

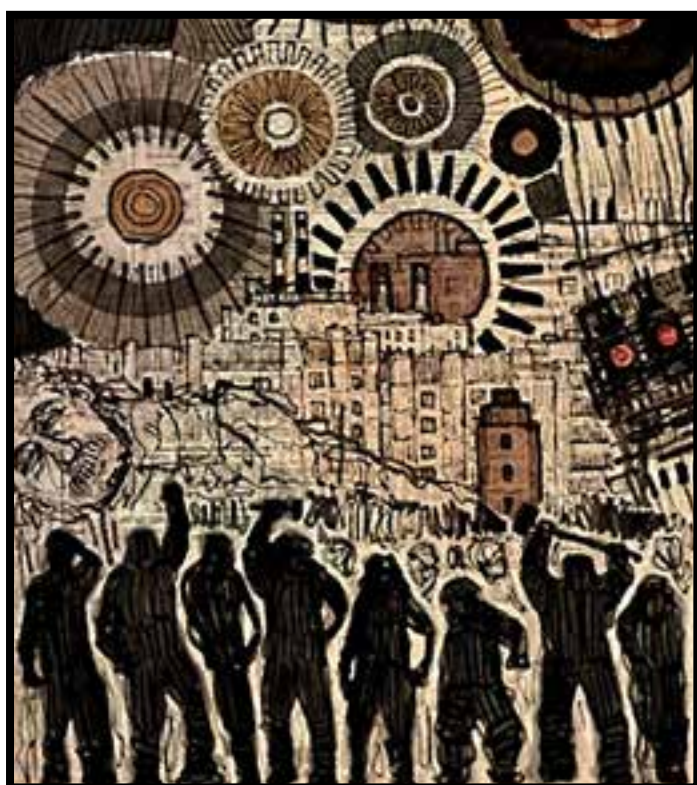
JACKDAW
FOR REVOLUTIONARY ANARCHISM

ISSUE No 23 **FREE**



Organise to Win!

**Direct Action, Solidarity,
Internationalism**



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VOICE OF THE ANARCHIST COMMUNIST GROUP

Solidarity:

French and Italian Dockers Remind Us What It Is

If the workers take a notion,
They can stop all speeding trains
Every ship upon the ocean
They can tie with mighty chain,
Every wheel in the creation,
Every mine and every mill,
Fleets and armies of the nation,
Will at their command stand still.

Joe Hill, Workers of the World, Awaken!

Examples from around the world

- In 1889, Australian workers raised money to support the Great Dock Strike in Britain.

- In 1919, dockers in Seattle in the

United States refused to load arms that were destined for use by the forces of the reactionary Whites against the Russian Revolution. Dockers in San Francisco did the same.

- In Britain, in 1919, train drivers in Scotland refused to move a freight train carrying ammunition bound for British forces in the Gulf.

- In May 1920, dockers in London refused to load the ship The Jolly George bound for Russia, with arms for the Whites. Dockers in Dublin did the same.

- In 1974 Rolls Royce workers in Scotland refused to repair fighter jets for the airforce of the murderous Chilean dictator Pinochet.

- During the Spanish dock strike of 1981, dockers in

Rochester refused to unload 45,000 boxes of tomatoes and 3,000 bales of peppers from Tenerife. In that year dockers in Barcelona refused to load 20 Fiat tanks bound for Peru.

- With the Danish dockers' strike in 1983, workers at Britain's registered ports refused to handle cargoes from Denmark. At Oslo in Norway, cargoes bound for Denmark were also boycotted.

- During the Liverpool dockers' dispute (1995-1998) workers in other countries boycotted ships bound for Liverpool.

- In 2010, Swedish dockers blocked more than 500 tons of goods to and from Israel.

- In 2015, French and Italian dockers refused to load arms intended to be used by Saudi Arabia for its war against Yemen.

- In 2018 Tunisian dockers stopped a ship chartered by the Israeli shipping company Zim from landing at the port of Radès.

- In May 2021, workers at Italian ports refused to let a ship be loaded with arms for Israel. In the same month, South African dockers refused to unload

a cargo from an Israeli ship.

- That year also saw Israeli ships being blocked in Oakland, Seattle, and Prince Rupert Island, Canada. There was much support on Prince Rupert Island for the blockade, where the population is mainly Native American, who felt great sympathy and solidarity for the plight of Palestinians.

- A similar blocking of Israeli ships had taken place in these ports in 2014. This blocking was successful up until June, 1921, when again Israeli ships attempted to dock at the ports.

- In late 2023 Belgian transport workers refused to handle military equipment for Israel.

