

# REBEL WORKER

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL



Sydney, Australia

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Paper of the Anarcho-Syndicalist Network 50c

Only Direct Action on the Job  
can foil lemma N.S.W. Govt's  
Privatisation Rampage!



**NEW GOVT. CENSORSHIP POWERS;  
N.S.W. RAIL NEWS; STATE TRANSIT  
NEWSFLASH; MARITIME TRANSPORT  
NEWS; CANADA; IRELAND; SPANISH  
LABOUR NEWS; RUSSIAN STRIKE WAVE;  
BRITAIN TODAY; FRENCH RAIL STRIKES;  
ITALIAN SYNDICALIST STRUGGLES;  
BOOK REVIEW CORNER;**

Rebel Worker is the bi-monthly Paper of the A.S.N. for the propagation of anarcho-sindicalism in Australia.

Unless otherwise stated, signed Articles do not necessarily represent the position of the A.S.N. as a whole. Any contributions, criticisms, letters or

Comments are welcome.

REBEL WORKER

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## National News

### LOOMING FINANCIAL CRISIS

**Anybody who thinks the world is on the brink of an economic collapse needs to think again. Capitalism has caught a minor cold; it is not as many commentators are reporting on its death bed. The current credit squeeze will cull out the more debt ridden corporations allowing other less leveraged corporations to enjoy the spoils of war. That is not to say that the private sector and the community are not facing a major problem. Once again the tax payer is being asked to fill a financial black hole caused by the activities of unaccountable corporations.**

The major central banks around the world are busily pumping taxpayers dollars into the private sector hoping to bail them out of trouble. Socialising the losses and privatising the profits is a game that is continually played by the private sector. Governments are so entwined with the capitalist system they have no option but to bail out the private sector when they run into trouble.

The consequences of a major credit squeeze could be catastrophic for many ordinary people. Faced with this situation, the taxpayer through State central banks is being asked to bail out the very corporations whose greed has put everybody at risk.

Capitalism as we are told every day of our lives, is the only economic system that can deliver the goods to the community. The negative effects of a system based on the creation of profits for majority shareholders, irrespective of the social, community and environmental costs, is being felt by everyone.

To continue to support an economic system based on greed that is willing to pocket the profits and demands socialisation of the losses makes no sense at all. The sooner we look at alternative economic models based on the satisfaction of real not manufactured human needs, the sooner the community does not have to foot the bill every time capitalism sneezes.

### BALI CONFERENCE

**Kenneth Davidson's article in The Age (17/12) on the Bali Conference ends with the intriguing question posed by Ian Dunlop – the Deputy Convenor of the Australian Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas – “how do we bring runaway capitalism into alignment with the sustainability of the planet and global society and indeed with democracy?”**

I'm afraid I have bad news for both Mr. Dunlop and Mr. Davidson – You cannot. Capitalism is an economic system under which the means of production, distribution and exchange are in large measure privately owned and directed. State capitalism is an economic system where the means of production distribution and exchange are predominantly owned by the State. Capitalism's survival whether privately or State owned is dependent on it generating ever increasing profits, irrespective of the human environmental and social costs. It is an economic system that flourishes in times of plenty. As long as it can create new markets and have access to new resources, it will continue to prosper.

Capitalism as an economic philosophy is ill equipped to deal with scarcity. Increasing population growth, finite resources and increasing environmental problems as a result of human activity have re-written the economic text books.

The principles that need to be applied to deal with scarcity cannot be put into practice by either the State or private corporations. The economics of scarcity revolve around co-operation, not competition and the common, not the private or State ownership of resources.

*Thanks to the Anarchist Age*

### NEW FEDERAL GOVT. CENSORSHIP POWERS

**In late November 2007, a new law was passed which greatly enhances Govt censorship powers regarding books. This legislation which was passed by both the House of Representatives and Senate, without any attention by the mainstream media allows the Govt to ban material which advocates terrorism.**

The definition of “terrorism” in the legislation is very vague and will allow the Govt to ban literature which it sees as “politically sensitive”. Such material can be officially seized by Customs or later taken off the shelf by the police.

The way the censorship would work is that “public complaints” about the material would be made and the State would seize the material. In practice various State Agencies would make “fake” public complaints which would be played up in the Media creating the pretext for State confiscation of the material.

Also on the censorship front, the Rudd Federal Govt is looking into legislation to allow the “filtering” of web sites using similar pretexts. Perhaps with a “Chinese” internet censorship model in mind.

*Thanks to “Alarm”*

## Rebel Worker Web Site -

# www.rebelworker.org

# N.S.W. RAILWAYS NEWS

## A Realistic Log Of Claims for Rail Workers?

Recently the rail unions released a log of claims that they claim were based on the answers to a workplace questionnaire that they circulated. It is highly unlikely, as the union claims suggest, that rail staff were calling for a review of leave loading or many of the other matters. Instead their log of claims is more likely to have been designed to fit in with the next enterprise bargaining agreement as outlined by management.

We decided to ask waged staff what should be included in their next EBA. The

previously free services, such as roads, are now privatised in favour of private toll ways. Private utilities cost much more for consumers.

We call for an immediate pay increase of 10% followed by yearly increments of at least 5% until our wages are bought up to parity with the real cost of living. We will never accept wage caps such as the one that is being imposed by the NSW State Government limiting us to a paltry 2.5% yearly increase, an increase well below the inflation rate.

### Shift penalties on all hours worked

Shift penalties are paid to workers for sac-

cutting measure that promotes a "race to the bottom" mentality that declares war on workers and pits one worker against another.

When there are \$10's millions of taxpayers dollars wasted on corporate deals such as the failed "T" Card we should be holding politicians accountable. The \$65million poured down the drain of the "T Card" project will not be saved by cutting the wages and conditions of rail workers who keep the system running on a day to day basis.

In any event, as labour costs for rail workers fall, as they hope, jobs are more likely to be privatised and outsourced simply because workers are more efficient in the eyes of politicians and the private sector.

### Family Leave to be paid from Sick Pay allocation

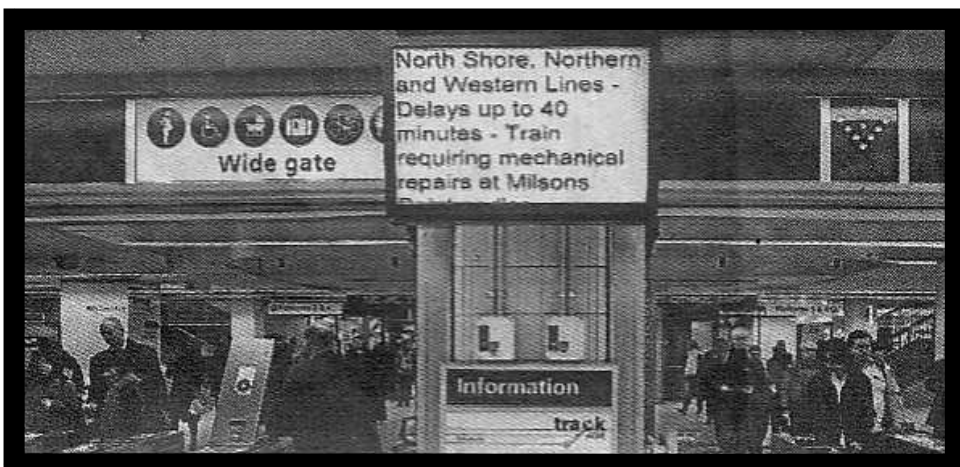
Employee's are forced to use accumulated leave, long service or holiday pay if they wish to be paid for time off caring for family members.

Our award is not clear on this matter. However, there been a long tradition in many industries for Family Leave to be paid from the cumulative sick pay allowance. The present arrangement reduces costs for RailCorp but causes hardship for many employees.

Employee's with sick spouses are being forced into using all of their holidays and Holiday Pay, along with their Long Service Leave, to survive a family crisis. Yet they may have a few thousand hours of sick pay left intact. This is unforgivable and heartless penny pinching on behalf of RailCorp management who should be doing their utmost to support their valued employees. Unfortunately the financial bottom line is more important to them than their own employee's well being.

### Incentives for not using Sick Pay

Rather than using the "big stick" approach for reducing unauthorised sick leave, staff could be paid an agreed portion of their unused sick pay as an incentive to reduce the use of sick pay overall. Alternatively staff could be offered other rewards (e.g. such as free travel for spouses or a points reward system similar to Frequent Flyer etc that could be redeemed at a later date).



"Realistic Log Of Claims" is an attempt to raise the issues as rail workers see them rather than through the eyes of "out of touch" union officials who have "forbidden" alteration to their "log of claims"

The push to secure our conditions is an ongoing project and we encourage railway wages staff to submit discussion and suggestions to Sparks magazine and to take part in workplace discussions where they occur. Here are some of the issues that open the discussion into the bargaining process.

### An immediate pay claim of 10%

An immediate pay rise based on the real cost of living. Fast rising mortgage rates and fuel and public transport costs are forcing working families onto struggle street. All shoppers know that there have been no price rise limits placed on the cost of fruit and vegetables and groceries. Also

rificing family and social life due to the odd hours of work that are required. Presently shift penalties are not paid on days worked as overtime, on public holidays or weekends. It makes no sense that a person working continuous morning shifts receives the same rate of pay for these days as someone who works night shift or afternoon shift.

We call for shift penalties to be paid across the board on all afternoon and night shifts worked regardless of where they fall on the roster. This is the norm in most other industries. This is how it should be, as family, community and social time is precious.

Whatever happened to the ACTU's campaign for "Work, Family, Life"?

### No "Trade Off's"

The idea that we must trade off working conditions and wage rises against productivity is not in our best interests. It is a cost

This could be calculated after each financial calendar year. We would not support any reduction of sick pay for legitimate cases of sickness or family hardship.

### Same conditions of employment for waged and salaried staff

At present waged staff are disadvantaged in comparison to salaried staff. This is despite waged employees being paid less and at a greater economic disadvantage. Salaried staff deserve these conditions, however the divide between them and waged workers needs to be bridged in the cause of equity. Salaried staff are not penalised on overtime shift penalties for claiming an absence. Waged staff on the other hand lose the penalties on any overtime worked for the number of days that they are sick.

Also, if a waged employee takes annual leave in the middle of a working fortnight, any overtime worked before taking leave for that fortnight is not paid at overtime rates. This is because waged employees

Due to the nature of shift work many employee's are time poor and often eat on the run. The availability of nutritious food in or near workplaces and depots is limited. The best way of ensuring that employees are maintaining a healthy and balanced diet is through a subsidised healthy food canteen.

This may be impractical at smaller locations, but at larger locations, especially where there are guards and drivers signing on and off, the move to staff canteens makes good sense. The healthy food idea should also be spread to staff canteens at the training college Petersham and other training locations. The food on offer there is often of poor nutritional standard, high in fats, carbohydrates and salt. The menu for subsidised canteens should be designed by a qualified dietician to ensure the healthiest food for rail staff.

