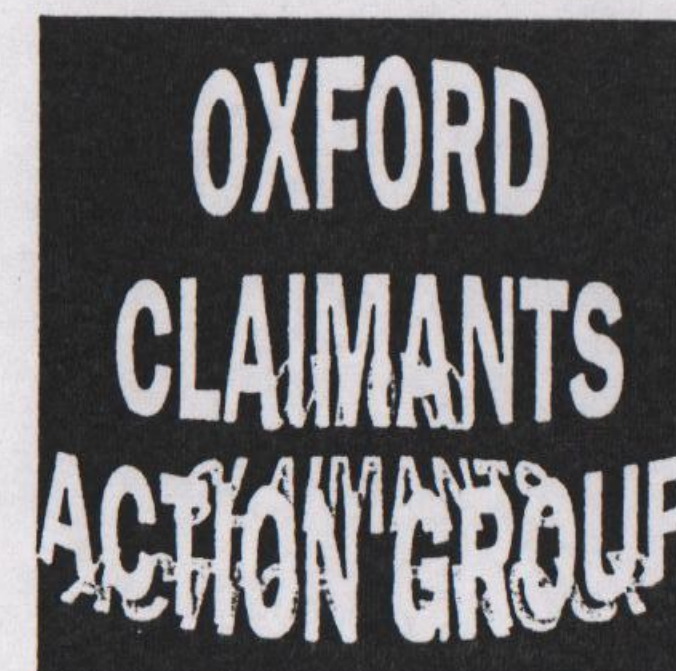
7. And finally, as I understand the attempted attack upon me is part of the Moderate election campaign i.e. the usual anti-Red propaganda, I hope that the incoming NEC will be prepared to campaign against the JSA and other issues that are so manifestly against the interests of the members and the unemployed.

Yours sincerely



Lee Rock
Regional Organiser
E.S. London

cc E.S. London RCC Officers
✓Groundswell Network



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25th February 1997

Barry Reamsbottom
General Secretary CPSA
160 Falcon Road
London
SW11 2LN

An Open Letter to Mr. Barry Reamsbottom

Dear Mr. Reamsbottom,

Having been passed a copy of your letter dated 17th February to Mr. Lee Rock, the London C.P.S.A. (E.S.) organiser, we wish to register our serious concerns about its contents and implications. You accuse Mr. Rock of acting against the interests of your members in stating that E.S. workers should "...continue to campaign, alongside unemployed groups such as Groundswell, against the JSA". You claim that the actions of Groundswell are manifestly against your members interests, referring specifically to the "Three Strikes" policy.

We think your members have been subjected to enough negative propaganda concerning the Groundswell network and that it is your actions, not those of Groundswell or Mr. Rock, which are against the direct interests of your members.

To set the record straight. Groundswell is a network of over 60 independent groups of unemployed and claimants and others seeking to oppose J.S.A. It is not an organisation with fixed national policy, since each group retains its own autonomy. The main activities of the groups have been and remain alerting claimants and workers to the nature of JSA, encouraging them to resist it and supporting them when they do so. To this end groups have always sought to build links with ES and BA workers and have supported them in recent disputes in a number of ways, including presence on picket lines.

As to the "well documented" and "notorious" tactics of harassment and intimidation of BA / ES members by Groundswell, do you mean by this the small number of direct actions undertaken against management by members of the network, or their consistent effort to direct the anger of claimants and workers towards that management? If so, you should say so openly. In fact all you refer to is the "notorious" "Three Strikes" policy.

We must therefore point out that "Three Strikes" is a tactic adopted by only a limited number of groups in the network, and, as far as we know, has only actually been applied in the case of one individual in Edinburgh. This is because it is a tactic for use only in exceptional circumstances, where there is persistent and undeniable evidence that an E.S. or BA. employee exceeds the requirements and power of their position.

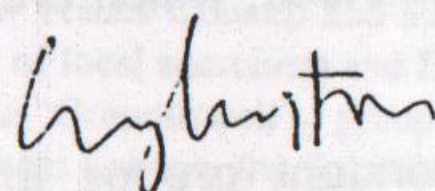
For various reasons the majority of groups in Groundswell do not employ the Three Strikes tactic. However, all groups would reserve the right to take whatever action is appropriate and necessary to deal with managers and staff who clearly abuse their position of authority and subject claimants to intimidation and harassment. This is nothing new - established claimants groups (some of which have been around for over 20 years) have always had to recognise and deal with the fact that there are employees and managers in the E.S. and BA who act in this manner. We assume that neither you nor the CPSA would ever condone such abuse of power by its members? Indeed we would hope that the union / workforce would be the first to try and sort out such problems.

However, it must be noted that the actions of yourself and other paid officials of the CPSA, by way of alarmist circulars, has been to consistently over-exaggerate and misrepresent both Groundswell and the "Three Strikes" policy. In so doing you have had enthusiastic allies in E.S. management. Your members should perhaps ask themselves about this unholy alliance. After all, nothing could be further from the interests of management than to see the spread of worker / claimant solidarity in resisting J.S.A. Are not those same managers, together with the government, the common enemy of claimants and ES / BA workers? Are not they the ones who daily pressurise your members to meet government targets, who make them implement this unjust law and who threaten the future of thousands of your members jobs?

As to Mr.Rock, in our experience he is a dedicated union organiser, who sets an example for others in the work he has done to resist JSA and protect your members jobs. Furthermore he has stated on numerous public platforms and in writing that he does not support the Three Strikes tactic, whilst acknowledging that there are workers who adopt a hostile stance towards claimants. Since it is a matter of record that he does not endorse "Three Strikes" it would seem that his alleged offence is to advocate that workers and claimant groups should organise together against JSA. It is hardly Mr.Rock's fault that Groundswell is one of the largest and most active networks of claimants groups in the country and that, rather than burying his head in the sand, he has sought to engage in constructive dialogue (and criticisms) with us.

Setting the actions and statements of Mr.Rock alongside those of yourself and other full time officials, we think your members have legitimate cause to ask themselves: whose side are you on?

Yours Sincerely,



Gerry Winston
on behalf of:

Oxford Claimants Action Group
Haringey Solidarity Group
South London Against the J.S.A.
Brighton Claimants Action Group
Brighton Against the J.S.A.