International solidarity needed more than ever

International solidarity of workers has a long and noble tradition. It shows that despite all the jingoistic and nationalistic propaganda pumped out by

the media and in education, there is still a feeling that workers have no country, and that fellowship with workers of other lands is still there.

In this period when capitalism has globalised, international solidarity is needed more than ever.

Workers have more in common with each other than with the rich, with the likes of Musk, Farage, and Trump, with the filthy rich

King Charles, with Scottish lairds, with company directors.

Solidarity also shows that, again as Joe Hill wrote, that

"There is pow'r, there is pow'r in a band of working folk, when they stand hand in hand."

It also shows that workers acting together locally, regionally and internationally, can thwart the war plans of our rulers.



DIRECT ACTION

Direct action is such a plain-spoken notion of such self-evident transparency that merely to speak the words defines and explains them. It means that the working class, forever bridling at

the existing state of affairs, expects nothing from outside people, powers or forces, but rather creates its own conditions of struggle and looks to itself for its methodology. It means that from now

on the producer looms before the existing society which recognises only the citizen. And that producer, having grasped that any social grouping models itself upon its production system, means to mount a direct attack upon the capitalist mode of production in order to

transform it by eliminating the employer and thereby achieving sovereignty in the workshop – the essential precondition for the enjoyment of real freedom....
...it is plain that direct action is the plain and simple fleshing-out of the spirit of revolt: it fleshes

out the class struggle, shifting it from the realm of theory and abstraction into the realm of practice and accomplishment. As a result, direct action is the class struggle lived on a daily basis, an ongoing attack upon capitalism.
*Emile Pouget,
Direct Action 1904*

Why direct action?

There are loads of different methods which people use to try and change the world, too many to mention here. Often, however, we think that we can look for help from various 'specialists' like politicians, union leaders, legal experts, and the like.

In reality, this isn't the case. Politicians and union leaders have interests different from our own, like basically anyone earning six-figure salaries or even those bumbling around £80-90,000 a year.

Trying to find protection behind the law can leave us equally at sea, as the laws that protect us today can simply be changed tomorrow - assuming they're even enforced in the first place!

We favour direct action: because it relies on our collective strength to stop 'business as usual' rather than our individual lifestyle choices or appeals to political and union leaders.

And because at the end of the day, it means relying each other – the others who share our situation – rather than on so-called 'experts' who ultimately won't have to live with our problems.

What is direct action?

Direct action is when people take action to further their goals, without the interference of a third party. This means the rejection of lobbying politicians or appealing to our employers' generosity to improve our conditions. Ultimately, it's not

even just that they don't care – it's that they profit from making our conditions worse.

So, we take action ourselves to force improvements to our conditions. In doing so, we empower ourselves by taking control of and responsibility for our actions. So, fundamental

to direct action is the idea that we can only depend on each other to achieve our goals. Direct action takes place at the point where we experience the sharp end of capitalism.

Often this will mean where we work, as our bosses try to sack us or make us work harder, for less money. Or it can be where we live, as local politicians try to cut spending by getting rid of public services.

Direct action in the workplace

Direct action at work is basically any action that interferes with the bosses' ability to manage, forcing them to cave in to their staff's demands.

The best-known form of direct action at work is the strike, where workers walk off the job until they get what they want.

However, strike action can sometimes be limited by union bureaucrats and anti-strike laws. That said, workers often successfully ignore these limits and hold unofficial, or 'wildcat', strikes which return a lot of the impact of strike action.

Though there are too many to mention here, some other direct action tactics used by workers are:

- Occupations; where workers lock bosses out of a workplace, effectively striking but not letting the boss replace them with strike-breakers (also known as 'scabs').

- Go-slows; where workers work much slower than usual so as to ensure that less work is done (and so less profit made).

- Work-to-rules, another form of on-the-job action, where workers follow every little rule to the letter, again so as to slow down the pace of work.

There are many examples of these kinds of tactics being used successfully.

In 1999, London

Underground workers engaged in a 'piss strike' against not being allowed to go home once their work was finished. Instead of pissing by the tracks as usual, they would insist on being accompanied to a toilet by the safety supervisor, who had to bring the rest of the team with them (for safety).

On their return, someone else would 'realise' they had to go as well, effectively stopping any work happening!

In Brighton in 2009, refuse workers held a successful wildcat strike over management bullying while the same year saw Visteon workers in London and Belfast occupy their factories against redundancies.

Direct action in the workplace has often been used for political ends as well. For instance, this year saw French and Italian dockers refuse to handle arms for Israel.

However, it is possible for successful direct action to take place outside of the workplace as well, over a variety of issues.