Likewise sporting equipment and gymnasiums in or near the workplace would promote exercise and healthy lifestyles. Already RailCorp pays a modest subsidy to nominated health clubs for employees who want to use their facilities. However,

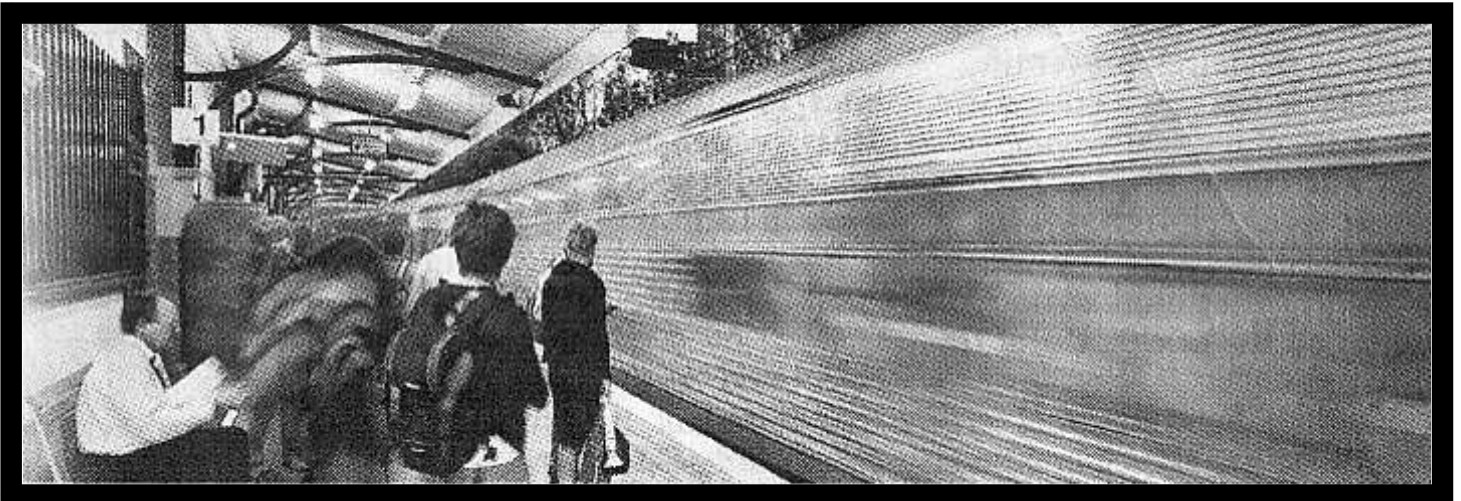
### Free Child Care facilities close to workplaces

A few years ago RailCorp was encouraging the participation of women into the railways through an equity program that had lots of merit. Targets of 50/50 gender representation were never met for a variety of reasons.

One important reason why targets were not met was the difficulties women faced with over childcare. Unfortunately in this society it is still regarded as a women's responsibility for raising and minding children.

It is highly irresponsible for a corporation to expect women to participate as fully functioning employees while worrying about the well-being of their child. Having child care facilities close or within workplaces means that no time is spent by the mother travelling to and from the child care centre before and after work. Child care facility hours could also be tailored to suit rail workers hours of work.

The hiring of care workers would be a



have to have worked 10 days before claiming overtime. This rule is grossly unfair and is an out and out rip-off of wages staff.

### Subsidised food canteens and gymnasiums in the workplace

RailCorp is targeting unhealthy employees through medical examinations as a way of improving health and safety. This is a misguided crusade wrought with issues of privacy and patient confidentiality but it also involves the best health interests of employees. However RailCorp do not acknowledge how their policies and procedures create sick and unhealthy employees. If they are serious in improving the overall health of employees they must provide facilities and working conditions which promote good health.

gymnasiums exclusively for the use of rail staff, close to workplaces, would do more to promote exercise and enhance the cultural outlook of an active and healthy lifestyle within the organisation. This also would only be viable at larger locations, although staff from smaller locations should be encouraged to attend facilities at larger locations. The benefits for RailCorp and for employees is mutual and would produce rewards beyond what is presently thinkable.

The old sporting clubs that existed within The Rail Institute hardly exist, if at all, and funding is no longer forthcoming from RailCorp for Institute facilities.

minimal cost to the organisation. Other organisations with far smaller budgets are able to achieve this quite successfully ie NRMA, several city banks, TAB.

### Clean and decent work facilities

While recognising the responsibility of employees to keep their own workplaces clean there has been a noted deterioration in the upkeep and thorough cleaning of work areas. Some areas are particularly grubby and are neither conducive to a healthy workplace nor to excellence. This has a lot to do with the prioritisation of work tasks according to a management order that deems that cleaning is a non-safety, non-operational specific task.

Maintenance of work areas is also a major concern. Some areas have been promised upgrades for years, yet employees are still forced to work in sub standard conditions while they wait.

### The greatest number of complaints are about:

\* Poorly commissioned or functioning air conditioning and inadequate ventilation of some rooms.\* Floor coverings \* Mouldy and putrid staff showers, toilets and change rooms\* Poorly installed computer

terminals and IT with desk clutter and untidy cabling.\* Excessive dust.\* Non-functional platform control rooms\* Inadequately serviced and fitted meal rooms\* Unpainted rooms and dirty walls

### Filling of "vacant" positions.

Presently there are hundreds of waged staff acting up in positions without being officially selected or appointed. This is particularly rife around the City Circle stations but also exists within Train Crewing and other areas. Few of these appoint-

ments have been made on the basis of merit. To eliminate growing cronyism in job appointments and the resentment that this causes in the workplace, all job vacancies should be advertised and filled in an open, equitable and ethical process, in the interests of fairness.

Under the old "Seniority" selection process this situation would not have arisen. It is still our preferred method of job selection. "Merit Selection" on the other hand is open to the subjectivity of certain managers and selection panels.

## STATE TRANSIT NEWSFLASH

### WAVERLEY DEPOT NEWS

#### Rebel Worker: What's happening with the union rep?

Waverley Busie: Recently the bosses tried to seize the opportunity to sack our union rep, Wendy, by blowing up an incident out of all proportion. This attempted savage attack, follows the actual sacking of Chris, the union rep at Port Botany. Is this all that management can do to build themselves up? Bashing union members and their delegates! Why don't they put their excess energy and strategizing into finding ways to create a new dawn for public transport in NSW by vastly improving bus services and getting cars off the road?

#### RW:: What do you think of the Iemma Govt's threats to sell off the Ferries and other Govt. owned industries?

WB: Three wise company bosses bearing fat brown paper envelopes for the NSW Rightwing ALP Faction Bosses are jockeying on the humps of their camels in the race to win the most lucrative contracts for the Ferry Services. I have also heard a rumour that the Iemma Govt. is planning to privatise the Illawarra Line.

#### RW: What's the latest with the War Memorial at Waverley Depot?

WB: The Flag at the Remembrance Memorial for those at the depot who died during various wars is in a very dilapidated state. As remembrance of who we are as workers, how about we get a new flag, boys? How about the Eureka Flag, the symbol of workers' revolt!

#### RW: What are your thoughts concerning AWA's (Australian Workplace Agreements)?

WB: Many workers have the false notion that the introduction of AWA's is a completely new Govt initiative. In fact indi-

vidual contracts were imposed on aboriginal workers in Northern Australia during the 19th and 20th Centuries. It proved to be quite a scam for the bosses and the Govt. As part of the contracts which the workers didn't understand, 75% of their wages was supposedly held in a trust fund for them, whilst they only received the remainder. With the aboriginal workers constantly moving to different workplaces and signing new contracts, details of the contracts were lost or deliberately mislaid. Consequently, the workers never received their correct entitlements. Only recently, following a long campaign has the Qld Beatty Govt agreed to pay a meagre amount of the wages due to them. So it's no wonder that aboriginal people in these areas are still angry with white people and have a lot of resentment as many worked for effectively nothing for much of their lives.

#### RW: What's the latest with the buses?

WB: The STA is still failing to take action on the dangerous situation of groups of up to 10 passengers standing in the centre of the turntable on the bendies. Recently I spoke with some union reps. OH&S (Occupational Health & Safety) people and others on the issue. Their remedy which seemed to me to be quite expensive, involved reducing the space in the concertina section for passengers to congregate. I argued that a less expensive way to go, would be the installation of a speaker and camera in the bus so the driver can request that passengers congregating in this area move to a safer area. Rather than relying on the passive approach favoured by the STA of just putting up signage for passengers not to stand in that area. The tackling of this safety issue is an urgent priority.

Some drivers are still having problems with standing passengers cramming in the front of the bus, and not directing them to

go to the back of the bus so as to even out those standing. I recently spoke to the driver of a bus where this problem was apparent. He told me "I don't even care about talking to people". Indicating a communication problem, some drivers have which the STA needs to focus upon through providing appropriate training courses to help remedy, rather than just focusing on the economics of transporting its precious cargo. I find it very sad that drivers are cutting themselves off from passengers and don't allow themselves to open lines of communication and so tackle the problem of passengers standing up front. I always try to communicate well with passengers and mix with them, so as to better handle these issues.

#### RW: What are your thoughts on the election of the Rudd ALP Government in the federal election?

WB: As time goes by we will see the true extent of Howard Govt's harmful policies. The wedge politics, secret wheeling and dealing and the provoking of hysteria which facilitated the pursuit of these policies will also be exposed.

Despite the demise of the Howard Govt. and Rudd's promises to remedy many of Howard's abuses, many on the Left side of politics are suspicious of Rudd and consider his Govt will be very much at the mercy of Big Business and won't be much different from the Liberals.

Don't take off "Your Rights at Work" badges and stickers, yet. We aren't out of the wood shed yet! The fight isn't over yet! We must put as much industrial pressure as possible on Rudd to drop Howard's IR Laws.

The most important issue confronting the ALP Federal and State Govts is the climate change and Green House Effect issue. It's much bigger than any previous issue



which we have confronted such as the Vietnam War or the Iraq War. It's an urgent priority that Governments greatly increase investment in infrastructure to combat green house gases and stop pandering to Big Business with the irresponsible massive investment on roads and freeways increasing ever more traffic into the city, such as the expansion of the Birkenhead Bridge.

**RW: What's been happening with the transit officers in the railways?**

WB: According to a very reliable source, recently a rogue element has been exposed not doing their job, which mostly involves checking tickets. The incident involved a serious case of harassment of a female passenger on an inner city station by some transit officers. On the pretext of drugs possession she was body searched by male transit officers. The mother of the woman and some passengers who observed the incident were quite angry and complained about it.

In taking this action, the officers involved were stretching the parameters of their authority. Four years ago I mentioned in Sparks another incident where transit officers were exceeding their authority. It involved the harassment of a lady's 50 year old invalid son at MacQuarie Fields Railway Station.

Why weren't the police called and the search of the woman conducted by female officers? The branch of RailCorp Management which oversees the transit officers needs to take urgent action to check out this incident and discourage any further high handed actions by rogue transit officers.

**RW: What were your impressions of the 75 years of State Transit Celebration?**

WB: It was held at Luna Park and the organisers did a good job. For the next 75 years there needs to be a major effort to get people out of their cars into bus seats and reduce green house gases. Recently 200 eminent scientists stated that oil consumption must be drastically reduced now to reduce green house gas emissions to avoid environmental disaster. There are alternatives to oil based fuel powered vehicles which could be introduced now such as electric cars, hydrogen powered buses just to name a few. Whilst oil based fuels are the most efficient, they are also the dirtiest. The problem is the huge influence that the Oil and Roads Lobby has over Governments which results in huge expenditure on measures which encourage vehicles powered by oil based fuels.

