

JACKDAW

FOR REVOLUTIONARY ANARCHISM

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Solidarity

is our Strength

“Never be deceived that the rich will allow you to vote away their wealth”

*Lucy Parsons -
American activist
and partner of one of the
Haymarket Square Martyrs*



Illustration by Frans Masereel

Organised a little we control a little, organise more we control more;
organise as a class we control everything *Industrial Workers of the World*

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VOICE OF THE ANARCHIST COMMUNIST GROUP

The Labour Leadership Contest

The Labour government is deeply unpopular as a result of its first two years, where it attacked pensioners and pursued policies that showed it was jettisoning any idea of welfarism and left rhetoric. It blatantly is pro-business and pro-market.



Starmer sought to block any contenders to leadership of Labour back in 2021 when he increased the percentage of MPs needed to set off a contest from 10% to 20%. This has blocked the former Health Secretary Wes Streeting, himself an alternative Starmer, with a record of viciously attacking the NHS, and indeed, if anything, more Blairite than Starmer.

Sections of the Labour Party started panicking that under Starmer they would lose the next election. They looked to Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, as someone to replace Starmer. Andy Burnham is no fiery left winger. He supported the Iraq war when he

was a MP, voting for the invasion of Iraq. He served as a minister under Blair, and over the next ten years he voted to block any independent inquiry into the war. He then opportunistically started to say that he regretted the war when he became Mayor of Manchester. Whilst in Parliament, he abstained on opposing welfare cuts proposed by the Tory government. He made it abundantly clear when Corbyn was elected Labour leader, that he was dissociating himself from the whole phenomenon of Corbynism. He supported Starmer in the 2020 leadership contest. In addition, he was an

important member of Labour Friends of Israel whilst in parliament, and has spoken regularly at their events. He says that Israel would be the first country he would visit if he became Prime Minister. He is a confirmed supporter of the Israeli state.

Now, however, in order to win the leadership election, he had to pose as to the left of Starmer. So, he is calling for more funding for council housing and more re-nationalisation (indeed Starmer himself changed direction over this, calling for nationalisation of the steel industry).

Sections of the ruling class were concerned that Starmer could not retain control over his MPs and continue its assaults on the working class. Therefore, Burnham is seen as a handy alternative, due to his supposed popularity, and better able to implement harsh measures. Burnham has said that he supports fiscal rules and so may well curry favour with sections of the boss class. He hopes to garner the racist vote by his support for anti-migrant action pushed by Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood. He has said that the government should spend more on defence,

rather than health, education and infrastructure.

Now Burnham's winning of the Makerfield election has forced Starmer to resign.

This is at a time when the UK has shown that it is as unstable a state as, for example, Italy, with six different prime ministers in the last ten years.

This instability is caused by the ongoing world economic crisis, dating back to the crash of 2007. All around the world, governments, whether, left, right, or centre, and at the bidding of the boss class, imposed austerity measures. With the failure of neo-liberalism to get out of this crisis, we see a new tack, with increasing state intervention in the economy. Alongside this has come the encouragement of racism and far-right groups, payrolled heavily by trillionaires and billionaires; and a culture war, attacking the gains of the late sixties

onwards around women's and LGBTQ+ rights.

However, the Starmer government decided to continue with austerity measures, as it was scared of affrighting the ruling class and upsetting the financial markets. Burnham, it will be seen, is no more capable of going against the grain as Starmer was.

An indication of the direction he is going if he wins the Labour leadership contest is his appointment of three economic advisers all tightly linked to austerity policies and to financial institutions like the Bank of England and Goldman Sachs.

The past few decades of austerity and rising cost of living have dealt severe blows to the old establishment parties of Labour and Conservatives. Unfortunately, the vacuum that is opening does not benefit truly radical ideas,

but offers new opportunities for the populist hard right.

Bigotry and racism are now fully out in the open. As for the left, whether they be the old Stalinist formations or the Trotskyist groups, they have been unable to develop any significant threat, tied as they are by an umbilical cord to Labourism. The majority of British anarchism, now much reduced, is also similarly unable to offer a challenge.