Direct action in the community

The most famous example in recent British history is the Poll Tax. When Margaret Thatcher attempted to bring in the unpopular tax in 1989, up to 17 million working class people across the country refused to pay it. Non-payment groups spread through communities all over the

UK and people set up local anti-eviction networks to confront bailiffs. By 1990, Margaret Thatcher and the Poll Tax had both been beaten.

Similar non-payment campaigns successfully beat increasing water charges (1993-1996) and bin taxes (2003-2004) in Ireland.



In 2011, working people in Greece began the 'We Won't Pay' campaign against rising prices, with people refusing to pay motorway tolls, public transport tickets and some doctors even refusing to charge patients for their treatment.

Mainland Europe has also seen the spread of 'economic blockades'. Often used by students or workers where strike action has not been hugely effective, they involve participants blocking major roads or transport hubs. The idea is that by stopping people getting to work or slowing the transportation of goods and services, the protesters block the economy in much the same way as a strike would.

Hundreds of thousands of people have been involved in tactics like these, breaking out from government-approved (and ineffective) tactics such as lobbying and A-to-B marches.

Based on *What is Direct Action?* by Organise! Ireland.

Wildcat or official strike action?

The best-known form of direct action is the strike, in which workers simply walk off their jobs and refuse to produce profits for the boss until they get what they want. This is the preferred tactic of bureaucratic unions but is one of the least effective ways of confronting the boss.

The bosses, with their large financial reserves, are better able to withstand

a long drawn-out strike than the workers. In many cases, court orders will freeze or confiscate the union's strike funds. And worst of all, a long walk-out only gives the boss a chance to replace striking workers with a replacement, or "scab", workforce.

Workers are far more effective when they take direct action while still on the job. By deliberately reducing the boss's profits while continuing to collect wages, you can cripple the boss without giving some scab the opportunity to take your job.

Unofficial, or wildcat, action - that is, organised with other workers independent of union officials bypasses anti-union laws meaning there are no union funds to sequester and there is no obligation to provide the bosses with advance warning - giving them the opportunity to arrange scabs.

Direct action, by definition, means those tactics workers can undertake themselves, without the help of government agencies, union bureaucrats, or high-priced lawyers. Running to an Industrial Tribunal (or outside the UK the relevant arbitration board in your country) for help may be appropriate in some cases, but it is not a form of direct action, and they too are generally weighted in the bosses'

favour, taking up a great deal of time and money.

Every major victory won by labour over the years was achieved with militant direct actions that were, in their time, illegal and subject to police repression. After all, for much of history the laws surrounding trade unions were simple - there were none. Strikers were routinely beaten and killed by police and soldiers and imprisoned with extremely harsh sentences.

After years of relentless struggle, the legal right of workers to organise is now officially recognised, yet so many restrictions exist that effective action is as difficult as ever. For this reason, any worker contemplating direct action on the job - bypassing the legal system and hitting the boss where they are weakest - should be fully aware of labour law, how

it is applied, and how it may be used against labour activists. At the same time, workers must realise that the struggle between the bosses and the workers is not a badminton match - it is war. Under these circumstances, workers must use what works, whether the bosses (and their courts) like it or not.

It is worth bearing in mind that the best weapon is, of course, organisation. If one worker stands up and protests, the bosses will squash him or her like a bug. Squashed bugs are obviously of little use to their families, friends, and social movements in general. But if all the workers stand up together, the boss will have no choice but to take you seriously. They can fire any individual worker who makes a fuss, but they might find it difficult to fire their entire workforce.

Solidarity is strength!



Super-exploitation on UK Farms

Agricultural workers are underrepresented and largely ignored in the trade union movement. They make up less than 1% of the workforce and are mainly migrants. Recently, however, the workers themselves are organising, supported by grass roots unions.

Since Brexit, the UK has struggled to get workers for the low-paid and back-breaking jobs characteristic of the farming industry. The government therefore launched a special scheme - the Seasonal Worker Visa Scheme, which is now set to run until at least 2029.

This scheme is for workers who have a job offer in the UK to do seasonal horticulture work or poultry production work with a sponsor who is an approved scheme operator.

In theory, the pay and conditions of these workers is regulated but it is becoming increasingly apparent that the scheme is just a way for employers to exploit workers, maximising their own profits.

Strikes and Support

The United Workers of the World (UWW) is largely a London-based union, focusing its efforts on low-paid and precarious workers, usually migrants. However, in 2023, they responded for a call for help by a worker on a farm in Herefordshire, an official sponsor in the

Seasonal Worker Visa Scheme.