**RW: What's happening with the Travel 10's?**

WB: Lately I've noticed many cases of faulty Travel 10's. After 2-3 trips, the Travel 10's become faulty when run through the Green Machines, conse-

quently commuters are losing approx. \$12 from the \$15 spent on the ticket. It appears the manufacturer has produced a bad batch. I spoke to one lady recently about this problem, and she mentioned that she has tried to get her money back from where she purchased the faulty ticket, but without success. The STA should make it an urgent priority to ensure all commuters who have purchased faulty Travel 10's are issued with refunds.

**Brookvale Depot News, Opinion & Other Side of Story!**



**Rebel Worker - How come Drivers accepted 4% when they were claiming about 7%?**

Amigo - Well, I think it was out of frustration. Some I spoke to felt there was no choice. Their pay rise was cleverly delayed about 5 months. Inflation is moving etc.

Many Drivers are living on the edge, they simply cannot wait for a better deal.

**RW - With the 4% pa were there any giveaways?**

Amigo - Yes, although I was firstly informed that it would be a straight 4% without giveaways, this is not the case.

**RW - What are the major give a ways?**

Amigo - More power has been given to STA Managers to be able to harass those claiming their sickie rights e.g. when calling off sick they must call an STA nurse etc. They could be put on a sickie management program and could later be sacked etc. Check it out for accuracy. It's really a big giveaway!

**RW - Any other giveaways?**

Amigo - The other big give away I feel was to give the right to STA the right to change shifts by up to 2%! Can u imagine what they will do with that????

**RW - We heard there was another big giveaway? Something about forced overtime?**

Amigo - Oh yes, I think u are referring to up to half hour forced overtime i.e. if there is an emergency disruption to services, STA gave themselves the right to be able to ask you to sign off half hour later (or earlier??). Something like this....say your second half is four and a half hours and the Ferries are out, you could be told to work another half hour! Horrendous but I think it's true. Hard to believe, but check it out for accuracy. It need not be paid as overtime, unless you go over into overtime hours. Because shifts have been cut, it's unlikely that you will even get overtime because it might just be build up to normal hours.

**RW - Well this will save STA having to call people in for casual overtime or maintain expensive spare staff!**

Amigo - Probably, but it has been voted in. Only three depots as far as I know voted against the new EBA.

**RW - Who controlled the ballot?**

Amigo - Unlike previous occasions, the Electoral Office did not control the ballot which was run by the union.

**RW - That in itself is a big change and somewhat 'odd'.**

**RW - With high inflation of about 4% how can STA get Drivers to agree to such low increases over the next 2 years. It appears that**

**by the time one takes away the inflation there would be nothing left of the increase. Then u have to take away 2% of take home pay or something like that, have more sickie hassles, and be told to work half an hour more, even if you have to get home! Surely, it's a bad deal. How do they manage to get it through?**

Amigo - I don't really know. I can only guess that Drivers are really doing the job because they like it, not so much for the money. I feel there is a large 'volunteering' spirit which creeps in i.e. Drivers are nice people who like to do a good job, but this might be exploited by the clever Employers. Australia has a large 'volunteer' culture. Look at the past Olympics. Volunteers carried out big jobs unpaid whilst others did nothing for free and became rich from payments. There are now unpaid volunteers in many industries. The few fat cats at the top I would think love volunteers because, without volunteers the job could never be done.

Without volunteers means that the job would have to be paid for and that would cut profits and increase employment levels, something which many greedy Employers would not welcome!

# SYDNEY MARITIME NEWS

## Rebel Worker: What has been happening down on the waterfront?

Port Botany Wharfie: The overriding issue has of course been the Federal Elections.

Maritime Union branch officials have been talking up the need to get rid of Howard and his WorkChoices laws. Not through a campaign of industrial action – heaven forbid – but by encouraging members to take part in marginal seats campaigning.

The Sydney MUA Branch mobilised large groups of members to help out in the seats of Dobell on the Central Coast, Lindsay in western Sydney and Howard's now former seat of Bennelong. A few people helped out in Parramatta and Banks as well.

Sparks readers no doubt know the results in Bennelong and Lindsay, but it is worth reporting that Dobell is now held by Craig Thomson, the former National Secretary of the Health Services Union. He is one of the lesser known union officials that have managed to get their bum on a parliamentary seat.

The MUA has always thrown its weight behind the Labor Party. For instance the MUA National Council decided to make a donation to the ALP of around \$60 per member, which adds up to well over half a million dollars. The union also handed out its "funny money" – fake \$15 notes that bag out the Liberals and call on members to "Vote Labor".

The Sydney MUA called for a vote to the ALP or the Greens, a position that can be put down to the influence of the two elected officials from the Communist Party of Australia (CPA).

On paper the branch has taken formally correct positions – the need to continue the fight to ensure that Labor repeals all of WorkChoices, opposition to any new Accord agreement with the ALP, union independence from all political parties etc.

But that's where the militancy ends. To give an example, the traditional communist (and anarchist) position of parliamentary democracy being an instrument of capitalist class domination is not mentioned. Today's CPA simply doesn't talk in these terms. They talk about "left and progressive forces" winning elections to form "peoples' governments" – not smashing the capitalist state.

Moving on, it was extremely interesting to see just how workmates swung behind the Labor Party in the lead up to November 24.

Those who you least suspect of being party political turn out to be card-carrying ALP members. A few turn up with "Kevin '07" bumper stickers on their cars or wore "Kevin '07" t-shirts. "For Fair Work Laws – Vote Rudd for PM" stickers appeared from nowhere. Many of those asked by the union to volunteer on election day did so. No matter what reservations and criticisms of the Labor Party that my workmates have – nearly all of them still in some way or other see the ALP as "their party". A huge problem to say the least.

Now that Labor is in, what will become of the "Your Rights at Work" campaign? For the hierarchy of the ACTU and the unions their goal was not the repeal of all of WorkChoices but the election of a Rudd Labor government. They would like to pull the plug on the campaign ASAP.

The "Your Rights at Work" campaign should not let up until Rudd repeals every single piece of WorkChoices legislation. But whether or not that will happen – only time will tell.

## SYDNEY FERRIES NEWS

### RW: What is happening at Sydney Ferries?

Port Botany Wharfie: Morris Iemma and the NSW Labor government want to privatise Sydney Ferries. The MUA has rightly come out against privatisation and for continued public ownership.

November saw the release of the government commissioned Walker Report that not surprisingly put the privatisation of Sydney Ferries on the agenda.

This report comes in the wake of a few different incidents – both on and off the harbour. There have been a number of accidents, near misses and the like. The Daily Telegraph has hyped up some of this and has "exposed" issues like the high level of Cab Charges that Sydney Ferries has paid out to employees.

The ferry management have incompetently been trying to play hard ball – trying to refuse recognition to the union site committee, harassing delegates – that sort of thing.

How the MUA branch leadership responds to any proposed privatisation will be a real test.

### RW: I understand that workers at Dubai Ports World had a few problems getting to the MUA's Annual General Meeting.

Port Botany Wharfie: That's right. The MUA's Annual General Meeting on the last Tuesday in November is a paid four-hour stop work meeting that starts at 10am. The union runs buses from the Port Botany terminals to ensure that those that want to get to the meeting can.

The day before the AGM, DP World management put out a memo stating that em-



ployees could not come out of their machines (let alone leave the terminal) before 10am. This was despite an Enterprise Agreement clause that states that your point of work can be left a full thirty minutes before the meeting starts.

As a consequence, the MUA bus that was supposed to leave at 9.45am did not leave until 10.20am. By the time people got to the meeting it was almost 11am.

Hopefully the company will be brought to task for this breach of the EBA.

### RW: What is the latest with the issue of permanent jobs at DP World?

Port Botany Wharfie: The company increased the number of those employed on a permanent roster and those employed as Variable Salaried Employees (VSE's) by around 12 to 15 for each category.

While this is obviously better than nothing, there were a few outstanding jobs that needed to be back filled. The 20 to 40 new casuals that the company is hiring also skews the ratio of 51% permanent and VSE jobs to 49% casual employees that DP World has to adhere to.

The other issue is the way these jobs have been handed out. The company uses a points system that awards more productive workers and those with a "good atti-

tude" and penalises those that have a few sick days or make themselves unavailable for more than a few shifts. Seniority accounts for bugger all.

This leads to the ridiculous situation where some can make permanent within three years while others can't make it after ten years.

Upcoming Enterprise Agreement negotiations have to focus on improving the 51:49 ratio and ensure the process of handing out new permanent jobs is based on seniority.

# Problems of Independent Unionism In Canada

## Sweetheart Deals & Solidarity Unionism

*Date: Wed, 05 Dec 2007*

**Following the announcement of a no-strike contract between the Canadian Auto Workers and Magna International a number of CAW local leaders criticized Buzz Hargrove for pushing the deal. Bruce Allen, vice-president of Local 199 at GM in St. Catharines, described the deal as "a betrayal of the reason why we established ourselves as an independent union." Bruce founded the CAW Left Caucus and was involved in publishing the anarchist paper Strike in the 1980's.**

**Linchpin contacted Bruce and in the following interview he outlines in detail the problems with the deal and the direction of the CAW and the Labour movement in general.**

**LINCHPIN>** *I guess the first question is how you view the recent sweet heart deal between Magna and the CAW?*

**BRUCE ALLEN>** I view it as the culmination of trends that have been developing in the CAW over the past ten years. I outlined those trends in some detail in an article that was published last year called? Inside the CAW Jacket?. That article was prompted by the spectacle, a year or so ago, of Buzz Hargrove giving a CAW jacket to Paul Martin at the CAW council. This was at a time when Buzz Hargrove was embracing the Liberals and making an absolute rupture with the traditional alliance between the CAW, organized labour and the New Democratic Party.

Really the point simply put is that this is just taking a trend that was already there to another level, consolidating it in the form of an agreement with a traditionally very anti-union transnational corporation, MAGNA, and completely embracing the very things that the CAW was founded to oppose back in the mid-1980's.

You may recall the premise and essential reason for the CAW breaking from the United Auto Workers in the mid 1980's

was a rejection of the UAW's pro-corporation orientation. In so far as they accepted team concepts, embraced profit sharing as opposed to wage increases, and all forms of management labour co-operation, basically they embraced an agenda of making the corporation more competitive and successful regardless of whether that was in the interests of their members.

The CAW broke from that, it was the right thing to do at the time? It was a break to the left of the UAW. What this agreement with MAGNA does is it takes things full



circle and it casts us in a role where essentially there is no difference between what we stand for and what the UAW stands for. Arguably this deal is even worse than what the UAW contracts typically involve right now.

So in more ideological terms it's a complete subordination to the agenda of capital, it's a complete acceptance of capitalism. There isn't the slightest hint of anti-capitalist politics in the CAW anymore, where ten to fifteen years ago the CAW was decisively to the left of the NDP and was willing to engage in far more extra-parliamentary political action. It was essentially socialist in its political

orientation. There is absolutely nothing socialist in its politics now. This deal is the culmination of all that and taking it to another level.

