



The union forever?

The strikes by public sector workers, by university workers, by the women at Gate Gourmet have all made people begin to wonder whether the unions are finally beginning to fight for us again. As anarchist communists we believe that the reasons the unions give for calling strikes aren't always what they seem.

Sadly, the many years of industrial defeat have meant the union story that they are fighting for their members has been swallowed far too easily.

Now though, with the great pension's sell-out, millions will be feeling disappointed in their unions once again. How can we explain what they have done?

The union bosses want to be 'social partners', they want to go back to the good old days of regular talks with industry, of beer and sandwiches with the Prime Minister. But partners have to do deals, to scratch each others' backs. In the real world they end up helping the bosses impose the changes they feel are necessary. They help impose job cuts, like at Gate Gourmet, they help speed up production, and they help make us produce more for less – calling this productivity.

Unions traditionally did two things. First they managed the sale of our labour power and struggles for limited working class gains. But as their very existence relies on capitalism's existence, they have to support that too. They cannot be revolutionary.

Offensive action that threatens to pose any wider questions beyond the immediate economic horizon will be fought as being dangerous to the continued existence of the union itself.

The past thirty years have seen the unions ignored. They could not operate effectively because of new labour legislation, intimidation and defeat after defeat of strikes. The most they could hope for was a quiet word in the ear of Labour politicians in the hope that they'd listen. Now the union leaders use strikes to make themselves impor-



tant, not to benefit their members. Unions exist for the bureaucrats, not for the members.

This has been highlighted recently by the pensions strike farce. The seven unions involved used the mass walkouts get themselves into the management of the proposed changes. They agreed to effectively drop the demands to keep the "rule of 85" as soon as they were became part of the institutional process.

Another example is in France during the protests against the new young people's employment laws (the CPE). The unions used these to bolster their own position as 'social partners' with the French state. They now plan to administer almost the exact same proposals that were defeated but now given a new name and broken up into different schemes.

This job of imposing capital's demands is one that unions are playing across the European Union, through the European Trade Union Confederation (headed by John Monks) who supported the 'Lisbon Strategy'. This is to help European capital com-

pete with the US and Asia by raising productivity, lowering wages, slashing social budgets and imposing 'flexibility'...

Five years after the plan was first introduced, and after millions of jobs have been lost, after conditions have worsened from millions they issued a joint statement affirming their support and urging that the elements that have yet to be put into place are done as soon as possible. The unions now openly back Capital.

How can this be squared with the reams of left-wing sounding talk from the unions each time there's a strike? It can't. What can be clearly seen though is the unions' use of struggles to cement their own positions. We can see the absolute impossibility of either 're-claiming' or radicalising the unions from within via rank-and-file organising. This is dead - as dead as the conditions which originally gave rise to those strategies. We now have to ask the question of what collective work-place activity can be taken that is able to confront these problems. This is something we all have to work out together.

ON THE FRONTLINE

This month we'll take a closer look at the dispute at the Asda distribution depots and offer some wider points about the way in which unions are operating in this county. The dispute over union recognition had escalated to the verge of a national strike but was called off by the GMB union hours before it was due to start. The GMB have painted this as a historic victory, as the first time Wal-Mart the notorious anti-worker owners of Asda have been forced into recognising a collective bargaining agreement (not a single one of their million employees in the US is in a union). A closer look though reveals that all the agreement has done is give the union itself a place at the negotiating table and actually removes responsibility away from the workers themselves upwards to those appointed by the union – it effectively carries on what seems to be the main role of unions today - getting their feet under the table at any cost, even of sweeping the workers demands under the carpet.

Asda workers have been under attack from the management for some time now. Secret plans to increase their workload by 45% added to plans to remove rights to breaks, as well as being caught and fined for attempting to bribe workers to leave the union led to a very militant attitude towards this dispute with many wanting to push for all of these things to be addressed right now - instead the union has told them to shut up, let us deal with it and we'll eventually (maybe) get around to it. A virtual kick in the teeth for those workers who were prepared to put their livelihood on the line over this - as well as a refusal to strike when the iron was hot in a sector in which competition is leading to direct assaults on current conditions right across the board, a real victory here would have boosted the morale and will to fight of other workers in this sector - the other large union in the field is USDAW which is even worse than the GMB and is practically in bed with Tesco management, suggesting and implementing plans to get rid of workers sick days etc. It's clear that the official unions are going to have to be bypassed if the attacks are to be halted - that means workers organising directly with other workers and the local communities and fighting on their own interests not those of the union tops.