From the UWW website: "Some 88 workers took strike action in July at a Haygrove farm in Herefordshire over health and safety concerns, claims of wage theft, breach of contract, discrimination and appalling conditions. The final straw was when workers realised they would be charged over £400 more than the cost of the flight they had agreed to pay back. After plane tickets and accommodation deductions, some of the workers would have been left with barely no money in their pockets and no possibility of saving money to send back home. UWW is informed that some 130 Latin Americans workers and workers from other countries participated in drawing up their demands.

The following morning, having received no response, around 88 workers walked off the job. After taking part in the strike action some of the workers were forced to flee the Haygrove farm over the degrading working conditions and pay.

With the help of UWW, one of them, Julia from Bolivia, has launched legal proceedings. The claim includes allegations breach of contract as Haygrove failed to provide from day one the 42 hours of work some were verbally promised when they

were recruited in Chile - leading to the loss of hundreds of pounds; bosses are also accused of threatening to remove shifts as "punishment" for not picking enough fruit; harassment and discrimination including threatening dismissal, exerting excessive pressure, and insults such as "stupid" and "slow"; a lack of health and safety training to prevent accidents, a lack of protective gloves, glasses, boots, or waterproof jacket, and a lack of toilet or drinking water facilities on site."

In January 2024, The Home Office decided that there were reasonable grounds (RG) to believe that Julia could be a victim of human trafficking and modern slavery. Julia and the UWW are still fighting this case, which has highlighted the problems facing hundreds of other workers.

Solidarity Across Land Trades (SALT)

This is a new union, which started as an independent initiative, but is now part of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union. It seems that SALT is largely autonomous with its own website (See: <https://saltunion.org/>). What is unusual about this union is that it organises among volunteers and free lancers, usually focusing on workers in the

alternative, agroecological and organic sector.

“Solidarity Across Land Trades (SALT) is a grassroots trade union organising for fairer conditions, solidarity, care and justice. We are a collective of workers, trainees, freelancers, co-op members and volunteers who are employed by others in land-related trades. We fight for better standards of pay, working conditions and cultures within our sectors, support our members with workplace issues and build community between landworkers and wider social justice movements.”

It achieved its first win on a supposedly ethical dairy farm, which was underpaying its workers, as well as showing cruelty to animals

(<https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2024-12-19/chris-hynde-turns-back-on-ethical-farm-after-animal-welfare-allegations/>).

SALT published a very critical report of the alternative agricultural sector based on a survey of their membership:

<https://saltunion.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/burnt-out-overworked-and-underpaid-salt-report-revised-20th-feb.pdf>.

Its focus on volunteers and trainees has also brought

it into some conflict with Land Workers Alliance (LWA), the best known organisation campaigning for a radical transformation of the food system.

This is because the LWA also includes farms, both rural and urban, who employ workers and who often rely on volunteers and training schemes.

SALT hopes to move beyond organising in the alternative farming sector to organise among workers in the traditional farming industry. They firmly supported



the actions of the UVW to organise the migrant workers who predominate in this sector.

Building an effective movement for justice

The case of Julia, and the general situation of farm workers, was the focus of a protest outside the

Home Office in January. It was supported by UVW as well as by SALT and LWA. We hope is a sign of things to come: a militant, self-organised movement agricultural workers against the super exploitation of capitalist agriculture, in all its forms.

However, we need to go well beyond organising workers within the current system.

Agricultural land is largely privately owned, just like other resources. When someone owns land, they

use it to make profit for themselves. Given the labour-intensive nature of much land-based work, the owners will seek to pay workers as little as possible.

The only solution is to actually place the land into collective stewardship, such that land is used for the common good, controlled and managed by those who do the work. And, links need to be made directly with people who eat the food produced, side-lining the supermarkets who

exploit both producers and consumers.

For more information about land reform and transformation of the food system see: Manifesto for Land Justice available to download at www.peopleslandpolicy.org

NHS: Managed Social Murder

by an NHS worker (personal capacity)

As an NHS worker there is an anguish, grief and melancholy in what I write about the NHS. It's certainly the best (least worst!) place I've contributed to with some of the finest, most admirable staff and personable people in the many varied places of employment I have endured: finance, government agencies, education, multinational firms and small consultancies.

In recent times the NHS is often discussed as one would of a great sporting hero debilitated by age, illness and increasingly unsuited to the contemporary world; or as suffering a pitiful and fatal descent as a direct result of self-destructive behaviour due to the inherent nature of the beast. To stretch the credulity of the analogy, it is seen apart from its social and political context as the sports person is from their team.