What's really significant about this deal and important in terms of understanding where we were and where we are now, is that really this is the product of an organization which at the national level is completely un-democratic, completely top down in its orientation. Hargrove does what he wants and expects everyone to fall in line after the fact. He is completely un-accountable for what he does and he uses a combination of coercion through the bureaucratic apparatus and co option to maintain order to preserve the control of the existing hierarchy of the CAW.

Consequently as he moves more and more to the right and becomes more accommodating to the corporations he brings the organization with him in its orientation. The lack of democracy obstructs any attempt to put a break on that.

**LINCHPIN>** *Can you envision any knock on effects for the general labour movement as a result of this deal?*

**BRUCE ALLEN>** This deal has far reaching effects for all other unions because it will have an impact on collective bargaining throughout the entire manufacturing sector in this country. It will encourage employers in all industries, particularly in the private sector and manufacturing, to put pressure on all unions, not just the CAW, to negotiate similar agreements and be conducive to ending up in a situation where this becomes the norm between capital and organised labour in this country.

**LINCHPIN>** *What sort of forces if any are there as a left opposition in the CAW? Where's that at? Do you see possibility for worker's action on the shop floor in resistance to this trend in the CAW?*

**BRUCE ALLEN>** There is no organised left opposition. Several years ago there was a small CAW left caucus which I was the driving force behind, basically it would never have formed if it hadn't have been for me. It took

*See Page 12*



# RUSSIAN LABOUR NEWS

## The Situation in Russia

**The strike movement in Russia is inseparably connected with horrible inflation. All prices for food and some other things have increased 50-70% since the beginning of 2007 and this is far from the end. Economists say prices will rise again by 50% during the winter!**

Apart from the fact that, capitalism is not a comfortable system for 90% of proletarians, inflation, strikes and the brutal reaction of the Russian state derive from one source - the criminal structure of the social, political and economic system of Russia. The economy of Putin's Russia is based on monopolies. They are almost everywhere. All of them are connected with some state bureaucrat or another, or with friends of friends of Mister Putin. (Naturally these monopolies pay big money to the bureaucrats).

This third world economy has only one aim - to provide prosperity for the gangsters in a pyramid of nouveau riches and state functionaries. The top among them is Mister Putin whose untold wealth equals about 40 billion US dollars. None of them is interested in any "negotiations" with proletarians. Many bosses and officials are former criminals or KGB officials and don't understand what "negotiations" mean. All the functionaries know their time is limited; they can lose power during a struggle to the death between different factions.

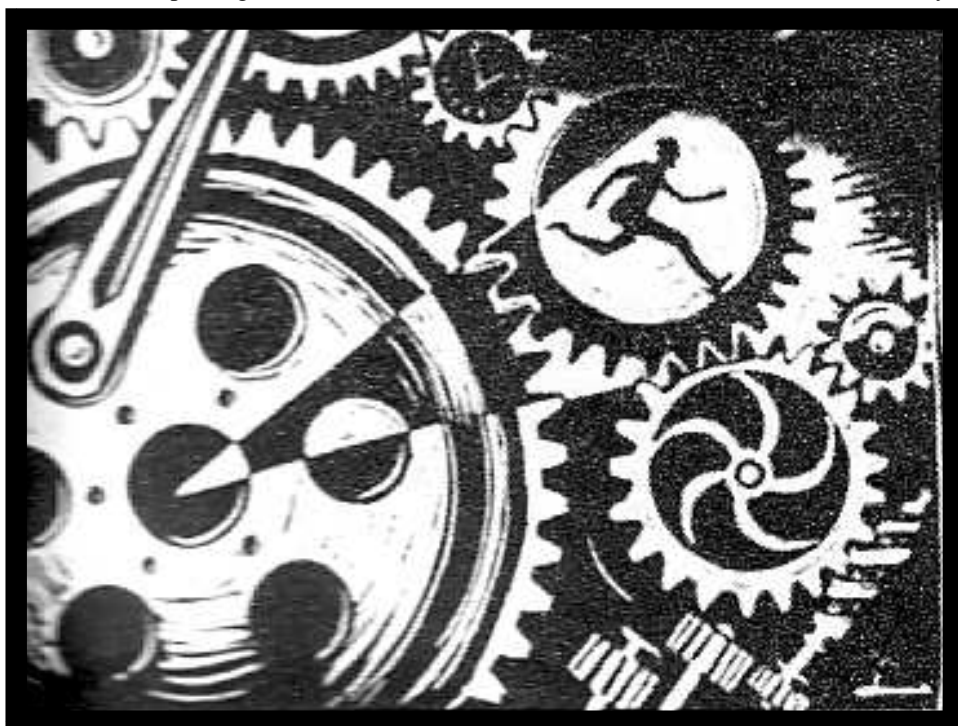
Today their uncertainty is growing because of the unclear situation with the presidential elections. So they need to get money as fast as they can, and so they use different methods against strikers and protesters - judicial prohibition, police violence and criminal violence. For example, almost all strikes have been declared "illegal" by courts in the past few months and some union leaders were attacked by the police or mafia.

## The Strike at FORD

The strike at the FORD factory in St. Petersburg began yesterday, on the 20th of November. About 1,700 workers are participating in the strike. A total about 2200 people work there. The strike is organised by FORD's trade union. The main demand of the workers is a wage increase of 30-40% (which is not more than compen-

sation for inflation). Today FORD workers earn about 500 dollars per month. (This is not so bad for Russia - in fact the salary of industrial workers, doctors and teachers in the Russian city of Saratov (with one million inhabitants) is about 150 dollars per month and it is also quickly shrinking because of inflation.) Activists from KRAS were making anarchist propaganda at FORD as well as agitating against the hierarchical trade union. We call on the workers to stop being obedient to the un-

law-abiding dockers' union stopped the strike on the 16-18 of November. But they say workers will make an Italian strike.. We spread hundreds of leaflets and newspapers at the port of St. Petersburg and tried to contact workers without union leaders. They gave lists of their members to bosses! They stopped the strikes before negotiations with the bosses started. They interrupted the strikes after the court verdicts. They teach workers to obey the law. This is madness..This is madness every-



ion leaders, organize a general assembly and make all decisions themselves. The factory was occupied by special police forces from the so-called "OMON". Union leaders are very angry because of our propaganda. As for the workers themselves, they told us during private talks that they understand that their trade union cannot help them. But they are afraid of the state law and police..They also say that they have problems with money and the strike will not be long. We are going to the factory every day. As we see, the workers are struggling. But until they use an anarchist way of struggle (which is absolutely illegal). They can change nothing.

The FORD strike is not the first strike in St. Petersburg this month. At the same time the dockers' union paralysed the city port.. This strike started on November 13th. The court says it's illegal. The

where in the world because of the neoliberal politics of capitalism. But especially it is madness here in our third world primitive rude dictatorship of criminals and the KGB! Also some taxi drivers in St. Petersburg started their strike yesterday. We still don't have contact with them. As we know it was a spontaneous (wild-cat) strike. Still we are the only anarcho-communist organisation in Russia which tries to influence strikes. At the same time we participate in the movement of local inhabitants of Moscow who struggle against gentrification.. But this is another long story.

*Michael Magid  
Intersecretary  
of (KRAS) IWA-AIT-Russia*

# BRITAIN TODAY

## LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL SHOP STEWARDS' NETWORK



Postal workers' picket line in Coventry during July 2007 Strikes

**In July 2007 a number of Solidarity Federation delegates and observers attended the launch of the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) in London. The overall impression reported back by our members was generally positive, while recognising that there may be problems which lurk over the not too distant horizon. Certainly the conference was successful in bringing together a good number of people who seem to genuinely see the need concentrate on workplace activity and organisation.**

SolFed had a visible presence which included a banner, literature stall and leaflet which was distributed to all present -

See [www.solfed.org.uk/nssn/pdfs/Nssn.pdf](http://www.solfed.org.uk/nssn/pdfs/Nssn.pdf) for the full text. In the leaflet we argued that activists should....

- Organise not merely on the basis of workplace representatives meeting with other representatives outside the workplace but on the basis of involving other workers to build effective organisation inside the workplace.
- Encourage workers to confront basic workplace issues like unpaid over-

time, health and safety, arbitrary and bullying management - in short to just say "no" to management - which is badly needed in the overwhelming majority of workplaces.

- Organise workplace meetings on such issues where stewards can be mandated and held to account as workplace delegates allowing negotiation to become effective, backed up by organisation and the real prospect of workers taking direct action.

- Make links between different groups of workers, between different workplaces in the same industry and between workers in different unions; this should include groups and committees in workplaces with agency workers and subcontractors and which allow workers in different unionins or who are unable to openly join a trades union to support, participate in and benefit from workplace organisation based on solidarity.

- Encourage an awareness that by confronting workplace issues we are also confronting capitalism from which they arise- in other words, our interests as a class cannot be reconciled with those of management.

- To avoid leaving politics at the workplace door in the same way that the existing unions leave political issues to be dealt with by political parties.

### Some potential problems

At this stage it is unclear if the NSSN will go much beyond a thin layer of shop stewards. Restricting the network to "bona fide rank and file TUC affiliated trade union workplace representatives" is clearly meant to put stewards rather than full time trade union officials in control. However, we feel there needs to be more emphasis on the role of the rank and file of ordinary members in the workplace.

Besides this there are other issues with the potential to cause problems in the future. First and despite the emphasis on shop stewards, NSSN has not (yet) clearly rejected the union bureaucracy. Indeed there is a

tendency, similar to the 'broad left organising committees' of the 1980s, which seeks little in the way of workplace activity or organisation, but instead concentrates on getting motions passed at union conferences and getting left wing candidates elected to positions within unions - albeit with the usual proviso about them only getting paid average earnings.

Second, there is the potential for political infighting to undermine the NSSN. Many at the conference were members of some political party or other, but there currently seems to be a truce amongst the various groups. This could be because no one group dominates or because things are so bad that for the moment people will sink their differences in the hope of building some resistance.

Third, and related, the ever present ghost of 'a new political party' kept rearing its ugly head. It is very odd indeed, at a conference called to help build a shop stewards' organisation, that this issue should be mentioned so often. Arguments over what form such a new party

should take is another source of future problems for the NSSN, that is, if the stage of launching it is ever reached. In the meantime it is an idea that diverts attention away from where it is most needed.

Lack of structure is also problematic. Clearly many participants were present "in a personal capacity" rather than being delegated from their workplace. In addition, the fact that the NSSN committee was 'agreed' - if you stuck your hand up immediately prompts questions like: who are these people?; who, if anyone, do they represent?; how are decisions going to be made in an accountable fashion?

## A Supportive Critique

Despite these reservations, the SF members who attended the conference would urge all anarcho-syndicalists, as well as others with a focus on encouraging workplace activity and organisation, to remain or to become involved in the NSSN to put these ideas across and help to influence its future development.

As such we can argue for the central role of workplace organisation, for an alternative accountable structure for the NSSN, for our critique of political parties and union bureaucracy, and against the red herring of a 'new workers' party' as well as the idea of getting people elected to union positions beyond the workplace. Having said this, the NSSN is not a substitute for developing anarcho-syndicalist ideas and activities based on our own industrial strategy and the long term aim of building revolutionary unions.

