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DAM Aims and Principles

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 by 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 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 environment.
 8. The Direct Action Movement is a federation of groups and individuals who believe in the principles of anarcho-syndicalism; a system where the workers alone control industry and the community without the dictates of politicians, bureaucrats, bosses and so-called experts.



Iron Column Press

50p

RANK AND FILE

Organisation



Direct Action Movement

BUILDING FOR CHANGE

Rank and File

BUILDING FOR CHANGE



The State is out to solve their system's financial crisis at our expense - and with a savage determination. Tax cuts for the rich are being financed by closed hospitals, the appalling conditions in the inner cities and "Japanese" style job cuts and working conditions in many factories. It's not just within the leadership of the young conservatives that ideas about "smoothing the NHS" and the whole-sale dismantling of shop floor workers organisations are voiced. They have a wide and popular appeal to the rich and power hungry.

In recent years groups of workers have been involved in a series of disputes that have lasted for a considerable period of time. During these strikes workers who have taken an active role in the day to day necessities of picketing, collecting funds and organising for solidarity have been faced with the reality that bosses, backed by their organisations and their class have been prepared to fight on, not just for weeks and months but in some cases years. Faced with this and the "new realism" of trade union officials, rank and file union activists have found a growing need to organise at a grass roots level.

The new realism of union officials and careerists of Britain in the 80's has in fact merely been a justification of old attitudes and practices on their part. The officials who are prepared to sell working peoples' livelihoods, communities and futures in order to defend their union from the law courts have been with us for a long while. When Thatcher came to power in 1979, she and her class were faced with an active and militant working class. Rank and file discontent had brought down the right wing labour government of James Callaghan. The Tory government began to dismantle rank and file organisation with the help of Leyland management - sacking Derek Robinson an AUEW convenor, preparing the way for the Employment Bill. Leyland management pioneered the use of "secret" ballots with which they could by-pass shop floor trade union organisation with the AUEW national leaders anxiously willing to back (and get State funds to pay for) the use of such ballots to undermine the influence of shop stewards. Just as the Tories were later to provoke the miners strike they deliberately set out to provoke a steel strike at a period of high inflation. They announced a 2% wage increase and massive redundancies. They calculated that the steel workers, who had never been on national strike since 1934 and had no previous militant tradition, could be broken as an example to us all.

After just 3 weeks of the steel strike Bill Sire (the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation general secretary) was faced with the Tory government's new anti-trade union laws (the Employment Bill). Lord Denning ruled that private steel workers should not be allowed to organise strikes. On Monday, Bill Sire went with

IRON COLUMN PRESS 

... the case for change.

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After just 5 weeks of the steel strike Bill Sirs (the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation general secretary) was faced with the Tory governments' new anti-trade union laws (the Employment Bill), Lord Denning ruled that private steel workers should not come out on sympathy strike. On Monday, Bill Sirs wept with emotion at the applause he (or rather the steel workers) got from Welsh miners as he spoke in Cardiff "I'll go to prison if necessary, if it's for the working class ..." he declared; but on the Tuesday he did a complete about-turn and lectured us all about how we had to abide by the law of the land (even bad laws).

It was the magnificent response of rank and file steel workers, their determination and mass picketing that beat off the vicious attack the government sought. The Denning judgement was overturned by a shaken government on a point of law by the House of Lords, but the principle of out-lawing sympathy strikes that was involved in the judgement was later incorporated into the amendments to the Employment Bill. Rattled but not defeated, the Tory government learnt from its mistakes, preparing new legislation, attacking shop floor organisation and strength - turning the screw just that little bit tighter each time.