BASTARD OF THE MONTH: JOHN REID

When Tony Blair needs a bit of muscle, there's always John Reid there to intimidate rebels, and provide spin in the media with his inimitable thuggish bluster.

As Secretary for Northern Ireland, he carried on the good old tradition of whitewashing the use of plastic bullets, the employment of which often has serious consequences.

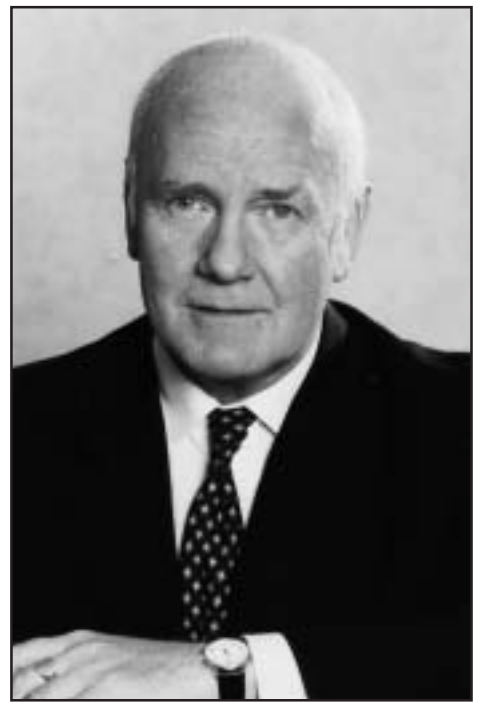
When hundreds of thousands took to the streets to mark the third anniversary of the war in Iraq, Wee Johnny Boy, then Defence Secretary, said that they were siding with "terrorists".

"When people go on the streets of London today, I do wish just occasionally they would go out in support of the United Nations, the Iraqi people and the Iraqi democrats, and condemn terrorists," he said. He went on to say that civil war was neither "imminent nor inevitable," when it is obvious that that is exactly what is now happening in Iraq.

He spluttered that tabloid papers would not dictate government policy, then after tabloid uproar over a paedophile sentence, pandered to the gutter press and clashed with the Attorney General.

Now in a new post as Home Secretary, he lost no time in blaming his predecessor Charles Clarke, when he got into trouble over asylum seekers, when it was patently obvious that he was as much to blame for his lack of grasp of the situation.

"Attack Dog" Reid then fancied himself as someone from out of the Sweeney or Starsky and Hutch, joining police on 5am dawn raids in London. He forgot that Home Sec-



retaries are not supposed to be present at any such police actions, and that that could seriously jeopardise any case.

But to finish with, let's cast our minds back to January, when he was still Defence Secretary. He was just then sending troops into a notoriously Taliban-ridden part of Afghanistan. He expressed the opinion that British troops would leave Afghanistan without firing a single shot. Now five British soldiers are dead and others injured (not to mention how many Afghans killed and maimed in their villages). Britain is now bogged down in both Iraq and Afghanistan and lives are being needlessly wasted. John Reid, bastard? Yep!

G8 PROTESTS IN A POLICE STATE: CALL FOR SOLIDARITY

Russian anarchists struggle to organise anti-summit protests under an authoritarian regime. According to a statement from a group of anarchists in St. Petersburg (Piter), 'The main difficulties of holding actions in Piter during the summit are connected with the police regime, which has been strengthened by the authorities before the summit. The city is stuffed with police, who constantly check documents. There are video cameras in the central streets. The police received special armoured vehicles to disperse street demonstrations'

Like in neighbouring Belarus, well-known for its dictatorship, protests are automatically illegal if not sanctioned by the authorities. Anarchists have had to meet in secret, sometimes in nearby forests, in order to discuss plans for the G8. Additional problems are caused by limited resources to accommodate people travelling to Russia. The Second Russian Social Forum has organised a stadium on an island for people to stay but most

will not be keen to put themselves into what is an obvious trap for police attacks.