But the NHS is no such thing. The myth of what sort of organisation the NHS is, as well as its purpose, appears more durable than the

organisation itself. Despite the myth of the NHS, it is part of the social and economic landscape as any other distended arm of government: it is a beast which fulfils its master's needs in the same way any organisation of the state does under the guise of securing its citizens welfare.

Even at a superficial level, the NHS's fabled commitment to healthcare as being "comprehensive, universal and free at the point of delivery" has now been revised as provision

to be delivered by "limited circumstances sanctioned by Parliament".

Consider recently proclaimed values and behaviours such as: Working together for patients, Commitment to quality of care & Compassion. One would think these were pretty obvious and implicit requisites of the health service and then wonder why such

obvious things require to be explicitly stated and what they were prior to explicitly defining them. But they are required for a couple of important reasons:

1. to convince staff and patients the NHS is their friend and a beneficent organisation.

2. to give the political veneer of its raison d'être to care.

And this deception obscures the NHS raison d'être: to manage the health of the national



workforce in accordance with its disposability; it is to commodify health provision by identifying particularly profitable [care] and fully corporatise the institutions itself (internal markets, commissioning, etc) and the value of its workforce (productivity, efficiency measures such as bed occupancy).

Some consideration of a sample of recent scandals of either service provision or the way the NHS treats whistleblowers reveal the nature of the beast. The most recent to surface is the corporate manslaughter investigation of whether maternity care provided by the Nottingham University Hospitals NHS trust had been grossly negligent- the same Trust recently announced a bid to cut hundreds of jobs.

In one sense it's unfair to highlight one Trust after decades have witnessed a surfeit of awful mismanagement and wilful skullduggery across the NHS, whereby cover ups of care so below the required standards is, even in the eyes of the law, tantamount to manslaughter.

The Francis report of 2013 highlighted similar deliberate delivery of substandard care and resourcing at the core of the often-fatal consequences. And yet on it goes: Morecambe Bay, Ockenden,

Sturrock, Kirkup. And on and on....

There have been a myriad of other examples of dissembling and cover ups which NHS management have orchestrated including manipulating waiting times, inaction over repeated staff concerns and rampant and unchecked bullying of staff. Even the apparently straightforward Lucy Letby affair now stinks of cover up after an internationally acclaimed panel of experts have refocussed the causes on poor practice and resourcing, throwing serious doubt on the conviction.

It's the NHS treatment of whistleblowers that is truly revealing about the nature of the organisation. The case of Dr Chris Day is an exemplar of the lengths and depths the NHS will go to crush those championing adequate health care provision and the political and legal establishment's desire to either ignore or hide the malfeasant nature of the NHS.

Over ten years ago Dr Day pitched up to a busy shift at Queen Elizabeth Hospital's intensive care unit (ICU) at Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Foundation Trust. He escalated issues of staff shortages as per the required practice. The Trust refused to act upon his complaints and Dr Day then utilised his right to

publicly raise his concerns through the whistleblowing policy.

This started a long and tortuous legal campaign and a series of court and employment tribunal appearances which are still ongoing. Aside from the obstinate determination to destroy Dr Day professionally, financially, and personally, the revelations are shocking even to hardened observers and include:

- the collusion between the Trust and Health Education England to backlist Dr Day from professional development the deliberate destruction of 90,000 emails relevant to the legal and employment case

- the refusal of the legal system to hold those who withheld or destroyed evidence in contempt

- expending at least £700,000 on legal provisions on a case when the Trust knew it was in the wrong and was forced into an admission of wrongdoing

This is one admittedly extreme case. There are many other more pedestrian examples (though no less destructive and outright hateful) of NHS whistleblowers who have had to defend their careers from being destroyed by the NHS for trying to do the right thing: Martyn Pitman, Consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at the

Royal Hampshire County Hospital; Psychiatrist Dr Jane Hamilton NHS Livingston; Mental Health Nurse, Rab Wilson; even Orthopaedic surgeon Shyam Kumar, special adviser on hospital inspections for the Care Quality Commission – it was his actual job to identify poor quality service!

This is only the stuff we know about – the tip of the iceberg. And yet, after decades of this sort of stuff creating news headlines, the Government is only now seriously considering sacking and excluding from future employment in the NHS.

Despite the undoubted commitment, skills and care the frontline and supporting staff, theirs is not the culture that predominates and not the type of organisation that materialises. Why is NHS culture and conduct like this? It is because the NHS is in the service of those who wish to privatise the profit opportunities and socialise the costs.