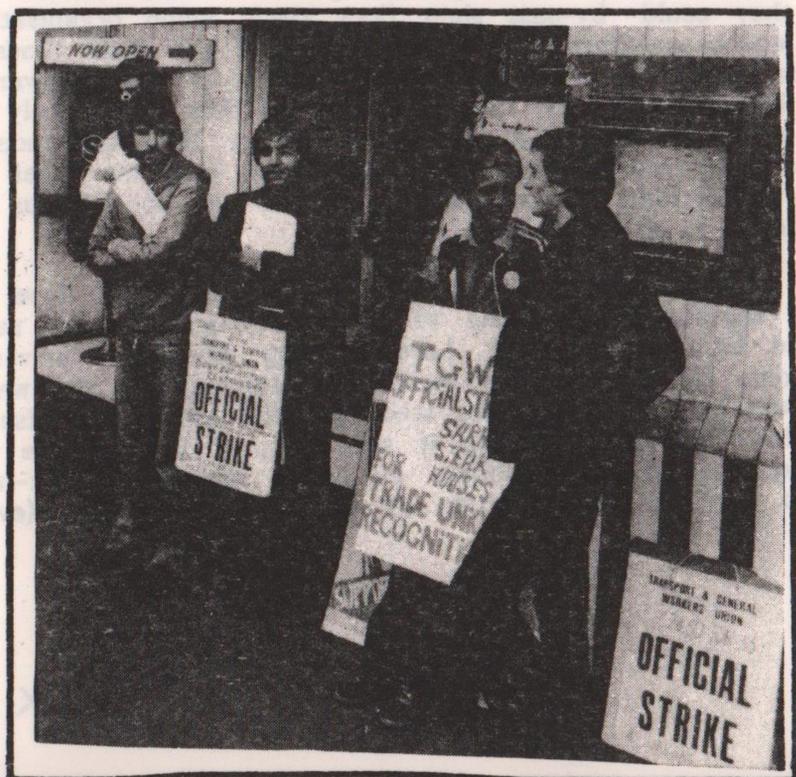
The basic principle that victory for the working class in its fight against the State and the ruling class was won in its actions and preparations of yesterday has always been an important factor in Anarchist organisation and argument. The Tories were prepared to spend years in formulating its plans to defeat miners, print workers etc. Rank and file organisation of union activists has a long history in Britain, reaping magnificent results in the "syndicalist years" of the early 20th century. The shop stewards movement was a direct rank and file response to the "dead wood" of trade union officials and reformist labour politicians.

There is no doubt in the minds of many people that the organisation of rank and file activists is necessary for us to argue the basic principles of trade unionism that are constantly under attack from all directions of the State and employers.

It needs to be shouted out that the Labour Party under James Callaghan was wrong when he said that "Picket lines aren't sacred" - THEY ARE! Many working class people have lost their lives on picket lines in defending and improving the conditions of our class.

We need to argue that mass picketing is necessary to win disputes and that the governments' laws outlaw secondary picketing precisely because it is effective in building solidarity and mutual aid amongst working class people

Anti-union laws, sequestration and the use of the police, courts and prisons by the State are not impartial and independent, but a weapon used by employers (just as they use scab labour and lies in the media) and should therefore be confronted in the same manner - by solidarity, rank and file organisation and unity.



rank & file revolt in the 60's

In January 1961 groups of rank and file activists held an industrial conference to form a single and united group which in their words was "to bring together trade union militants in a spirit of mutual aid". The result of the conference (which was attended by, amongst others, delegates from the Independent Labour Party [ILP] and the Syndicalist Workers Federation which was to become in 1979 the Direct Action Movement) was the formation of the National Rank and File Movement.

The statement they issued arguing the need for such a movement could quite easily be issued today from any of the rank and file groups. It reads as follows:-

The union officials are remote and sometimes not even elected by their members

The union officials are largely careerists

Decisions in the unions are often taken by central executives, often without consulting membership

The increasing emergence of a bureaucratic junta of salaried officials with power to expel militant members within unions

Due to the trend towards "Americanised" boss unions, the National Rank and File Movement began to argue amongst workers that the power of industrial solidarity should rest and be exercised by the members, not by the officials and that there should be no bureaucratically centralised executive within the labour movement. The National Rank and File Movement built sections in engineering, the docks, printing, carpentry, building trade, teachers and amongst white collar workers. On May Day 1961 for the first time, a march was organised by the National Rank and File Movement independently of the Labour Party. 800 attended a meeting addressed by Brian Behan which is even more spectacular when it is remembered that in those days May Day was not a paid holiday as it is now.

The implications of the growth of the National Rank and File Movement was not lost on trade union bosses and employers. The National Rank and File Movement had successfully organised around disputes at John Brown Land Boilers and helped striking electricians at Telemakers.

Brian Behan was expelled from his union because he publically criticised the sell-out of workers at ShellMex house, Waterloo. In Glasgow, other rank and file activists were disciplined for distributing literature and in Bolton, Brian Bamford was expelled from the communist controlled Electricians Union (ETU) in 1961 for editing a rank and file paper for engineering apprentices.

The National Rank and File Movement declined because, as one leading activist at the time put it "not only was there the distracting effect of the rise of CND and the committee of 100 in the early 1960's [but also] because the National Rank and File Movement only fulfilled a negative need ... it could condemn the union and party hacks but it lacked a positive programme under which it could unite workers. It had no constructive scheme to rally mass support".