There are many people involved in the NSSN who actively organise in the workplace. For this reason Solidarity Federation will remain involved but will continue to have a supportive critique of it. Should the worst come to the worst at least these people will have heard of an alternative to the toothless politicking that often gets in the way of the real work of organising.

Thanks to Direct Action  
Paper of the Solidarity Federation  
Autumn 2007

# ITALIAN TRANSPORT STRIKE

*December 4th 2007 by John*

**Italy's biggest transport strike in 25 years forced the cancellation of hundreds of flights, idled trains, anchored ships and stalled buses across the country on Friday.**

Areo-news.net reported that Italian carrier Alitalia cancelled 217 domestic and international flights before a four hour walk-out by pilots, flight crew and ground staff beginning at 11am. Air One, Italy's number two carrier, only guaranteed nine flights there.

Workers are upset and protesting cuts in the transportation sector over funding shortfalls in the country's new 2008 budget, and declining revenues of businesses operating in the sector.

The number one loser is Alitalia, which the Italian Govt is struggling to unload.

Railway Company Trenitalia also cancelled hundreds of trains and warned travelers of further delays as rail workers walked off their jobs at 9am for an 8-hour protest.

Ships were delayed 24 hours, while commuters slugged through traffic trying to get to their jobs in private vehicles.

At midday, nearly 80% of employees had participated in the strike, according to union estimates. The country's funeral and emergency services workers were among those taking part.

Local transportation was idled for 8 hours starting at different times in cities across Italy.

The city of Rome avoided further walk-out disruption by making a late-night deal Thursday with taxi drivers. Taxi drivers had staged wildcat strikes and traffic blockages for two days to persuade the city not to grant 500 new cab licenses.

The city did not go back on its plans but agreed to discuss with unions when and where the new licenses will be available.

*Thanks to  
libcom*

*Continued From Page 8* some good positions, did some good work but it never managed to grow to the point where it became a formidable force. You had a lot of fear, a lot of people within it were not willing to seriously take on the leadership and consequently that had a corrosive effect and ultimately it shrivelled and died.

Today there is no organized left opposition. But there is a growing number of people who are expressing dissatisfaction given the concessions that have been made in places like Oshawa with the Shelf Agreement and more so now with this MAGNA agreement. But they are not organised into a force. There are diverse, basically informal networks around certain individuals. The most notable being Sam Gindin, who used to be the research director in the union and the best known critic of Hargrove's politics, or at least the most high profile critic.

Another problem is that of the most notable in opposition a lot of them are retired members, there is very little at least in terms of opposition involving the secondary leadership, at the level of the local union. They are generally biting their tongues, they are reluctant to defy the national union.

The national union in the way it operates is openly hostile to any local union leadership that goes against the direction set by the national union. There are pressures that are applied and there is also a relationship of dependencies. In all level of negotiations there are national reps involved and they play a pivotal role. There is always the risk that it will be disadvantageous if you alienate yourself from the national rep who take orders from the top leadership.

They can put the gears to you and really hurt you at a local level. Again it's a matter of a lack of democracy within the organization, the real concentration of power is at the top and it emanates from the top down. That's very obstructive and very conducive to suppressing the emergence of any local opposition.

*LINCHPIN> I am often under the impression that these sort of deals are struck in the union movement as a result of a general weakness, that they are attempts to stabilise declining memberships. Are there any other strategies that can be used to reverse that trend?*

**BRUCE ALLEN>** A deal like this is certainly a product of weakness, and a product of a declining membership base in manufacturing and especially auto and auto parts sector. There the CAW has experienced massive membership losses due to corporate down-sizing and plant closures and that has definitely created some sense of desperation. Desperation is con-

ducive to obviously making an accommodation with employers in any way they can in order to maintain the dues base and you can see this agreement in this context. It definitely plays in to it and a major driving force is the CAW's national office desire to maintain the dues base in order to sustain the organization.

You only need to look to the United States in that respect, the UAW at the end of the 1970's had 1.5 million members, today it's about a third of that. You can't maintain the organisation, the bureaucratic structure and all the rest if you have a shrivelling dues base.

Speaking from a local level, I'm in a local union that has as its biggest unit General Motors. At the beginning of the 1980's we had nearly 10,000 General Motors workers in St Catherines, that number today is 2,500 and by the end of next year probably down to 2,000. We have a union hall, long term I don't know how we are going to maintain it, the income from union dues is not there to sustain it. There is another union local in St Catherines that organised the Dana plant, their union hall was sold off and pretty much the only Dana workers that will be left will be retirees.

The same dynamic is evident where I am. There are far more retired members of our local union now than active members because the corporation is encouraging people to take buy outs, like retirement packages, and people are running for the door. They have a take the money and run attitude, without any consideration for what the future holds. What they don't understand and what I tell people all the time, is that you can grab the money and run and retire, but if the union

keeps getting weaker and weaker, who is going to protect your pensions and benefits after you retire? I tell them that and the look on their faces is as if I told them their mother has died. But it is brutally true.

These dynamics and trends are a major reason why a deal like this is struck.

There is a quiet desperation about it. But touching on your other question, is this the way to build the union? In the short term, sure it could get you additional members. But the other way to look at it, from more a class perspective, is if the union is going to be weak and defective, unable to win things for you, make substantial gains for you and improve the quality of life; your standard of living; day to day reality on the shop floor, people are not going to want to join a union. What's the point of joining a union if it doesn't do anything for you? If all a union is, is something that takes money off your pay check?

*LINCHPIN> Following up and this is the question, what actions can we take as a class to reverse that?*

**BRUCE ALLEN>** Frankly my opinion is this, the existing union structures have reached a point of no return. I've long believed that the existing union structures like the Canadian Labour Congress and the CAW have passed the point of no return. The labour movement is going to have to be built from the ground up.

I'm not advocating building outside of the existing structures yet as you have to be inside them to be relevant, to interact with workers. But we have to build on the things that made the union strong in the first place. Stand by the principles that got us what we got. You do not join a union to go backwards, you join a union to make gains and improve your life and be prepared to do whatever is necessary to realise those gains.

From my vantage point that means do whatever you can to build strong local unions and labour councils. I really believe in the concept and always have that Lynd outline of solidarity unionism. He wrote a book about it, about networking and building in the existing unions, at a local level and at local labour councils. In a horizontal rather than a vertical way, networking.

*LINCHPIN> For people that may want to touch base on that form of solidarity unionism, is there any examples in Ontario to suggest that form developing?*

**BRUCE ALLEN>** There are no real examples I can think of. The challenge before us is to build them, to get involved in our local unions and labour councils. To start the process of networking and building that is conducive to fostering solidarity unionism, it's the base of the movement and the labour movement grows and survives at the base. Don't waste your time trying to change the CLC, the Ontario Federation of Labour or the CAW from the top because for the same reason they are so top down and controlled from above, you can't break that.

You've got to build around it, it's like going down a road and encountering an obstacle, you don't run head first into it, you go around it. You build local networks around strikes and issues. I'm heavily involved in activities around injured workers, my specialty in terms of the union is fighting worker compensations and there are all kinds of possibilities to realise through that work.

I take a class struggle approach to workers' compensation. You can maintain and continue a really adversarial orientation to employers. I maintain a totally adversarial orientation with GM through fighting for injured workers. You have to find niches and possibilities where ever you are in order to move in that direction. That is what I am doing to the extent that I can do it.

*Thanks to Linchpin*

## FRENCH RAIL STRIKES

Since 1993 in France, workers' pensions have been under attack by the capitalists. At that time, the amount of time private sector workers were required to work was increased from 37.5 to 40 years in order to get retirement benefits at the age of 60. In 1995, the government tried to attack the benefits of retired railways workers, while at the same time threatening closure of 6,000 kilometers of railways. These two attacks were fought-off by railways workers in a victorious 3-week strike. Twelve years have passed before this new attack on railways workers.

In 2003, the government changed the pension terms for public sector workers so as to match those of their private sector counterparts.

Railways workers struck in solidarity with public sector workers, but the general strike was defeated.

In 2007, the government is attacking the benefits of the last workers with good pensions: train drivers who get retirement benefits at age 50, and others who can get benefits at age 55 (railways SNCF, underground of Paris RATP, electricians EDF, etc.).

The first day of the strike, October 18th, was a great success: 75% participation in SNCF (railways) instead of the usual 45%, 80% of electricians, and 70% in RATP. However, this success was probably due to the call for only a one-day strike. Therefore, lots of managers, chiefs and other shy workers participated when they usually do not.

I work in the railways, where the main union, the CGT (bureaucratic union similar to the ACTU, associated with the French Communist Party), wanted only a 24-hour strike. The second union, SUD wanted to have a strike of unlimited duration. Workers at some establishments where these unions are strong voted to continue the strike this week, but overall the movement is weak.

The railways workers federations decided upon an unlimited strike beginning the 14th of November. The strike ended after 8 - 10 days. At the end of the strike, we were still 25% of strikers. This is a good number for an unlimited strike. But CGT leaders appealed to stop strike and negotiate. Perhaps they were afraid to not be able to have enough strikers one more week. Only SUD wanted to continue.

The strike stopped because the majority of strikers voted it. The movement was democratic with general assembly of strikers where anyone can speak and vote. Some signs show that the main union CGT preferred to negotiate than strike. The general secretary made a proposition to the government of separate negotiations for railway, underground and electricians 2 hours before the beginning of strike. The union leaders appealed to stop the strike after 8 days and made lots of speeches to



convince workers. The majority of workers trust their union and followed their advice.

Probably, union leaders are afraid of the Sarkozy government. This government is prepared to fight like the UK Thatcher government in 1984 against the miners.

The new French President campaigned for his election by dividing workers. He stated that public were more privileged than private sector workers. He promised to attack our pensions. The capitalists want to get rid of our retirement rights at 50 and 55, increase all workers' retirement age. They promised to elevate the required 40 years dues (work contribution) to 41 in 2008 and 42 in 2012.

The media, owned by capitalists and state, campaigns every day to make private workers jealous of public ones. The problem of the union movement is that our members are more concentrated in public sector, and we therefore have great difficulties mobilizing private sector workers.

To sum up, we have three handicaps in this struggle.

- The government attacks. It has chosen the ground where to fight (Pensions).

- The government has conditioned all the population to say that railways workers are more privileged than other workers. This has two effects. One is to divide workers to prevent private workers sector to go on strike for their own pensions. The second is to put in the heads of railways workers: it's normal to have lower pensions like other workers.

- The main union CGT has more members in the public sector than private so it is difficult to fight boss propaganda dividing workers. The bureaucracy is also afraid to fight and prefers to negotiate.

**Will the strike begin one more time at the end of the negotiations?**

Currently, the only way for unity between private and public sector workers on this issue is to fight for an early retirement age for difficult work. The scientists have said that manual workers have 7 years less to live than bosses. The unionisation of private workers has not been a focus of the labor movement in France.

CSR (a network of workplace activists pushing for grass roots control of unions) militants are involved in territorial union organisations of the CGT in order to organise private sector workers. We have recently written a document to train militants to do this job. However, the main obstacle is that the CGT abandoned the industrial unions in 1950 in favor of enterprise unions. As a result, union workers have developed a craft union mentality, and they are hesitant to involve themselves in Local Unions (Bourses du Travail).