There is an abundance of material which documents 7 governments constructing pathways for the private sector to increasingly corporatise the NHS with Labour in particular being an enthusiastic facilitator of marketising health care. Current Health Secretary Streetering has trousered almost £200k from private

health care companies “while advocating for the NHS to pay private firms for use of their resources” while one of his predecessors, Alan Milburn, was paid over £8m (yes, million!) for “consultancy roles in the private healthcare sector”. These companies do not part with this sort of cash without an expectation of significant return.

Together the sole aim of their Mutually Agreed Resignation Scheme aims to “slash the budgets, stand back and let the service fight itself for survival; forcing a reduction in headcount, without wasting time on analysis or permission [it's] just a way to ‘get rid of people’”. MARS is “more expensive than statutory redundancy, but the key benefit, it avoids consultation [and] MARS is arbitrary and open to favouritism”. Their strategy is to force the way open to expensive, profitable but inefficient and disinterested privatisation of back office services.

Other benefactors to Labour, the Health Sector trade unions, are often muted on Labour on the take and obstinate in refusing to frankly criticise the organisation they created and fund. They are silent, posted missing or implicated in NHS bad behaviour. This is no surprise on a number of

counts: trade unions are notorious in putting their union's interests before their members; they have a long track record in working with employers to police, discipline or even victimise union activists and campaigners; in the NHS in Scotland the unions work in partnership with the NHS and the most senior union representative in each is employed by the Board with title of Employee Director – no possible conflict of interest there then...

In addition, many of the big trade unions such as GMB and UNITE have been exposed as cultivating toxic environments and fraudulent practices. Trade unions are moribund in terms of engagement with its membership – for example, union general secretaries are often elected by around 10% of their membership on turnouts so low as to undermine their legitimacy.

The wilful ineffectiveness of the unions and cravenness to Labour is therefore no surprise and, despite many union activists providing valuable support and service on the ground, they cannot offer any hope of mustering any turnaround for the NHS's fortunes.

It is a conscious strategy by the trade unions in the same way austerity is the choice of their masters in government. The NHS

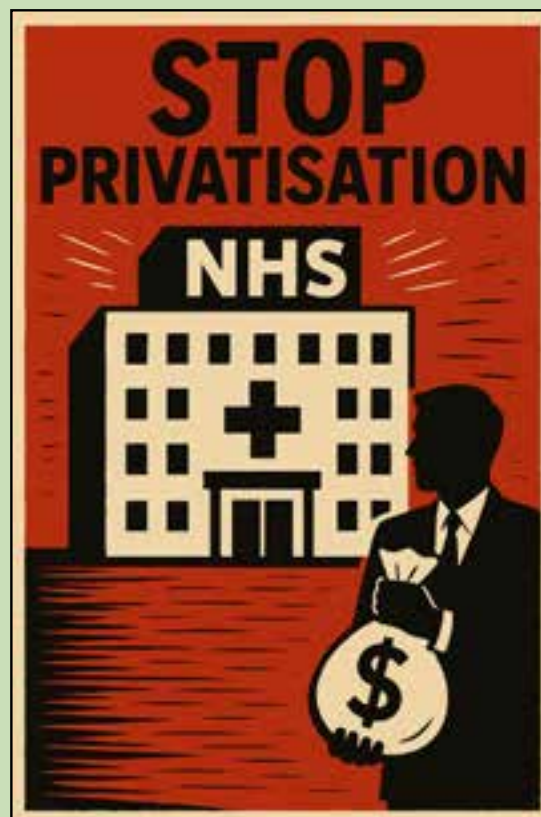
is the integrated mechanism by which to manage the inevitable effects of austerity. The result is that a hateful culture is at large in the NHS. Consider the tale of an employee collapsing in the workplace and having their line manager shout at them, while passed out on the floor, "Get up! What's your fucking problem?"; and after it was discovered the colleague collapsed as a result of having a miscarriage that same manager commenting "Yeah, well, its over now, get back to work".

Not a tale from an Amazon like employer but an illustrative tale from former midwife turned journalist Pavan Amara on an example from a midwifery department. She notes that the myth of saintliness on the frontline has been exposed as a febrile and feral workplace environment nourished by toxicity feeding down from the top.

Further anecdotal evidence from long time health professionals note career advancement at the expense of care quality of contemporary training and trainees – a less confederate approach to teamwork in the interest of climbing the greasy career pole. It is the patient who also endures the blunt

consequences. With reports of services being overwhelmed, where is demand for healthcare coming from? Public Health academics, Walsh and McCartney identified that "health inequalities are entirely political in nature and therefore require entirely political solutions".