INTERVIEW WITH JIM PETTY,
TGWU BRANCH SECRETARY
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

The wrong road to change...

While all the political organisations pay lip service to the "ballot", the revolutionaries amongst them try to build up rank and file structures, if only to cash in on working class industrial muscle. The fly in the ointment being the politicians inability to control "their" industrial cannon fodder. This caused the failure some years ago of the SWP's promising efforts to organise industrially. When they called a meeting to finalise their ideas, it was obvious that the membership would not have an "official" (SWP) slate forced on them. Rather than take a chance on the working class, the SWP abandoned the idea of an "independent" rank and file organisation, for the time being.

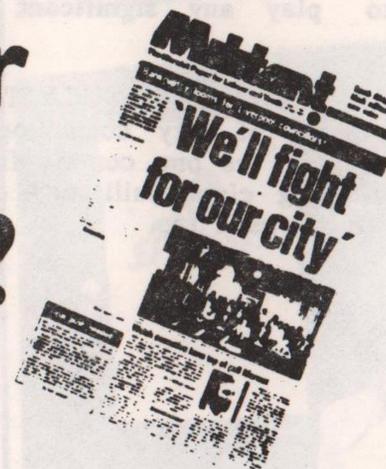
Probably one of the most successful attempts to build a tame rank and file group was the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) controlled Liason Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions. This differed from most politically orientated rank and file groupings in that it never attempted to become a "mass movement". That organisation already existed in the Broad Left in Engineering. What the LCDTU aspired to be was the moving force within the Broad Left. In the struggle for Trade Union rights against both Tory and Labour attacks, the LCDTU applied pressure through its C.P. members and supporters throughout the official Trade Union movement. It successfully initiated a series of one day strikes, throughout the engineering industry. This brought the C.P. militants a measure of respect and orthodoxy that they both needed and craved.

The result was that an effort was made to consolidate their gains and to capitalise on their growing and undoubted prestige. A mass meeting was called to be held in the Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London. There was to be no "lost credentials", or credentials issued on the door. If the credentials had not arrived in the post, or you were not on the official list, it was bad luck. "Students, Trots and Hippies", to quote one official were not wanted. Orthodoxy lay in militants being nominated by Broad Left in Engineering Groups, by Trade Union branches or Trades Councils. The result was startling. The organisers claimed a thousand delegates. Certainly the Hall was full. However, the LCDTU meeting didn't get beyond the usual full throated denunciations of the Tory government. When an alliance of Trotskyist delegates attempted to move a motion going further than the platforms' platitudes, the organisers reacted by first refusing to accept it and then closing the meeting prematurely.

The success of this CP attempt to boost the LCDTU moved the SWP to resurrect its attempts to build industrial strength. After a series of meetings held throughout the country, a "defend our unions" meeting was held in Manchester. In members it dwarfed the London one. However, to quote one trade union source, "it isn't a real one", in that non-militants such as students and party members were allowed in. Sadly, the events of that Saturday afternoon were a replay of the previous one in the Friends Meeting House, London.

Platitudes were followed by an "official" resolution. Ironically, it was the SWP's erstwhile friends, the International Marxist Group, who followed the pattern laid out previously by attempting to push through a critical resolution, whilst the organisers of the SWP meeting who had led the struggle against the CP now adopted the latter's previous stance by refusing a vote, and finally closing the meeting. Interesting, exciting even, but in neither case productive.

Is there a case for Labour?



In recent years, many people have begun to argue that for a socialist response to the government attacks on rank and file organisation, jobs and services, union activists must join and vote Labour. Labour Party controlled councils have been seen to be at the forefront of the fight back against the Tories and for two and a half years Liverpool City Council was seen as the centre of hopes of everyone wanting to fight the Tories through the councils. Their tactics of confrontation over the city's budget had an initial success. In March 1984 the Labour council prepared their first budget, but they were faced with Tory demands to either treble the rates or make 5000 workers redundant. Their decision to fight was applauded across the board by the Left. There were no accusations of irresponsibility or unreasonableness - "an example to us all" read the headline in London Labour Briefing (April 1984) - the publication of left Labour councils in London, then supported by Ken Livingstone and Sheffield Labour Council Leader David Blunkett. David Blunkett speaking for the Labour Party National Executive Committee (NEC) said "no local authority should cut their jobs or services". This was the year of the miners strike and the government was making concessions across the board in their attempt to break the miners. They agreed a package with the Liverpool city council which was in the words of the Financial Times "a great relief to the Government". The agreement conceded £10 million to the council and removed a further £17 million the government was threatening to take in penalties. This was not enough to meet the councils existing needs and the council resorted to a rate rise of 17% and creative accounting, eating into their house-building cash.