CSR members have made some improvements in this area, but there is a lot more to do. For example, I participated in the cleaning union meeting of my town last week. The union is so poorly organised that workers had no time to speak about the critical pension issue.

*Kaou, Railway worker, CSR*



# SPANISH LABOUR NEWS

## Barcelona, Bus drivers on strike

**Bus drivers in Barcelona have called a strike on 21-24 December and 2-4 January, demanding a second day of leave per week. Currently, bus drivers have to work six days a week.**

Workers with the anarcho-syndicalist union, Confederacion General de Treball (CGT) agreed to go on strike to press their demands against the owner, TMB, allowing only minimum services needed to con-

dering them immobile. One bus was even forcibly evicted by a rowdy crowd of strike supporters. The city of Barcelona possesses only two cranes capable of hauling decommissioned buses, and needless to say the day's attacks went quite beyond their capacity. Additionally, bus stations all throughout the city were spray painted with stencils urging solidarity with the strikers, although reflecting the dramatic changes caused in Spanish society by mass media and spectacular consumerism, a distressing number of people were grum-

CNT Barcelona  
Indymedia Barcelona

## MADRID TRANSIT CLEANERS STRIKE

**From Dec. 17th 2007, Madrid urban transit cleaners commenced strike action to achieve the same wage for all cleaners in the transit system.**

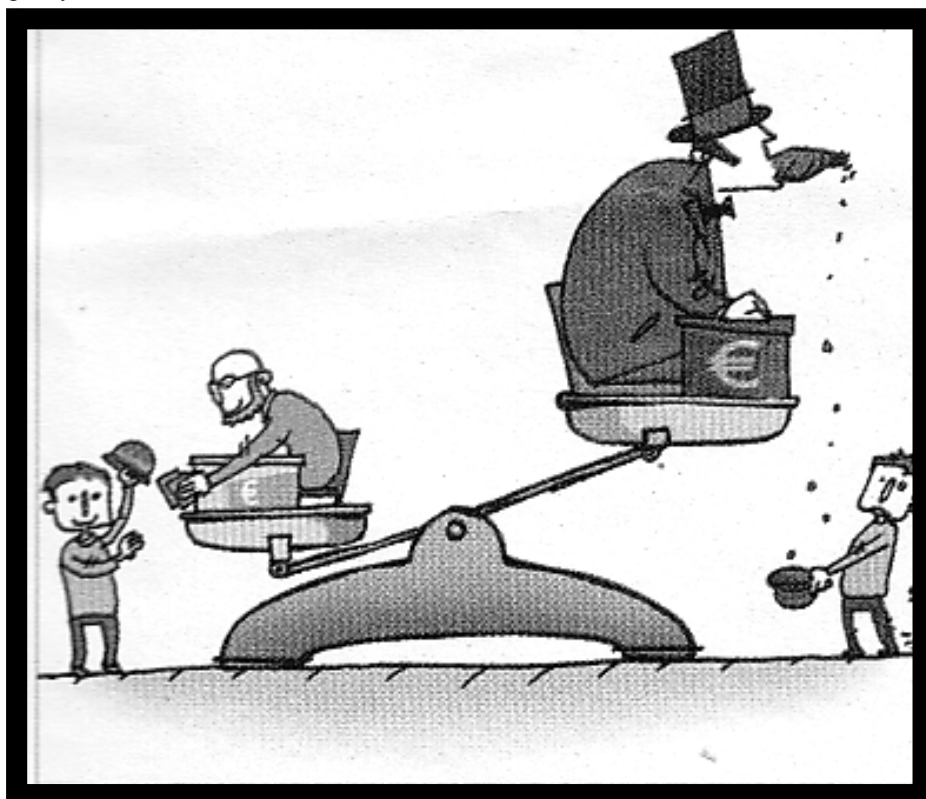
Nowadays the cleaners are in different companies or contract types causing different wages to be paid. 1,500 cleaners are employed in the crews and are members of a range of different unions – UGT (bureaucratic union controlled by the Socialist Party), CGT, CNT, USO and SYT and hold regular workplace assemblies to control negotiations with management.

The bosses' media is particularly focusing on instances of sabotage caught in the Metro cameras – just people throwing rubbish around.

## FRAPE-BEHR FACTORY OCCUPATION - BARCELONA

**Workers who are members of the CNT (Anarcho-Syndicalist union), FTC-IAC (independent leftist Catalan union), UGT and CCOO (bureaucratic Communist Party controlled union) unions are occupying the factory (sister company to Behr in Germany) to pressure the Catalan Govt to oppose the implementation of an "adjustment plan" in the factory.**

It involves the reduction of the work force by 295 workers. For over 3 months now, workers at the factory have been opposing the implementation of an "adjustment plan". The CNT has been active in the campaign via organising demonstrations to protest the planned sackings and issuing press releases regarding developments. They also have been pursuing an international campaign by encouraging demos and protests outside Spanish Embassies and Consulates and emails/faxes to put pressure on the Catalan Govt on the issue.



nect neighbourhoods without other transportation options. The CGT linked with squatters and direct action anarchists to ensure that scabs would not be permitted to keep the buses running. While CGT workers picketed all the bus depots, anarchists, independentistas, and squatters throughout the city took action against buses operated by scabs, splashing paint on the windshields, breaking the rear view mirrors, or puncturing the tires, so that buses had to return to the station. Although in the morning a large number of buses were in the streets, around midday hardly any buses were passing by even on major streets. 54 buses driven by scabs were attacked and sabotaged the first day, with tires punctured, rear view mirrors broken, or windshields splashed with paint, ren-

dering about the inconvenience and calling for various forms of repression against strikers and direct actionists. Major newspapers collaborated with police to provide a negative headline to the strike, claiming that someone was injured by one sabotage action, though this has yet to be verified by independent sources.

Previously, the bus workers had built connections with squatters, sending a letter of support to the ten-year-old squatted social centre Can Vies, which is on property owned by TMB.

You can find more information about some of these other cases at:

Barcelona.revolt.org  
CGT Barcelona

## BOOK REVIEW CORNER

### **Facing Reality: The New Society, Where to look for it and How to bring it Closer by C.L.R. James & Grace C. Lee Published by Charles H. Kerr, Sixties Series**

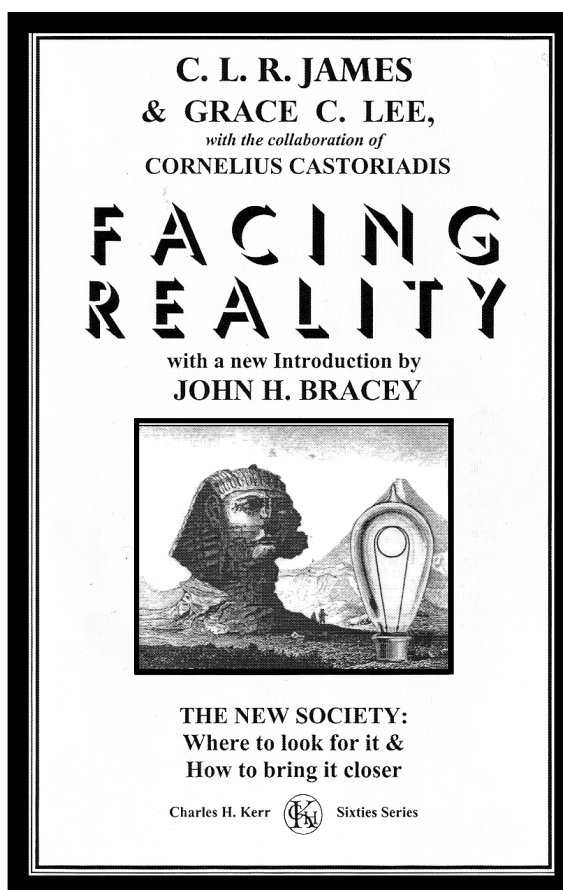
This book under review was published originally in 1958 at the height of the Cold War and was inspired by the early stages of the upsurge in workers' struggles from 1955 to 1973 associated with the wave of direct action coordinated by the British Shop Stewards' (union delegates) movement and the American wildcat strike movement commencing with the historic UAW (Auto Workers Union) wildcat strike of 1955 and the 1956 workers uprising and establishment of workers councils (committees of mandated and recallable delegates in workplaces) in Hungary in 1956.

It also represented a re-thinking by the authors of their politics – evolving from support for the Leninist vanguard party originating from their background in the Trotskyist movement in Britain and the USA to support for autonomous workers self activity culminating in the spontaneous establishment of workers councils when the time is ripe. Associated with this position, the authors see the role of the "Marxist Organisation" or revolutionary group to assist steps toward the blossoming of workers councils and their coordination to establish a workers councils republic on the lines of the Hungary 1956 precedent.

The authors initially saw the Leninist style vanguard party playing a so-called revolutionary role in 1917 during the Russian Revolution due to specific Russian conditions. However, even then, they state in the book it was "a type of parliament with representatives of the workers divided into debating factions increasingly removed from the actual conditions of social and particularly proletarian life". Subsequently with the emergence of the insurgent workers movements on both sides of the iron curtain and the establishment of workers councils in Hungary in 1956, new vehicles for the revolutionary transformation and overthrow of the capitalist mode of production have emerged making the vanguard party outmoded.

The authors see the new socialist society governed by workers councils already present in daily workers' struggles coordinated by informal work place organisations such as shop steward committees. Connected to this approach, they pre-

dicted the instability on both sides of the iron curtain in the 60's, 70's and 80's reaching its peak with the events of May 1968 in France and its General Strike – the largest in French history and the workers



upsurges in Eastern Europe such as the wave of strike action associated with the emergence of the Solidarity union movement in Poland which eventually brought down the Soviet Bloc states.

#### **"Post WWII Shop Stewards' Movement"**

The authors' outlook for this grass roots workers movement which they saw growing ever stronger and eventually overthrowing the capitalist mode of production via establishing workers councils, has certainly been shown to be over optimistic. They have failed to take account of the likelihood of an employer counter offensive stemming from the end of the post war boom, which occurred in the mid 1970's, associated with the Oil Crisis and likely

new cunning strategies of employers and their governments to counter this grass roots workplace movement. An important example of such a strategy is the establishment of full time shop stewards, known as "convenors" in workplaces in Britain during the 1970's which played an important role in bureaucratising the shop stewards movement. They grossly under estimate the dangers for the grass roots workers movement posed by the union bureaucracy particularly via manipulating of these convenors, normal union reps and other co-thinkers on the job in demobilising workers' self activity and preventing industrial solidarity between workers in different industries and workplaces, particularly in the context of a down turn in the class struggle and decline in workers' self confidence.

The combination of these factors and the repressive industrial laws of the Thatcher Govt. played a key role in the defeat of the British Miners' Strike 1984-85, which helped turn the tide against the shop stewards' movement and led to further setbacks for workers in various industries in Britain in the 1980's. Whilst the Communist Party controlled union bureaucracy via its continuing influence amongst shop stewards played an important role in taming the revolutionary movement in France in May 1968 and preventing the emergence of workers councils. Certainly the authors have no perspectives for the crystallisation of the Shop Stewards' Movements into anarcho-syndicalist style mass union confederations which would effectively destroy much of the base of union bureaucracies and pull the rug under their nefarious ploys against militant workers. This attitude is no doubt related to the Trotskyist background of the authors and associated prejudices acquired in this milieu.