The consequence of political choices – irrespective of political hue



– has resulted in increasing avoidable deaths and even a reduction in life expectancy. Saliently, they conjure up the analysis of Engels to characterise government policies: When society places hundreds... in such as position that they inevitably meet too early and an unnatural death [and] places them under conditions in which they

cannot live ... its deed is murder [even if] the offence is one of omission rather than commission: social murder.

As NHS employees our motivations are important but not significant in its role in supporting government policy of social murder – it facilitates the managing of it. There is a danger that criticising the NHS puts you on the side of the health hawks.

With the weight of statistical, documented and anecdotal evidence, it should be clear the NHS is masquerading in plain sight. The NHS is an agent of neo-liberalism with its central tenet of austerity. What can we do...? A response could be: well, you've made your bed, now die in it. But there are examples of what can be achieved and offer a better way of providing healthcare. Union members have often forced the officers to put aside their tribal hatred and work together to represent (sometimes successfully) their interests. But this can take years and often means Trusts and Boards robbing Peter to pay Paul. Many have come together to form grass roots movements within unions to try to democratise them and make them more representative e.g. UNISON's Time for Real

Change. While there are some measures of success, these groups are often outflanked by their own organisations by, for example, disbarring members from standing for office.

During the COVID pandemic healthcare workers in Greece, Germany and France ignored their respective ministries and unions and organised themselves to provide the resources and care required.

Mutual assistance became a byword and hinted at previous grand social experiments in the last century. The NHS does not exist in a vacuum – it is integrated into the social and economic system which is why – especially as the last fifty years of government in the UK has consistently and particularly demonstrated - that in a world of unfathomable wealth, the political will, competence, and capability

does not exist. In order to formulate a health service, we first must decide what sort of society we want to live in. Historical - anthropological! - evidence suggests that mutuality is the most successful way for civilisations to develop healthily and successfully. We can only do it ourselves, or allow them to carry on regardless and by doing so, facilitate managed social murder.

WOMEN'S WORK

WOMEN

are 51% of the population but 70% of the poor

and 83% of single parents doing 66% of the work

producing 50% of the food but earn just 11% of the pay and own only 1% of the land

In case you wondered why we still need feminism!

The Patriarchy is alive and well

The 2024 median pay gap between men and women still runs at 13.1% - 87pence for every pound. (TUC figures on UnionLearn website). Work available to women is still largely low paid and lower graded whether because of their need for part-time work or

specific hours to fit in with childcare and domestic duties, or because 'women's work' has always been undervalued, or because women are not often encouraged to train to do 'non-traditional' jobs. Whilst there have been enormous improvements in Health and Safety at work since the HSAW Act in 1974, there are still great inequalities in the treatment of hazards. We know a great deal about the lifting of materials in the construction industry - but far less about lifting in the care industry. Safe levels of toxicity and tolerance of chemicals and hazardous substances are calculated according to the physical attributes of 'Reference Man' - caucasian men aged twenty-five to thirty who weigh 70kg.

Women have very different physical attributes and tolerances which are not taken into account, and have largely not been properly researched (size, weight, fatty tissue, bone size and density, hormones etc).

It is not long since our TV screens were full of harrowing scenes of nurses, care-workers, domestics suffering from exhaustion, stress and illness; with inadequate and ill-fitting PPE, during the Covid pandemic - our method of solidarity to stand in the street and clap! How quickly their commitment and courage has been forgotten.

Join the Union

As the women's movement grew in the '70s, so women began to make more demands on the unions that

they had joined to defend their rights and conditions at work.

It was commonplace that men in more supervisory roles would represent women workers (e.g. cleaners and caretakers in schools) and women stewards and branch officials were few and far between in many workplaces. At my first national NUPE conference in 1976 I was one of only two women who spoke - this in a union with 75% women membership. NUPE had reserved women's seats on regional and national executive bodies, but otherwise not much organisation devoted to the bulk of the membership and it was easy to shout down the few lone voices of women.

There were many disputes during the 70s and early 80s among women workers. My experience was in the public sector, where I was a local government manual worker. As we got to know each other, we began to demand women's committees, so that we could discuss and formulate our own demands. These we won and then began to campaign and make demands around so-called 'women's issues': Low pay, insecure contracts, women's health, childcare and creches for meetings, women's educational sessions, sexual harassment, violence against women, menstruation and menopause, and so on. Most importantly, we established

that women could and should be represented by other women who would understand the issues and be able to properly put forward the case. At that time there were also many hospital occupations, where local women sat in the buildings and supported the health workers. Women were bridging the gap between community and workplace by supporting other struggles - housing, nursery provision and organising coaches to support Greenham Common women, miners' strike and other disputes.

Where now?