Despite such serious obstacles to anarchist activity, people are still planning a variety of events, though they stress that the kind of street actions that have been organised in other places will not be encouraged, due to the enormous forces waged against the small anarchist movement.

Though it will be impractical in terms of money and logistics for many people to go to Piter, we can still organise actions in our own countries to support those protesting in Russia. There is a call for a Global Day of Action on July the 14th. In addition, we must be prepared to organise solidarity actions against the repression, doing what we can to show our support for those who are struggling to build an anarchist movement in such difficult circumstances. For more information contact the Network against the G8 which can be found on www.nadir.org or ru.indymedia.org.



LATIN LEFTIES

There's been a lot of changes in the Latin American political landscape in the last few years. From Brazil a few years ago to Bolivia and Chile most recently, many Labour style governments have been given office. There's also some more long standing ones, like Hugo Chavez in Venezuela who is still proving to be controversial, after some years in power. Many of them have won elections after big social movements ousted previous conservative governments, like Evo Morales in Bolivia. Others like Lula's PT in Brazil had been running unsuccessfully for decades.

Regardless of how they were appointed they all share one characteristic. Huge social movements have been simmering in Latin America for the last decade or so, and it is on the wings of these peasants, workers, students, etc. that they have been projected to the top job. These social movements usually involved bitter struggles, brutally repressed by conservative and neo-liberal governments, with anti-riot police killing dozens of people. In certain cases they brought the country to the brink of a civil war, like in Bolivia, or came close to a revolutionary insurrection, as in Argentina. Usually these movements originate in the misery brought to big swathes of the population by neo-liberal policies dictated from Western business centres, and implemented by subservient governments. People already poor have been deprived of basic services, like clean water, so the price of shares

'WANNABE COP' TV

A digital TV channel in East London has launched a proposal with the slogan "combat crime from your couch". For £15 a month Shoreditch TV offers the chance to plug in to 400 surveillance cameras in the neighbourhood. If you see someone who you think is dodgy, you can send an anonymous message to the police, thanks to a wireless keyboard supplied with the subscription. The first 3 months are free. The scheme was thought up by the Labour controlled council and is partly financed by the European Union and the government to the tune of £12 million

Video surveillance is an attack on civil and individual liberties. It is a supplementary instrument of social control. As well as being a useful election promise for demagogues, it attacks the consequences and not the causes of poverty, allowing for State surveillance of society. Dangerous today, tomorrow it can be the instrument of totalitarian power. Power divides in order to rule. If people act as cops and spy on each other, power can sleep easily. Tell ShoreditchTV what you think: www.digitalbridge.org.uk/sdtv/crimechannel.php

would rise in Western markets. Probably the big bosses are the only ones surprised that it blew up.

But it is a sorry price for these movements to have just replaced one government for another. As Evo Morales said: "Vote for me. I'm the only person who can stop a revolution in Bolivia." And he was probably right. Having Labour style governments in power is the best way to deter a dissatisfied people. By giving them false hopes of reform they distract them from achieving the more profound changes that are required to end poverty in Latin America. But in reality these governments provide close to nothing, apart from a fiery anti-US rhetoric. Brazil's Workers Party government has been tainted by corruption allegations, and has heavily repressed movements like the Sem Terra, of landless peasants. Hugo Chavez has opened natural reserves, protected before, to exploitation by multinationals. On the other hand he has undertaken a massive rearming programme, and he is likely to resort to war and nationalism if his populist rhetoric runs out of steam. Evo Morales has "nationalised" Bolivia's gas reserves in a way that the big corporations have lost just a 3% of their shares, and still own a 49% of the national resources.

Certainly, that is still better than the horrible repression that was the norm at the time of the fascist dictatorships. But the peoples in Latin America (and indeed everywhere else) deserve better.

SEND OUT THE LIONS



We wonder if Christians who criticize 'Jerry Springer the Opera' being shown at various venues around the country have actually read the Bible? We are puzzled (well not really) how the ever smiling, happy-clappy, Jesus-loves-you brigade can hold up this 'Holy' book as a source of "morality" when it contains not only idiocy but pure malice.

For example 'God' (sic) states in Deuteronomy 28:53: "And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy GOD hath given thee."