A social alternative is in dire need of being created. This has to mean painstaking work around the cost-of-living crisis, the rising cost of energy and food, housing, and transport. This crisis has been aggravated by the Trump regime's war against Iran, and so a clear antimilitarist message has to be linked to any such fight against this crisis. Whether this alternative can be built remains to be seen. If not, the far right will profit.

The May Elections and After

The May council, mayoral, and Welsh and Scottish Parliamentary elections showed the shifting ground of British politics. The two main establishment parties, Labour and the Conservatives, were decimated in England and Wales, and many, well those who bothered to vote, did so against the attacks both had led against working conditions and living standards of the working class. This disgust was expressed in Wales

and in Scotland with votes for the nationalist parties, which adopt centrist to left social democratic language. Labour lost almost 1500 council seats, in England, whilst the Tories, with a much reduced 1,300

seats, lost a further 600 seats.

However, the biggest benefactors were the hard right populists of Reform, who won roughly 30% of the council seats up for grabs, including 14 councils. These included traditional Labour strongholds like Barnsley, Gateshead, and Sandwell. They came second after the Plaid Cymru nationalists in Wales and in Scotland grabbed 16% of the vote. Farage and Reform are exploiting the anger felt



by many with successive governments, and fanning the flames of racism in British society. Many were disgusted with the way the Starmer government carried on with austerity measures like previous Tory governments. The vote for Reform appears to be higher in the most deprived areas. On the other hand, some working class voters voted tactically to block Reform. This wasn't by any means a guaranteed vote for Labour, as the Greens won 500 councillors, an increase of more than 400.

In fact, the Greens seem to be filling the vacuum of social-democracy relinquished by Labour, with increasingly left-sounding promises. The nationalists of Plaid Cymru and the SNP use similar rhetoric to gain working class votes. Zack Polanski referred to the Greens as the 'workers party', and put forward a charter for workers.

However, like Green Parties in other parts of the world, and indeed with already sitting Green councillors and councils in the UK, the hopes of the Green Party posing a genuine alternative

will soon be dashed. In over 40 councils they have helped implement cuts just like the rest. Where they now have wrested control, will they refuse to implement austerity measures?

Well, Polanski has said that councils have no choice in implementing cuts because it's due to the decisions of central government. No mention of local organising of workers and local people in alliance with intransigent councillors, or a cartel of councils pledging to refuse to implement cuts. This doesn't even enter his head!

Does it mean anything for women?

The best thing that can be said about the latest election fiasco is that at least Reform didn't get in. Reform and co, whilst trumpeting their defence of (white) women, represent everything that we should fear about politicians.

They have announced their 'women and motherhood protection act' whilst promising to rip up the Equality Act, and the Employment Rights Act which offers some protection to women, and the equal Pay for work of Equal Value Act. They clearly intend to make massive cuts in public sector care and health services, which offer (albeit low-paid) employment for women, as well as

supporting them in caring responsibilities. Existing inadequate childcare facilities will be cut along with any support for working mothers.

It is well-documented that many of their candidates and elected officials have convictions for sexual abuse and violence against women. Many have made outrageous public misogynistic statements and generally their behaviour is macho and misogynistic. In the name of protecting women and girls, they invent and inflate reports of migrant, especially Muslim, attacks on women whilst ignoring appalling attacks perpetrated by white 'English' men. As for the tussle over

leadership of the Labour Party, it seems pointless and certainly will make no difference to working class women. The only appreciable difference between them is that Andy Burnham is slightly better-looking than Starmer and a better communicator. Neither holds out much hope for women and migrant/immigrant people. As usual the only way forward for working class women is to organise in our workplaces and communities, not to put any hope in elections of politicians who do not have our interests at heart. Self-organisation and building solid communities are the only way to defeat this scum.

The Holyrood election brings more of the same

The SNP won the election with 58 MSPs, falling seven short of a majority, with Reform and Labour gaining 17 MSPs each. Much of the Reform vote seems to have come from the Conservatives who lost 19 of their 31 seats, whilst the Greens gained 7 seats to bring them up to 15 seats.