#### **"Independent Editorial Committees & Shop Papers"**

A particularly important and refreshing focus of the authors to facilitate this grass roots workers movement is the role of the revolutionary group in helping to seed the emergence of "independent editorial committees" based in the workplace edited by worker groups. Rather than the emphasis on "recruitment" of members and subsequent "brain washing" so fashionable in the realm of left sects of various stripes. They provide various examples of such

committees and their workplace publications in the heyday of the shop stewards' movement. Their conception is however somewhat abstract and dated. It fails to consider the difficulties presented by the harsh climate of an employer counter-offensive to the launching and continuity of such publications and groups. This attitude of the authors can play into the rigid unrealistic "correct lines" and superstitions of various left sects and their swell-headed gurus regarding "correct" workplace activity which leads inevitably into sectarian impudence and irrelevance to the workers control project.

In the context of the very harsh conditions in the workplace today involving fierce speedups, 12 hour and rotating shifts, and the extremely repressive climate engineered by managements with the collaboration of the union hierarchy and their co-thinkers on the job and vastly improved surveillance technology, the role of outside the job organisation is critical to the editing of workplace papers and often their distribution and the germination and growth of workplace movements.

In conclusion, whilst the book is very much a product of its times and suffers from a certain abstractness and over opti-

mism, its emphasis on the necessity of revolutionary groups focusing on assisting grassroots workers organisation to realise the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production remains of vital importance in regard to turning the tide against the employer offensive today and pursuing the workers' control project.

*Mark McGuire*

## Dawkin's Delusions: An Anarchist Analysis. A Review Article by Graham Purchase of The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins Continued from last edition of RW

### [5] Group Selection and Co-operative Evolution:

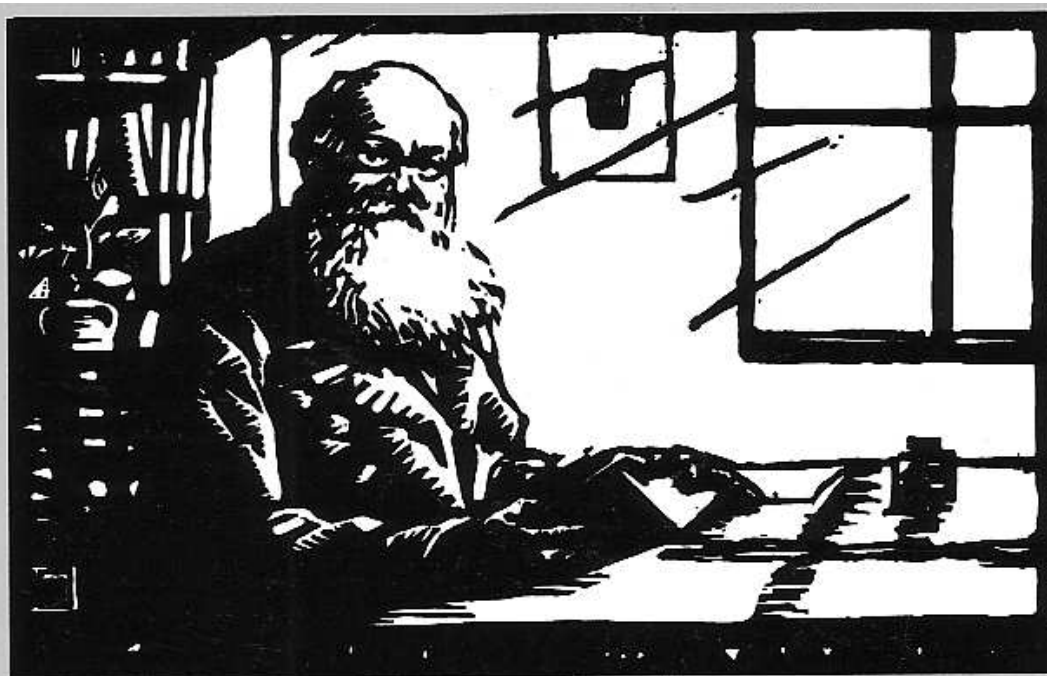
In his *God Delusion* Dawkins' provides a thankfully brief but unrewarding, ridiculous and "belittling" analysis of group-selection. He forewarns us that, he is biased and that this is his particular pet-hate in evolutionary theory: "I am not a supporter of group selection...A Partisan of the controversy I must beware of riding off on my pet steed Tangent" (p.170).

Kropotkin is the most important historical figure in the articulation of co-operative, collective or community models of animal life, natural systems and evolutionary processes. Mutual Aid was an immediate popular success and has stimulated many evolutionary thinkers to appreciate or re-examine collective dimensions of animal life and evolution. Co-operative models of evolutionary processes remain controversial.<sup>1</sup> The pioneering ecological scientist and popular environmentalist writer, Odum concluded that, "studies have shown that contemporary ecological textbooks devote vastly more space to competition and predation in comparison to mutualism. This is despite the fact that there is no evidence that competition is more important than co-operation in the formation and maintenance of bio-systems."<sup>2</sup>

Leading popular contemporary evolutionary scientists and writers who oppose Dawkins regard Kropotkin highly. Gould states that, "Kropotkin created a dichotomy within the general notion of struggle—two forms with opposite import (1) organism against organism of the same species for limited resources leading to competition; and (2) organism against en-

vironment. To survive an organism does not compete with its environment as it might with another organism, but must adapt to or modify its environment and its community in a co-operative manner"<sup>4</sup>

A recent environmental history book claims that, the idea of co-operation was initiated and "understood by Darwin and Kropotkin", and that, the next most significant personality in the field was Allee (1885-1955), "who headed at The University of Chicago a noted group of ecologists who spent much of the 1930's documenting the existence of



vironment, leading to co-operation."<sup>3</sup> Gould concludes that, "the central logic of Kropotkin's argument is simple, straightforward, and largely cogent". Odum similarly states that: "Kropotkin suggested that there were two kinds of natural selection, namely organism vs. organism, which leads to competition and organism vs. environment which leads to

co-operative communities in nature."<sup>5</sup> Allee, working a generation after Kropotkin's death, regarded Kropotkin's influence in quite general terms: "Kropotkin's remarkable if uncritical book... served the admirable purpose of keeping this [mutual aid] idea alive and popularising it."<sup>6</sup> Allee was also a group-selectionist. Although group selec-

tion was first invented by Darwin to explain human moral conscience, Kropotkin is historically the most influential advocate. The individual vs. group selection debate that occurred in biology and ecology during the 1960's began with the Huxley-Kropotkin exchange in the 1890's. Group selection is one of several levels or types of selection as categorized by present day evolutionists, but became something of an evolutionary heresy in both biology and ecology from the 1960's onwards. However, influential ecologists, such as E. Odum were much more reluctant to abandon it than evolutionary biologists. Wynne Edwards, a respected, though unorthodox contemporary theoretical and field biologist/naturalist, is the most well known contemporary advocate of group-selection. Gould with regard to his later work (published in the mid 1970s) with some justification stated that, the "consensus" may "perhaps be incorrect"<sup>7</sup> with respect to a total rejection of group selection as conceived by Wynne-Edwards. Gould did not think that group selection represented a serious threat to Darwinism, only the narrow or ultra Darwinism of Dawkins with which he consistently took issue. In his most considered defence of group selection Wynne-Edwards explores the ideas of Allee and Sewall Wright in some detail.<sup>8</sup> Allee worked at the same University of Chicago laboratories as Sewall Wright. Wright's work on structured populations has attracted considerable contemporary interest. Recent research is beginning to reveal how structured grouping of populations effect inheritance. For example, it has recently been found, according to a Guardian Newspaper report that, Cardinal fish of the Great Barrier Reef maintain distinct geographical and genetic communities through the recognition of odours. Even after drifting 30km fry always return to their dispersal point as eggs ensuring that, there is little random intermixing of genes between discrete populations. Scientists are further investigating whether this is the case for other species on the reef. This might explain the extraordinary biodiversity of coral ecosystems. Much of Wynne Edwards later work explores philopatry (love of home) and the effects of everything from chemical signalling to social hierarchies in maintaining local environments and gene pools (the epigenetic or phenotypic landscape).

Kropotkin discussed at length large aggregations and migrations, but his primary focus is upon groups rather than species-wide mass phenomena. Kropotkin believed that, many animals and birds live, at least for significant parts of the year, in structured communities and societies involving complex patterns of

inter-personal interaction among animals that know and recognize one another. Some animal species do not associate, e.g. snowy owls and tigers, but these are the exception rather than the rule. In *Mutual Aid* Kropotkin observes an "overwhelming numerical predominance of social species over those few carnivores which do not associate."<sup>9</sup> Most animal populations are not composed of individuals unknown to one another. They engage in various forms of social behaviour, both competitive and co-operative, within coherent groups and populations. Kropotkin's examples include the "numerous packs of Black Bear of Kamtchatka" and the "com-



pound families of elephants".<sup>10</sup> Allee came to very similar conclusions: "The growing weight of evidence indicates that animals are rarely solitary; that they are almost necessarily members of loosely integrated racial and inter-racial communities, in part woven together by environmental factors, and in part by mutual attraction between the individual members of different communities, no one of which can be affected without changing all the rest, at least to some slight extent."<sup>11</sup>

This concept of discrete populations and structured meaningful communities (demes, in groups), links a wide range of Kropotkin's interests as well as those who followed in his footsteps. The stabilisation of phenotypic variation, local isolation and its role in speciation are intimately linked with the existence of structured phenotypic and social community in particular and changing environmental contexts.

Both Allee and Kropotkin describe numerous examples of how economic co-operation enhance the survival of the individual, group and the species. Economic co-operation is used here in a broad way to describe great variety of activities concerned with daily survival and not directly concerned with reproduction, e.g. collective mechanisms for defence against predators (mobbing in birds), co-operative

hunting behaviours (lions), group moderation of the environment (beavers), migration, hibernation (combined heat in numbers), defence of feeding territories from competitors, etc. Kropotkin argues that economic co-operation results in differential reproductive success among social species in comparison to solitary ones.

Ecology has traditionally focused upon the "economic behaviour of organisms in groups" whilst "evolutionary theory has focused almost exclusively on the genealogical products".<sup>12</sup> Kropotkin, a geographer and an ecologist was particularly concerned to show how co-operative economic behaviour altered or improved the environment and survival chances of individuals, groups or species. Kropotkin thought that, co-operation "favours the development of such habits and characters as insure the maintenance and further development of the species, together with the greatest amount of welfare and enjoyment of life for the individual, with the least waste of energy."<sup>13</sup>

An adequate appreciation of economic efficiencies that can result from group or co-operative behaviour, Eldredge asserts, is what is missing from "reductive gene's-eye" type theories promulgated by Dawkins. Eldredge argues that under the standard neo-Darwinian synthesis "organisms have come to be regarded, at base, as being concerned exclusively with the maximization of reproductive success." Whereas Darwin had thought that, "offspring tend to inherit those features that confer relative economic success". The neo-Darwinists argue "all aspects of living systems are to be understood, ultimately, as an outgrowth of competition for reproductive success". They suggest "that, organisms actively seek to maximise their reproductive success" whereas Darwin "saw natural selection as a simple accumulator". The Dawkinite vulgarizers of Darwin: "see economic competition as a direct reflection of real competition for reproductive success... Natural selection is transformed from a passive accumulator to a dynamic process... responsible at bottom, for the organization of all manner of biotic entities: species, local ecosystems, and most of all, social systems. This reformulation of natural selection into active mode... in sociobiological literature maybe a downright perversion of the genuine evolutionary principle of natural selection" <sup>14</sup>

All multicellular life can be regarded as separate groups of epigenetically related cells then, natural selection of individuals can be reduced at the next level down to the selection of groups of cells constituted as organisms.