Also: "Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones..." (Psalm 137:9)

It seems cannibalism and infanticide is OK! Maybe before trying to ban people's enjoyment of a lighthearted opera, Christians should discover what the mythical, man-made "God" and "Jesus" actually said!

TIME BOMB



General Strike 1926

The 1926 General Strike was the climax of increasing class struggle in Britain since World War 1. During the war, the miners, dockers and railway workers formed the Triple Alliance which united almost one million workers! In 1919 an all out showdown was averted only by union and government deceit. 1920 actually saw a General Strike threatened to stop British attacks on Russia. 1921 saw another confrontation after government announcements of selling off the mines and coal owners instantly introducing wage cuts.

The coal bosses were the first to announce wage cuts. The TUC said they'd place themselves "unreservedly at the disposal of the Miners' Federation." It was clear to all that something big was going to happen. Baldwin introduced a 9 month subsidy to maintain the mines while an inquiry into the mining industry was set up. The Tories were not interested in reports. It was a ploy to buy time for the preparation of all out class warfare. Even the unions knew this. Arthur James Cook, ex-Communist Party member and union leader said that "we [the unions] shall be faced with the greatest struggle... ever known and we are preparing for it."

Union leaders were shitting themselves at the possibility of a General Strike. JR Clynes of the General and Municipal Workers union said clearly "I am not in fear of the capitalist class. The only class I fear is our own." Lloyd George had set up the Emergency Supply and Transport Committee in 1919 and beefed it up good and proper for Black Friday in 1921. It was built up and joined by the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies. The OMS were a nasty bunch of right-wing strike breakers including, amongst others, Fascists as members.

Three days before the showdown was to begin, the TUC General Council met for the first time. The TUC asked to speak to the PM, desperate to find some way out of this conflict. The TUC did nothing to organise the workers for battle, so the workers organised themselves.

On May 1, one million miners were locked out and the TUC took over the dispute. The miners' leaders came to the table and rejected the ridiculous sell-out negotiated by the TUC. As a 'compromise' was drawn

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TIME BOMB: GENERAL STRIKE 1926

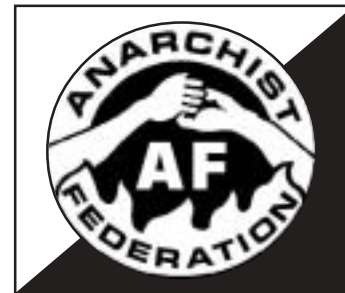
up, the state pulled out of talks after Daily Mail workers had staged an unofficial walk-out. The TUC, true to form, condemned the walk-out. The compromise was put to the miners' leaders who rejected it 12-6. The TUC General Council, however, was ready to accept it but found that by now the government wasn't listening.

A State of Emergency was called. Resources were stockpiled. Regional Civil Commissioners were given dictatorial powers and were ready to go into action. Army and Navy leave was cancelled and reinforcements were sent to Scotland, South Wales, London and Lancashire. Warships docked all over Britain. The OMS handed its services to the government.

By now there were 4 million workers out on strike who were willing to fight. Transport was crippled with London being solid. Nothing moved unless the workers said it could move. Churchill started printing the British Gazette whose sole aim was to print lies about the strike. In response the TUC produced The British Worker. All it did was try to keep control of the millions of men and women involved in the strike. Jimmy Thomas of the TUC admitted to the Commons on May 13 that "If by any chance it should have got out of the hands of those who would be able to exercise some control, every sane man knows what would have happened...that fear was always in our minds". But locally, the workers were very well organised. Councils of Action were set up organising transport, picketing, entertainment and financial as-

sistance for those in need. East Fife set up a workers defence militia which had a membership of 700 and had regular clashes with state forces. In many areas, workers produced high-quality strike bulletins. All this, however, was condemned by the TUC. Control of roads, transport and distribution was in the hands of the Councils of Action. However, their main failing was in not co-ordinating nationally.

Russia gave the British Communist Party their lead, saying "this is not a revolutionary movement. It is a simple wage dispute." A General Strike, Councils of Action and dual power in parts of the country?!! It may have been over miners' pay but everyday it was increasing the confidence of the working class. The TUC called for workers to "Be loyal to instructions and trust your leaders." Those leaders who all the while were looking for a way out. Once they realised the ruling class wasn't budging, they saw only one option, all out surrender. Excuses like people drifting back to work (when workers were coming out everyday) were used to justify the sell-out. There was no guarantee that strikers would be protected from victimisation, or of further negotiations and an end to the lock-out. On May 11, just one week into a strike growing in confidence, the TUC called off the strike. Union leaders claimed "assurances had been given". After the strike, over 3,000 people were prosecuted and wages were slashed. The working class had been betrayed and the bosses took their advantage.