Whilst the Nationalists have seen their vote decrease and the loss of 6 representatives at Holyrood, their performance in power since 2021 and the prosecution of former SNP Treasurer Peter Murrell for embezzling SNP funds, has not seen the near-absolute hegemony of the party amongst pro-Independence voters (outside the Greens) challenged. The pre-election collapse of the Alba party left a handful of Pro-Independence/nationalists in the form of the Alliance to Libertate Scotland, Sovereignty and the Independence for Scotland Party who failed to have a regionally elected MSP between them.

The electoral left fared even worse following the decision of *Your Party* in Scotland to not stand, just before their entire executive committee resigned due to a perceived lack of respect for the decisions and autonomy of the Scottish party.

The Scottish Socialist Party and the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition as well as the newly pro-Independence Workers Party of George Galloway achieved 11,368 between them.

Overall, the vote had fallen by 10.1% with a turnout of 53.4%. This means close to half of the electorate chose not to vote. This number reflects a growing disillusionment with the farce of parliamentary politics and a disaffection with politics generally, particularly amongst the working class. Whoever we vote for, we get pretty much the same: poor social services, rising food and fuel prices, a profound sense that the politicians don't care and don't understand how we live and what we face.

But this cynicism about the system doesn't automatically lead to an active rejection of its values and any optimism about changing things on the part of those who eschew the ballot box. Until we can build social movements in our communities that can create confidence that we can change things outside of elections we will remain caught between the false choices presented to us by nationalists of either the Scottish or the British variety.

The Welsh Elections



Meanwhile in Wales, Plaid Cymru have formed their first ever government. Labour's electoral dominance has been overturned, winning fewer seats than Reform who came second. Without a majority Plaid will need support to pass any motions, presumably from Labour. Plaid have presented themselves as the alternative to Reform and bringers of radical change.

Their flagship policy is universal childcare - 20 hours a week for all 9 month to four year olds. This has come under intense scrutiny from the right who condemn it as 'unaffordable'.

Historically, Plaid has a long tradition of anti-militarism. This was cemented in 1936 in Penyborth, Gwynedd, when a mass campaign against the construction of a bombing school culminated in three prominent party members

burning the school down in the tradition of non-violent protest. In recent years this commitment has wavered, with their leader Rhun ap Iorwerth stating “it’s not a call for the UK to withdraw from NATO for me” and that while an independent Wales may decide not to be a member, that it “would want to have a very close relationship with NATO”. Similar moves towards militarism have also been seen in the Green Party of England and Wales, who have won their first ever seats in the Senedd. The issue of Welsh nationalism has also become an increasingly hot topic. With elements of Reform wanting to see the powers

of the Senedd restricted (or simply abolished), even the Lib Dems vowed to oppose any money being spent on investigating the viability of independence. Meanwhile Plaid have emphasised they will not push for a referendum on the issue this term, but that it remains a long term goal. As anarchist communists we are one of the few groups that oppose nationalism in all its forms and see the necessity of a global revolution to abolish capitalism. The bludgeon is no softer if it is held by a Welsh police officer, the public sector cuts no less deep. Despite major electoral changes, little has changed

for everyday people in Wales. Plaid are more interested in promoting Welsh businesses than the struggles of the working class. Meanwhile strikes are few and far between with the Welsh Trades Union Congress committed to social partnership with the government. This has done very little to help the Tata Steel workers or university employees who have faced major job cuts. As we go to press, the health visitors of Cwm Taf Morgannwg have been on strike since February 23. Welsh workers don’t need class cooperation with their exploiters, but a revival of their proud tradition of militancy and solidarity.

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 leaving the EU, 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 Voices of the World (UVW) 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.



She is one of 88 Latin American workers who organised the UK's first-ever wild cat strike by seasonal migrant workers on visas in 2023, protesting wage theft, discrimination, harassment and unsafe working conditions at Haygrove Farms.