Although attitudes have changed enormously and most unions now do encourage women's self-organisation, there is still plenty of misogyny about and the struggle for women's autonomy is still live. The sectors where women work are still often the lowest paid with the worst conditions

also where many migrant and immigrant women work. Cuts and on-going privatisation in the National Health Service and in the care and education sectors continue to affect women heavily.

The racism and sexism that drive women into insecure and poorly paid work continue without too much challenge.

Non-hierarchical unions such as UVW (United Voices of the World) and IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) provide opportunities for the least organised workers to come together and fight. Unite Community, UNISON and GMB, with self-organised groups, along with some other unions can be a platform for women to get together, formulate demands and organise. The greatest successes will be where women find common ground across community and workplace to organise and build solidarity.



Key Workers United

In the beginning were the words. Key Workers United newsletter was launched during Covid to record what key workers in Norwich were experiencing at work during the pandemic and lockdown.

We began by asking our contacts in the NHS, rail, retail, education, and the post office to write short accounts of work and our contacts responded wholeheartedly. What seemed unique was that these were the voices of workers themselves, most of whom were not in a party or sect - a kind of local 'Notes from Below' with worker correspondents. It was bi-monthly, giving us enough time to collect articles and images and went from 2 to 4 pages very quickly.

After Covid, it was inevitable that contributions would fall off but the 2022-23 strike wave began to reactivate people. The strikes brought a massive

revival. Picket lines at the local hospital (Norfolk & Norwich), pickets at rail stations and postal depots were regularly supported. RMT picket lines were set pieces of solidarity supported by NOR4NOR, Unite Community and DPAC: we sang 'Oh show me the way to the next picket line'. At UEA, it has chronicled the long running disputes over redundancies whilst the closure of Norfolk's flagship adult centre Wensum Lodge provoked a community fightback. Over time, it has evolved: more general articles, a regular column called 'Whatever would Gerrard [Winstanley] say?' as well as play and book reviews and regular comments on the Palestine genocide.

And the opening of new left bookshop called Caracol has been a welcome home for reading, writing and gathering in Norwich.

It's clear that any local newsletter rides a wave

of wider political and social currents e.g. Covid, the strike wave and Palestine. But unlike the national publications of the left, it talks about identifiable local

workplaces or issues e.g. Benjamin Court in Cromer and in Lowestoft and Yarmouth. Secondly, that it is not affiliated to any political party (especially not the Labour Party or the Socialist Workers Party). Although the comrades involved in the meetings are from all shades of opinion and bring with them huge reserves of political experience they're not dogmatic. Thirdly it is an independent forum with a clear formulation of working class politics and tries to overcome the 'silo syndrome' that divides campaigns and projects. It asserts that it is vital to link the workplace with communities, for example in the work of NOR4NOR which argues that rail workers need to forge links with local passenger groups as shown successfully by the fight to retain guards on trains and by the ticket office victory.

If Key Workers Unite can begin to unite struggles in Norfolk is, as yet, unclear. This is urgent but difficult. But the issues of climate change, inequality, migrants' rights, Palestine and the proto-fascist right/militarism do not stop at county boundaries.

It is now the newsletter of the Norfolk & Waveney Solidarity Network.

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WHO WE ARE...

The Anarchist Communist Group (ACG) is a revolutionary anarchist communist organisation which is dedicated to seeking a complete transformation of society, and the creation of anarchist communism.

This will mean the working class overthrowing capitalism, abolishing the State, getting rid of exploitation, hierarchies and oppressions, and halting the destruction of the environment.

To do this, we believe it is important to be organised.

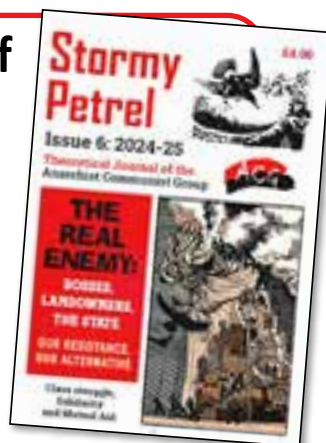
We are committed to building an effective organisation that works towards the common goal of anarchist communism, in cooperation with other working class organisations and in grass roots campaigns.

We strive to base all our current actions on the principles that will be the basis of the future society: mutual aid, solidarity, collective responsibility, individual freedom and autonomy, free association and federalism.

If you want to join the ACG, then look first at our Aims & Principles on our website www.anarchistcommunism.org. You can also drop us a line at info@anarchistcommunism.org



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All the above available from the ACG website shop

REVOLUTIONARY CLASS STRUGGLE NEWS