*To Be Continued*

# SYNDICALIST STRUGGLES IN ITALY

FROM CNT #332, MARCH 2007

TRANSLATED FOR ASR BY MIKE HARGIS

The situation in Italy is becoming more critical each day.

The center-left government (the two principal communist parties in a coalition with the Christian Democrats) has distinguished itself in hitting the workers and the more disadvantaged classes with an avalanche of out-of-control, unprecedented price and tax hikes. A true robbery from the workers with the paroxysm of the TFR (the settlement) that, through a perverse and illegal mechanism, will go to enriching the regime's unions and financial organizations.

In the cross hairs are also pensions and raising the retirement age. All this together with a new militarist and nationalist policy, with deployment of troops to all the scenes of the world's wars and servility to U.S. imperialism. In this context, militancy and class unionism becomes even more necessary, but also more difficult.

The USI (Italian Syndicalist Union), section of the IWA/AIT, finds itself today in the front lines of the struggle to organize dissent and defend the rights of the weakest classes.

The USI has instigated an intransigent anti-militarist and anti-war campaign extended over a good part of the national territory (although strongest in the communities of Lombardia and Emilia), combining it with union action in the traditional sectors 4- its intervention (health, post), but also in newer fronts like the struggles of the precarious (in the regions of Ancona and Emilia) and immigrants (in particular in Bologna).

While Milan represents the area with the strongest USI activity, a federative pact with "Alternativa Sindacale" (Alternative Unionism) has connected the USI with an important region in the south of Italy and in particular with the struggles within FIAT of Melfi.

## The USI in Milan

The USI has been present in Milan and province for more than 20 years. In 1989 it occupied a building at 22 Bligny Street where the USI rehabilitated a spacious theater now utilized for public events (January 25 it hosted a large assembly against the war and the expansion of NATO bases in Italy). The local is today a true union hall with legal consultation and assistance to workers in every sector of production.

Since the USI was reconstituted in Milan, our union organization is known above all among health workers, with presence and organization of self-managed unions in the leading Milanese and provincial (Morza) hospitals. In these hospitals the USI is by far the strongest union organization numerically. We publish true workplace newsletters and take charge of all the conflicts related to contracts, lawsuits and disciplinary matters that affect the workers.

But our activity is not limited to specifically union problems and lawsuits, on the contrary, we occupy ourselves with carrying forward our struggles in defense of the health and security of the workers and patients, against the health policy of the city and the state that turns the sick into a commodity from which to realize profit, for a correct management of economic resources, exposing to the administrative and judicial authorities all the illicit deeds that go on in the "health factories."

The instruments of struggle include, as always, individual and collective lawsuits, a state of permanent agitation until strikes are proclaimed, including by the USI by itself, in defense of working and living conditions, for the reduction of work tasks, against precarity and for the recognition of contractual rights.

The UM over time has been recognized as a combative, grassroots union to be reckoned with, not only by the workers but also by the bosses and institutions. Thanks to this image, the USI has succeeded in becoming a tool for the interests and the rights of many workers that not only develops its activity in health, but also making it known in the world of youth precarity and of the social centers, among the extracommunitarian workers as well as in sectors in which for a number of years it has been active such as in the post office (Italian Post) and the cleaning companies.

Finally, let's remember that it was the fellow workers of the USI of Milan that promoted the Flores Magon Libertarian Project in solidarity with the indigenous people of Chiapas.

## Alternativa Sindacale at Fiat - Melfi

Alternativa Sindacale was born in 1998 in FIAT of Melfi, first as a critical left current in CGIL (Italian General Union of Workers — a class collaborationist trade union) and then went on to become an autonomous union.

They were the principal protagonists in two big struggles in the south of Italy: the struggle for an increase in work days for the *braceros* (day laborers) and the 21-day strike at FIAT of Melfi.

These two fights were important for the Basilicata community and for the entire south. In the struggle of the day laborers, Alternativa Sindacale carried the agitation for the occupation for 151 days. They fought alone against all, hilt in the end won for the day laborers the doubling of the days of work.

In the struggles at FIAT, things did not go well with a very long and hard strike carried out by Alternativa Sindacale that ended with a minimal agreement due to organizational weaknesses with respect to the forces put into play by CGIL. At the end of 2005, Alternativa Sindacale decided to affiliate with the USI through a federative pact.

As to the motives that animated these fellow workers we reproduce some fragments from a recent press release announcing the opening of a new Chamber of Labor:

From these struggles we learned that we have to be autonomous and strongly organized in order to win the necessary battles to improve the conditions of work and of life of those who have only their labor.

From this is born the idea of this hall that... we have decided to call the *Camara della Lavoro* (Chamber of Labor), like the old union halls of the fifties, this being the appropriate definition for a place where we intend to not only defend, but also to organize the workers, because the conditions of the workers are going back to those of the 1950s, with the systematic demolition of all the gains they have won.

On the other hand, we federate with the USI, a national union born in long ago 1912 (that in five years will celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary), because we are a young union that wants to revalue the good old ideas and the serious methods of class unionism that has been lost.

In addition, we have given this hall the name of a worker of Pirelli of Milan who was the founder of the first *Comitati Unitari di Base* (the famous CUB, Unitary Rank-and-File Committee) that was born in the factories in the 1970s, breaking with the class collaborationist unionism of CGIL, CISL and UIL.

The name of the *Camara della Lavoro*, the federation with the old



## NEWS & NOTES

Some of the most important news is the NSW ALP Iemma Govt plans for a fire sale of public owned authorities such as the Electricity industry and Sydney Ferries (See article page 7.)

This privatisation drive means a major acceleration of the Employer offensive which will have ramifications in many industries and in other states with more efficiency and speed up drives by employers. Unions NSW is moving to divert grass roots attention away from the need to fight Iemma's threats with hard hitting industrial action, with a proposed lame duck community campaign and ALP politician lobbying. Those sectors of the union hierarchy in the firing line such as the MUA (Maritime Union of Australia) have come out verbally against the privatisation ram-page.

However, a grave danger facing ferry and other workers is a cave-in by the union officials to the selloff. As the officials may seek to make up for the loss of union dues caused by the corporate carve-up of the ferries by seeking to merge with Rightwing ALP controlled unions in the transport sector and take the opportunity to sell off the very expensive union property. A grass roots controlled campaign in the Ferries and other threatened sectors is critical to preclude treachery by the union hierarchy.

In the NSW Railways the ASN has been assisting militant workers to fight a big attack on their conditions associated with the upcoming RailCorp Enterprise Agreement negotiations. It involves the circulation of a "realistic log of claims" amongst the grass roots.

Rebel Worker has an internet web site. Its address is [www.rebelworker.org](http://www.rebelworker.org). Many articles from back issues of RW are available on the site.

Help Build Rebel Worker! Your Help is particularly sought with distribution. So why not order bulk copies to distribute and sell at your local shopping centre on Saturday mornings, leave at the lunch room at work and at your local café or library.

Your assistance on the financial plane is also very welcome.

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## Where we stand:

1. Our aim is to create a free and equal society

2. We are a revolutionary labour movement that uses as its only means of struggle, direct action in all its forms – occupations, strikes, boycotts, sabotage, etc. We are independent from all reformist and hierarchical unions and political parties, and we are creating an alternative to these and to existing society. We do not seek to gain political power, but rather to see it distributed amongst all.

3. We are a network of anarcho-syndicalists practising co-operation and mutual aid. We have an equal part in the making of decisions. Responsibilities within the network are subject to agreement by the members.

4. We are engaged in struggle where we work and where we live, to develop self managed production, distribution and servicing for the world community, to meet human needs rather than profit. We give solidarity to others in these struggles.

5. We are fighting to abolish all authoritarian institutions such as the State (including its communist variety), capitalism, all hierarchical and oppressive divisions between people.

6. We have no country and are organised on an international basis in opposition to oppression everywhere. The ASN is striving to build a viable revolutionary syndicalist movement in Australia as part of a world wide movement able to meet the challenge of the global employer offensive.

## TO FIND OUT MORE

I would like more information about the Anarcho-Syndicalist Network. Please send me information.

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Address.....  
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PO Box 532 Newcastle 2300 NSW.

If undeliverable, return to  
PO Box 92, Broadway NSW 2007  
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*Continued From Page 18* USI and naming the hall in honour of Cipriani, represent just what we

want to be to newly take advantage of the lessons of history and the old healthy ideas adapted to the modern situation called

globalisation and that is nothing other than the highest phase of capitalism in which rights are demolished, the producers are marginalised and new poor created."

## IRELAND TODAY

### Indefensible Health Cut Backs

**What an incredible week for the Irish Health Service! It seemed impossible that it could get any worse and then it did. Wage increases were handed to the top-brass while ordinary health workers and the public were faced with cut-backs, lay-offs and recruitment freezes. It's clear that the politicians, the powerful HSE bureaucracy and the hospital consultants will continue to look out for each other while ordinary people suffer.**

Despite being responsible for the Health Services Executive running a deficit of E245m, Brendan Drumm, the CEO of the HSE, which runs the Irish Health System, was handed a bonus of E80,000. Nice work if you can get it.

If that wasn't bad enough, the handsomely paid consultants were offered a new contract that would see their salary rise to E216,000 for a mere 39 hours work a week! Of course that wasn't enough for the consultants. They plan on rejecting this of-

fer because they might have to work the occasional night-shift, something many workers are well used to without such perks.

At the same time, on Wednesday, 19th September the HSE announced that the



contracts of 30 agency nurses would not be renewed in Sligo General Hospital.

The statement made no reference to the impact on services of these cuts. Many areas will be affected - clinics will not be held and waiting lists will grow.

Also on Wednesday, The Minister for (Ill-)Health, Mary Harney, confirmed that

Ennis General Hospital would lose its 24-hour Accident and Emergency service. Instead a consultant-led A&E service will be available at the hospital with limited hours of operation.

If that wasn't enough, it was reported that maternity patients were being sent to hotels because of a lack of beds in the hospital. What a waste of resources and a lack of proper treatment for the patients. Is this what we pay taxes for?

This blatant contrast should wake us all up to the real reasons for the problems in the Irish Health System. We need a country-wide campaign uniting patients and health workers that demands system wide change. Patients groups and health workers should reach out and build such a campaign with the aim of fundamental, radical change. Only a united campaign that attacks the root cause of the problems in the health service, namely the excessive power of consultants and the HSE and the right-wing privatising agenda of Mary Harney and the government, can deliver a health service that people in Ireland deserve.

*Thanks to  
Worker Solidarity Magazine*