The workers were recruited in Chile under the UK government's Seasonal Worker Visa scheme and brought claims alleging serious mistreatment and exploitation, including unpaid wages, fewer hours than promised, mounting debt from rent and living costs, and racially discriminatory treatment by supervisors. They argue these conditions amount to modern slavery.

Despite the efforts of the UvW and the workers, the Employment Tribunal refused to hear their case, arguing that time limits had expired. This decision was made even though tribunals having the legal power to extend time limits where it is "just and equitable" and these workers were homeless, undocumented, without income and traumatised after fleeing the farm, following the cancellation of their visas.

The case exposes the structural injustice faced by workers on the Seasonal Worker Visa scheme, who are legally tied to a single employer and prohibited from seeking alternative work even when their rights are violated — a system campaigners say mirrors conditions of servitude.

Fortunately they have now won the right to appeal.

Aida Luna Silvestre, seasonal worker and claimant, said:

"It has been a long wait, but we must keep fighting until the system changes. I have lived this experience first-hand as a worker,

and we cannot remain silent – if we do, this system will continue unchanged. The temporary worker visa program needs more opportunities, including the right for workers to switch employers so that those being exploited

can seek better conditions. Workers should also have access to unions to learn and protect their rights. The reality of modern slavery is often ignored. People do not see the main issue: how workers are treated on farms and what rights they are entitled to. Many are misled by the advertisements of large farms that promise good treatment and medical access, but this is far from the truth. Most people here simply do not know what workers endure."

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."

SALT 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/christie-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.

They have been very critical of the alternative farming movement which organises the annual Oxford Real Farming Conference.

From an article on their website:

<https://saltunion.org/at-orfc-2026/>

“The situation for farm workers in Britain is dire. LANTRA, the largest provider of land-based training in the UK and Ireland, places a farm worker’s expected salary at £14,000 to £18,000 a year – dramatically below the UK median average for 2025 of £39,039 as reported by the Office for National Statistics. Minimum wage work is the norm. Informal contracts with no pension or sick pay are standard. Abuse of every kind is common place. Modern slavery in the sector has been increasingly documented.

Until last year, the UK’s alternative agriculture sector was heavily dependent on ‘trainees’ who were paid an average of £1.41 per hour, if they were paid at all: many worked for room and board in exchange

for basic on-the-job training. It was only after campaigning from SALT that these traineeships were outlawed. Yet still some farms persist in offering these positions through novel loopholes.

“One delegate I spoke to, who had been working on farms in alternative agriculture for 10 years and attended the conference on and off in that time, told me that the conversations about workers’ rights had made little progress during her decade

in the industry. Every year individuals came forward at the conference with stories of abuse and malpractice, often at the hands of those same well-known farmers continuously given panel positions (which as a trade union we can attest to as many workers bringing their cases to us are from the stalwarts of organic farming). Nothing would shift. The difference now is that for the first time those voices are forming collectives.”

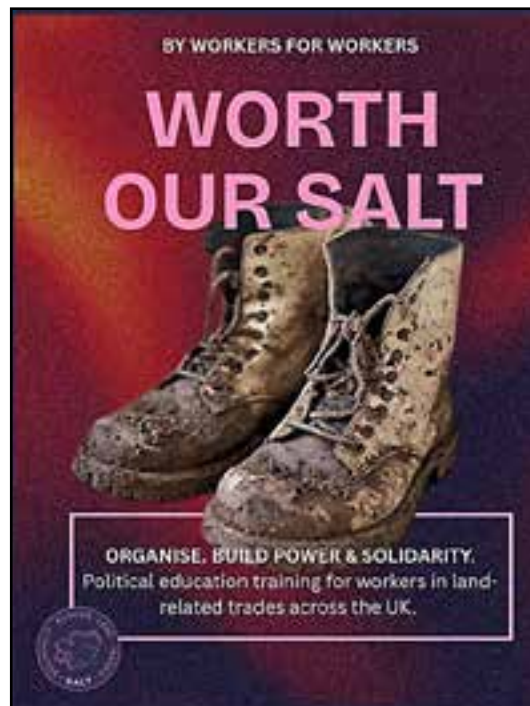
Building an effective

movement for justice

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.