The **Anarchist Federation** is an organisation of **class struggle** anarchists aiming to abolish capitalism and all oppression to create a free and equal society. This is **Anarchist Communism**.

We see today's society as being divided into two main opposing classes: the **ruling class** which controls all the power and wealth, and the **working class** which the rulers exploit to maintain this. By racism, sexism and other forms of oppression, as well as war and environmental destruction the rulers weaken and divide us. Only the **direct action** of working class people can defeat these attacks and ultimately overthrow capitalism.

As the capitalist system rules the whole world, its destruction must be complete and world wide. We reject attempts to reform it, such as working through parliament and national liberation movements, as they fail to challenge capitalism itself. Unions also work as a part of the capitalist system, so although workers struggle within them they will be unable to bring about capitalism's destruction unless they go beyond these limits.

Organisation is vital if we're to beat the bosses, so we work for a united anarchist movement and are affiliated to the International of Anarchist Federations.

The Anarchist Federation has members across Britain and Ireland fighting for the kind of world outlined above.

If you're interesting in joining contact us at:

Anarchist Federation,
BM ANARFED,
London, WC1N 3XX.
Email: info@afed.org.uk
Also visit: www.afed.org.uk
and www.iaf-ifa.org

Subscriptions to **resistance** costs £4 from the address above for 12 issues. A two issue subscription to our magazine, **Organise! for revolutionary anarchism**, is also £4.

You can subscribe to **resistance** by email for free via the website above.

SUBVERT!

When going on demonstrations stay sober, don't talk to the police and if you're arrested give only your name and address then say 'no comment' to any other questions. For more info visit: www.ldmg.org.uk

July

10th - Big Aldermaston Blockade. Resist Britain's WMD programme - Stop the next generation of nuclear weapons! Corporate war profiteers and their military masters are building new nuclear weapons facilities at Britain's nuclear bomb factory at Aldermaston in Berkshire. Come and join us for a big and practical/active NVDA blockade of the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Aldermaston and block the builders working on the new facilities. Visit: www.blockthebuilders.org.uk/action

14-16th - Hazards 2006 - gathering for trade union safety reps and activists discussing safety in the workplace. Organised by National Hazards Campaign and Greater Manchester Hazards Centre, at University Of Manchester. For details tel: 0161 636 7558 email: hazconf@gmhazards.co.uk visit: www.gmhazards.org.uk

15th - Day school on young people and asylum. Hackney Refugee and Migrant Support Group is holding a day school on young people and asylum, with workshops on laws, social & health needs, detention and other issues which affect

young asylum seekers. 10am-4.30pm, free entrance, at The Old Fire Station, 61 Leswin Road, Stoke Newington, London N16 7NY. Email: pierre@hclc.org.uk

19th - The Horror of War Demo with creative ways of showing bomb component manufacturers EDO MBM the true horror of war. 4-6pm, Outside EDO, Home Farm Road, Brighton. Visit: www.smashedo.org.uk

29 July-12th August - Trident Ploughshares - International Disarmament Camp, Coulport, Scotland. 15 days of direct disarmament actions at Faslane and Coulport naval bases. At the Peaton Glen Wood campsite, half a mile from the Coulport base, by the shores of Loch Long. Visit: www.tridentploughshares.org/article983

August

16-20th - Earth First! Summer Gathering in West Wales. For anyone interested in direct action for people and planet. This is not a festival but a chance to meet, discuss and plan. Food provided by Anarchist Teapot - 3 vegan meals for £4 a day. £15 to pay for running costs. There will be talks, stalls, workshops, kids space, teens space, camping areas. No dogs. If you would like to help with the gathering, give workshops, etc contact soon. See web site for more details, posters, leaflets etc - actual location will be published on website one month before. Visit: www.earthfirstgathering.org.uk Email: efgathering@aktivix.org Tel: 0845 223 5254