The best opportunity the council was going to have to fight had been hopelessly squandered and at a great price. Jobs and services had been saved only for 12 months until the next budget and then government could settle "old" accounts after the miners strike. After a further year and a half of teetering on the brink of confrontation with the Tory government the defiance of Liverpool city council collapsed on Friday 22 November 1985.

The resolution passed at the 300 strong District Labour Party meeting that night stated "in view of the forces now ranged against the city council and the talk of support for our stand we believe that we are forced to consider an alternative budget". (The Stonefrost cuts package). Council members blamed the Labour leadership and trade union leaders for undermining support amongst workers in Liverpool. The right wing in the council unions had used the Tories ballot laws to break solidarity action. Both the NUT and NUPE had in fact refused their members a vote altogether.

Throughout the two and a half years of Liverpool city council's stand they had failed to build any effective rank and file organisation amongst workers in Liverpool. The Broad Left Organising Committee (which is dominated by Militant Tendency and SWP) failed to play any significant role in building support amongst workers in Liverpool.

Despite the fact that workers in the GMBATU, UCATT and the TGWU had voted overwhelmingly to strike in support of city councillors, they had continued to see the fight against the government as one coming from the "leadership of the working class" believing that working class militancy can be turned on and off in support of their struggle as if it was a tap.



Bickerstaffe
1984

'It is not a question of shall we break the law but which laws should we obey.'

1985

'End resistance.'



Blunkett
1984

'No local authority should cut jobs or services.'

1985

'Accept Stonefrost' or else.



1978 dispute over low pay and union rights

The broad left and the BLOC is an organisation almost totally geared towards fighting union elections. Its weakness is its orientation towards "scaling the heights" of the labour movement rather than arguing the basic politics of working class solidarity and rank and file activism. The actual usefulness of trying to unite rank and file activists around a policy of mobilisation for union elections can be seen to fail those people who are at the sharp end of union activity. That is to say those who are in dispute, again and again.

The broad left's belief that left wing leaders in the TUC and the unions are willing to "deliver the goods" while a right wing leadership is ever willing to "sell out" a dispute is common though not the case in practice.

In 1982, just as today, health workers began a campaign for better wages and conditions and when ASLEF train drivers began action against flexible rostering there was much talk of the beginning of the end of Thatcherism. The ASLEF dispute collapsed when the TUC finance committee announced its decision not to back the drivers. The decision was unanimous and included the vote of left wing leaders such as Moss Evans (TGWU) and especially Alan Fisher - general secretary of NUPE. The health workers dispute dragged on until November 8th, 1982 with the TUC scaling down all solidarity action from other workers. It began on September 22nd with a "day of action" which was in effect a one hour stoppage and ended up with a series of regional stoppages to mobilise public opinion against the government.



Nottingham Anarchists, always strong supporters of Traders Strikers

Attempts to build an effective rank and file movement in recent years have been more modest than in the 60's and 70's. Rank and file activists are in the words of one government advertisement "leaner (and fitter)". We have the experience of the National Rank and File Movement and the Defend our Unions Conference to draw upon, and one of the greatest strengths of rank and file activists has been their practical approach, offering support across the board and across union boundaries to those in dispute such as the Midlands Trader dispute, Silent Night and the Senior Coleman strikes.

As the anarchist movement has grown during the 80's it has been able to contribute to a greater level of debate; it no longer has a nuisance value only, arguing for decisions to be made on a democratic basis, the elections of chairpersons etc but is able to contribute at all levels of organisation and in some cases initiating moves to organise rank and file activists in different industries. As anarcho-syndicalists we do not believe in a process of abstract propagandism, floating the "idea" of a rank and file movement whilst waiting for other union activists to realise the benefits of such an organisation. We believe that the best argument for a rank and file organisation is the organisation of rank and file activists themselves based on a positive response to government attacks, arguing for industrial solidarity - building genuine and long lasting links amongst rank and file activists while at the same time ensuring that all gains are built upon the strong roots of a well organised movement.

DIRECT ACTION

Direct Action

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The Voice of Anarcho-Syndicalism No 44 November 1987 25p

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