Birmingham Bin Strike: Not over!

The 18-month bin strike in Birmingham is far from over. Bin workers in Birmingham have been on strike since March 2025. When the Labour council in that city attacked bin workers' pay and conditions, walkouts started in January, leading on to an all-out strike from March 11th. The council wanted savage cuts that would result in a pay cut of £8,000 a year. In addition, lorry drivers were downgraded by this vicious anti-working class council.

Birmingham Council admitted that the supposed deal promised by the former leader of the council, Labour's John Cotton, is far from official. Since the May elections, Labour has lost control of the council. Now a coalition of Liberal Democrats, Greens, and Better Birmingham Independents, led by Roger Harmer, has said that no official settlement was ever agreed by the council itself.

Harmer said that his minority coalition would not be rushed into a deal.



Cotton had said that compensatory payments to the hundreds of bin workers had been 'agreed'. This was just a pathetic attempt by Labour to save itself at the May elections- and it didn't work!

The Labour council paid scabs to break the strike. Police attacked picket lines and army officers were employed to help in the strike-breaking operation. Workers responded to

the breaking up of picket lines by mounting mass pickets. The Labour council used Section 14 of the Public Order Act to attack pickets. However, the determination of the bin workers increased. The

Unite bureaucracy could not think beyond a legal challenge, when the police began breaking up picket lines. It was workers themselves organising mass action that led to increasing confidence.

The council attempted to enlist firefighters to clear rubbish. However, firefighters responded with a categorical rejection of such action.



Photograph by BRUM SP

The Unite union, to which the 400 striking bin workers belong, failed to organise massively. In addition, Sharon Graham, leader of Unite, has sabotaged the demands of the bin workers by replacing them with a so-called “fair settlement” which involved payments of lump sums of between £14,000 and £20,000. This fails to compensate the bin workers for many thousands of pounds lost in future earnings, and to challenge the new

conditions brought in by Labour. Whilst saying that Unite would give “unwavering support” to the strikers, she turned up on the picket lines just once in these long months of struggle.

All eyes should be on the Birmingham strike and how both the Liberal Democrats and the Greens react. As for the ‘left’ union chief, Sharon Graham, she cannot be trusted. She sent her emissaries to negotiate

secretly with Reform, who were in danger of seizing Birmingham Council, before being blocked by Harmer’s coalition. She did not consult with the striking bin workers over this squalid manoeuvre with the hard right party. To avoid defeat, the bin workers will need to increasingly look to their own independent organisation and to extend the fight to other council workers and beyond.

The Lucas Plan: 50 years on

50 years ago the workers at Lucas Aerospace produced an Alternative Plan as a response to threatened job losses and restructuring. The plan was developed by the Joint Shop Stewards Combine, representing staff and manual worker unions on all the fifteen sites throughout the U.K. The Combine had been established to help great an effective united movement which could resist management’s efforts to use divide and rule tactics.

From:

<https://lucasplan.co.uk/>

“Around half of Lucas Aerospace output supplied military contracts. Since this depended upon public

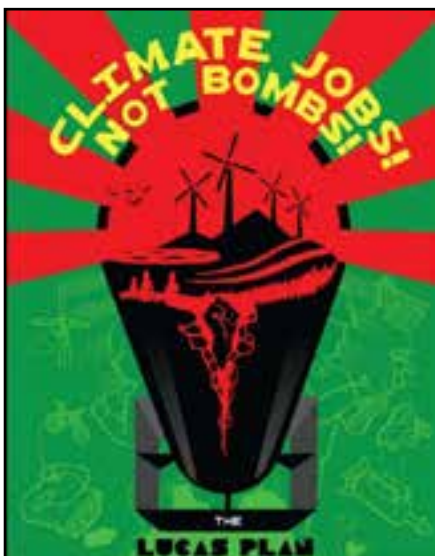
funding, as did many of the civilian contracts, the Combine argued that state support would be better put to developing products that society needed, rather than the state supporting workers through paying redundancy money when they were put out of work.

Initially the Combine approached outside organisations for suggested products. After receiving only three replies from 180 outside bodies, the Combine circulated questionnaires to the workforce requesting product suggestions which answered a social need and could be produced using the workforces existing skills and plant technology.

Emphasis was also to be put on the way the products were to be made, making sure that workers were not to be deskilled in the process of producing them.

150 product ideas were put forward by the workforce. From them, products were selected to fall into six categories: medical equipment, transport vehicles, improved braking systems, energy conservation, oceanics, and telechiric (robotics) machines. Specific proposals included, in the medical sector, an expansion of 40% in the production of kidney dialysis machines, which at that time were being manufactured on one of

the L.A. sites. The Combine 'regarded it was scandalous that people could be dying for the want of a kidney machine when those who could be producing them are facing the prospect of redundancy'. In the energy sector, proposals included the development of heat pumps, solar cell technology, wind turbines and fuel cell technology. In transport, a new hybrid power pack for motor vehicles and road-rail vehicles. Later, the Combine produced a road-rail bus, which toured the country." The plan was rejected. The company refused to change from their aerospace focus and the government did nothing to put pressure on this public-funded company. Meanwhile Lucas Aerospace, as a company in its own right, no longer exists, parts of it having been sold off, while other parts no longer exist. It is clear then, as now, that profits come before any strategy to produce products that are actually useful, and cause no harm.



The current situation, with war fever and a climate emergency, shows that the vision of the Lucas Aerospace workers is needed more than ever. The anti-war and environmental movements are largely separate from workplace organising. However, the movement for the necessary revolutionary change must be a united one, based firmly in the working class and willing to not only make demands of government but to challenge capitalism directly. Those at the point of production, who have the power to bring everything to a halt, have a critical role. Imagine port workers refusing to let imported Brazilian soya into the country. Imagine the fossil fuel workers refusing to work anymore and demanding full pay until they get alternative jobs. Unfortunately, many in the current trade union movement, in particular Sharon Graham of Unite, fully support any industry as long as it creates jobs. She

supports the Third Runway at Heathrow and argues for a rearmament programme. This shows that she is firmly behind capitalism where workers can continue to be exploited producing products that cause misery and destruction for both people and planet.

This is why we need to revitalise the interest in alternative plans, under direct control of the workers, and which incorporate at least a vision of a different society.

Workers at the Belfast shipyards, threatened with closure, have plans for producing infrastructure for renewable energy. In Italy, workers at a closed car factory are putting proposals forward for an alternative green production plan. (<https://labourhub.org.uk/2023/12/22/italian-car-workers-fight-for-alternative-green-production-plan/>).

We can draw on these examples and take them to other workplaces.

Employment Rights Act:

We need to rely on ourselves

The Employment Rights Act (ERA) became law last December 2025, though many of its provisions are still to come into force. Its proponents and defenders often describe it as biggest improvement to workers' rights for a generation - depressingly they are probably right, even if not in quite the way they mean. The ERA does confer improved legal benefits for workers, both individually and collectively, and is almost certainly superior to anything introduced by any government for over a quarter of a century. But it is highly limited, focussed on individual rather than collective rights and the development and enforcement of it is already flawed.

While in opposition the Labour Party talked up its intentions to improve rights for workers by "banning zero hours contracts", establishing "day one" employment rights for workers, to "outlaw fire and rehire", and more. Yet even before the 2024 General Election pressure from bosses had the Labour Party backtracking on some of

these pledges, which were furthered watered down after the election as the bill went through parliament.

By the time the Act became law zero hour contracts were limited rather than banned, the qualifying period for unfair dismissal claims was six months rather than day one, "fire and rehire" had not been banned but had been restricted to a limited extent. In terms of collective rights some existing anti-trade union legislation was rolled back, the Minimum Service Levels Act 2023 was repealed, the mandate for legal industrial action after a ballot increased from six to twelve months, and the 50% turnout threshold for ballots for industrial action to be removed (although this element has not come into effect at the time of going to print).

In addition, in October 2025, Matthew Taylor, a former Blair adviser, who had worked for the May government was appointed as CEO of the Fair Work Agency (FWA), the agency that was created by the ERA as responsible for enforcing workers' rights. Taylor

has announced strategic priorities for the FWA would include "reducing regulatory burdens". While trade unions bosses have made some verbal criticisms there has been little real fightback about the Labour Party's capitulation to employers interests.

Overall, the ERA provides a good example of how the state, parliamentary parties and large trade unions cannot be relied upon in the fight for better conditions for workers (let alone the securing of control of work by workers). 'Employment rights' are fundamentally nonsensical, the aim of the state is to support capital in exploiting workers, what rights workers have are those that they have forced from the state and capital via their own actions. While workers can, and should, look for opportunities that might arrive out of the ERA or other 'employment rights', ultimately we must rely on ourselves in the fight against bosses - that means organising together, joining up struggles where we can and looking for new opportunities to develop our class power.

The British General Strike of 1926:

An Anarchist Communist Critique

The British General Strike of May 1926 remains one of the defining moments in the history of the British labour movement. Although it lasted only nine days, it has entered working-class memory alongside Peterloo, Tolpuddle, the Great Unrest of 1911-14, the 1984-85 Miners' Strike and the Wapping dispute. The strike emerged from the economic crisis that followed the First World War. After wartime state control and increased demand, Britain's coal industry faced declining exports and growing international competition. Mine owners sought to restore profits by cutting wages and extending working hours, while miners resisted further attacks on already impoverished living standards. Under the leadership of the militant A.J. Cook, the Miners' Federation adopted the slogan: "Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day."

In 1925, the Conservative government temporarily subsidised the coal

industry after mine owners announced wage cuts, delaying confrontation in what became known as "Red Friday." However, the subsidy was only temporary.



The Samuel Commission later recommended industrial reorganisation while accepting wage reductions. At the same time, the government quietly prepared for industrial conflict by stockpiling supplies and organising emergency measures.

When negotiations collapsed in April 1926, the mine owners locked out over a million miners. On 3 May, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) reluctantly called a General Strike in support of them. Around 2.5 million workers from transport, printing, steel and other key industries withdrew their labour, making it the largest industrial dispute in British history. After only nine days, however, the TUC called off the strike without securing guarantees for the miners, who continued alone for several months before returning to work on worse terms. The defeat weakened organised labour for a generation.

The General Strike was significant because it demonstrated that society depends upon the labour of working people. Transport stopped, newspapers ceased publication, and large sections of industry ground to a halt. Workers showed that they possessed enormous collective power capable

of disrupting capitalist society. Yet this potential remained unrealised. From an anarchist communist perspective, the strike illustrates both the strength of working-class solidarity and the limitations imposed by reformist trade union leadership and the absence of revolutionary organisation.

Anarchist communism argues that social transformation requires workers to self-organise independently of the bureaucratic leadership of the trade unions and for anarchists to organise themselves around shared political principles, direct democracy, federalism and collective responsibility and to insert themselves into these self-organised movements of the working class.

The greatest weakness of the General Strike lay in the strategy of the TUC leadership. They viewed the strike not as a challenge to capitalism but as a negotiating tactic designed to pressure the government into compromise. Although millions of workers had effectively demonstrated their ability to stop the country functioning, union leaders repeatedly insisted that the strike was purely industrial and had no political objectives. This contradiction fatally limited the movement.

Trade union officials occupy a position distinct from ordinary workers. Their role centres on

negotiating between labour and capital and avoiding revolutionary confrontation. Consequently, they feared the independent development of working-class power almost as much as the government did. The TUC called the strike reluctantly, tightly controlled its development and abruptly ended it without consulting the rank and file or securing victory for the miners.

The strike also exposed the importance of workers' self-organisation. Across Britain, local Councils of Action coordinated strike activity, organised food distribution, transport and communications, and demonstrated the capacity of ordinary people to manage society collectively. These bodies hinted at an alternative form of social organisation based upon direct democracy. However, they remained subordinate to the trade union bureaucracy and never developed into independent centres of workers' power capable of directing the struggle nationally.

The government's response confirmed another central anarchist communist argument: the state is not a neutral institution but an instrument for defending ruling-class interests. Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin's government prepared extensively before the strike, recruiting around 100,000 volunteer strike-breakers, including Oxbridge University

students and former military officers, enrolling approximately 200,000 special constables, deploying troops where necessary and ensuring that essential services continued under state control. The state coordinated strike-breaking and protected capitalist interests throughout the dispute.

However, repression alone does not explain the defeat. Governments can be expected to defend existing social relations. The decisive question is whether workers possess the organisation and political confidence necessary to challenge them. In 1926, the labour movement had immense industrial strength but lacked revolutionary coordination and an alternative strategy independent of reformist leadership.

The General Strike also demonstrated that a general strike inevitably becomes political. Once millions withdraw their labour simultaneously, questions arise over who controls production, transport, communications and ultimately society itself. By refusing to acknowledge these political realities, the TUC effectively disarmed the movement. Workers were mobilised on a scale that challenged the existing order but were offered no strategy for extending their power beyond industrial protest. Whilst the capitalist class organised themselves for all out-class



Transport workers were among those who went on strike along with the miners

war the trade unions were desperate not to cause any trouble.

For anarchist communists, the strike also illustrates the limits of spontaneity. The courage and solidarity displayed by workers were extraordinary, but courage alone does not produce effective strategy. Without organised revolutionary forces capable of offering political direction and challenging bureaucratic leadership, even the most powerful movements risk confusion, compromise and defeat. The absence of a strong anarchist communist organisation meant that radical possibilities remained largely unrealised. While mass action is essential, spontaneous struggle alone cannot overcome the organised power of the state and capitalism. Revolutionary organisation is necessary to provide

political clarity, coordinate struggles and encourage workers' self-management.

Despite its failure, the General Strike should not simply be remembered as a defeat. It demonstrated remarkable solidarity across industries and regions, with millions accepting hardship in defence of fellow workers. It also exposed the gulf between the aspirations of ordinary workers and the caution of their official leaders. These experiences shaped later generations of militants seeking forms of organisation based upon direct democracy rather than bureaucratic mediation.

The lessons remain relevant today. The General Strike showed that workers possess the collective power to bring capitalist society to a standstill. It also demonstrated that industrial action alone

cannot secure fundamental social change. Successful revolutionary movements require democratic organisation rooted in workplaces and communities, political clarity and the ability to coordinate struggles independently of reformist institutions.

Trade unions remain essential for defending workers' immediate interests,

but they cannot by themselves become instruments of social revolution. Revolutionary transformation depends upon workers exercising direct control over their own struggles through democratic organisations while building revolutionary political organisations capable of linking immediate struggles with the wider goal of a free, classless and stateless society.

The British General Strike revealed both the promise and the limitations of mass industrial action. Its defeat was not proof that revolutionary change is impossible, but that the collective power of the working class must be matched by revolutionary organisation, political clarity and democratic self-management if future struggles are to succeed.



Anarchist Communist Group

Email: info@anarchistcommunism.org

Facebook: [AnarchistCommunistGroup](https://www.facebook.com/AnarchistCommunistGroup)

Instagram: [anarchistcommunistgrp](https://www.instagram.com/anarchistcommunistgrp)

www.anarchistcommunism.org



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.

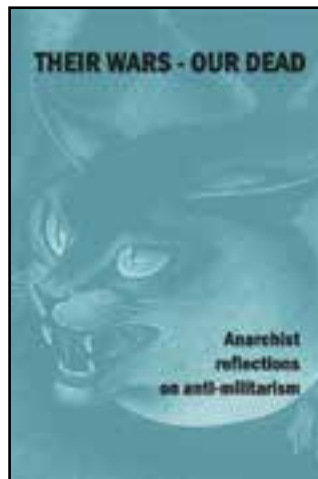
We are committed to building an effective organisation that works towards the common goal of anarchist communism, in cooperation with other working class organisations and in grass roots campaigns.

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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