

# ***Monopolise Resistance?***

***How Globalise Resistance  
would hijack revolt***



*published by*

**SchNEWS**  
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### **This pamphlet**

has been put together by people involved in direct action from a number of organisations and groups. It grew out of discussions led by SchNEWS and people involved in direct action in Manchester at the Earth First! gathering held in Derbyshire in the summer of 2001. After this, it was discussed amongst people from SchNEWS, Reclaim the Streets, Earth First! and others. Needless to say, everyone didn't agree on everything - but everyone did agree that we needed to say something along these lines.

One problem people mentioned a lot was the use of 'us', 'we', 'the movement' and so on when describing people involved in direct action and anti-capitalism. This isn't meant to sound exclusive - you can't 'join' the anti-capitalist movement - it's just kinda difficult to write about things any other way.

### **SchNEWS**

is a weekly direct action newsletter written by activists that has been providing information for action since 1994. Every year we publish a book compiling these newsletters, other material and a comprehensive contacts database.

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Front cover: *Carnival against capital, City of London, June 1999*

**“The protesters are winning. They are winning on the streets. Before too long they will be winning the argument. Globalisation is fast becoming a cause without credible champions.”**

**Financial Times, 17th August 2001**

For the first time in decades, millions of people are actively questioning the existence of capitalism. From the Mexican jungle to the streets of London, from the summits of Seattle and Genoa to the factories of Indonesia, a broad alliance of groups, networks and campaigns is mobilising people to take part in action directly challenging capitalism and its destruction of communities and ecologies. Millions are beginning to see that another world is possible.

But there is no guarantee that capitalism will fade away as people see through it. The rich and powerful would rather lay waste to the world than lose their control over it. They've already made quite a start. Our job is to stop them.

The anti-capitalist movement is at a key point in its development. Three years ago it hardly existed. The next three years will be crucial. This is why we've decided to make public our fears that all this good work could be undone by people who have nothing to do with this resistance but instead want to take it over for their own ends.

This pamphlet is an attempt to show why the Socialist Workers Party and Globalise Resistance are trying to do just that. While working closely with 'respectable' anti-globalisation groups, the SWP/GR increasingly attack those involved in direct action, describing us - just as the gutter press does - as disorganised, mindless hoodlums obsessed with violence. They are willing to make these attacks so they can portray themselves as more 'organised' and, therefore, the best bet if you think capitalism stinks and want to do something about it.

They are nothing of the sort. They want to kill the vitality of our movement - with the best of intentions, of course - and we need to organise better in the face of this threat.

Which is the other reason that we've written this pamphlet. Direct action has achieved great things over the years but - let's face it - sometimes the way we organise things is just crap. We need to change that.

This isn't some stupid slagging match. As regular readers will know, SchNEWS is not in the habit of attacking other groups. We just think these things need saying.

The opportunity for winning mass support for anti-capitalist ideas has never been greater. Let's not blow it.

# THE TWEEDLEDEE TENDENCY

As the anti-capitalist movement grows across the world, some people are beginning to tell us that we need closer links with social democratic parties - the tweedledee of electoral politics and often the very people organising the state's attacks on us - in the name of 'unity'. We believe in unity - but watering down anti-capitalist politics to gain a spurious 'unity' with supporters of capitalism is a betrayal that history rarely forgives. In-yer-face, on the streets anti-capitalism is what gives our movement its vitality and attracts support for our activities - it's not something to be played down, disguised or get embarrassed about.

Over the last year the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and its front organisation Globalise Resistance (GR) have been attempting to fundamentally change the nature of the anti-capitalist movement in Britain. The SWP have got involved in the anti-capitalist movement for very different reasons to the rest of us. Their main aim is to take control of the anti-capitalist movement and turn it into an ineffective, pro-Labour pressure group so as to increase the influence and membership of the SWP. They're not mainly interested in working with others - they completely disagree with the politics of just about everyone else involved. As they put it in Genoa,



*"Remember, we're the only people here with an overall strategy for the anti-capitalist movement. So I want five people to go out with membership cards, five to sell papers and five to sell bandanas."*<sup>1</sup>

They see the anti-capitalist movement as made up of well-meaning but muddled people who will not be able to achieve anything significant until they are led by the SWP. They want to lead us for our own good:

*"Mass movements don't get the political representation that they deserve unless a minority of activists within the movement seek to create a political leadership, which means a political party that shares their vision of political power from below"*<sup>2</sup>

But the SWP do not share the views of the movement they now claim to be a part of and want to 'lead'. They vote for the government. They oppose 'confrontational' direct action. They vastly overestimate the extent to which the Labour Party and trade unions represent ordinary people, consistently arguing for anti-capitalists to moderate their activities to suit the prejudices of 'Labour Party activists'. They want to take us back to the days of ineffective walk-to-Hyde-Park-and-listen-to-a-Labour-MP politics that the direct action movement in this country was born as a reaction against.

There is a world of difference between winning people to anti-capitalism and watering down anti-capitalism so as not to upset people in the Labour Party. If it was just a matter of the SWP having pointless marches and shouting themselves hoarse inside police pens it wouldn't be a problem - they've been doing that for years and

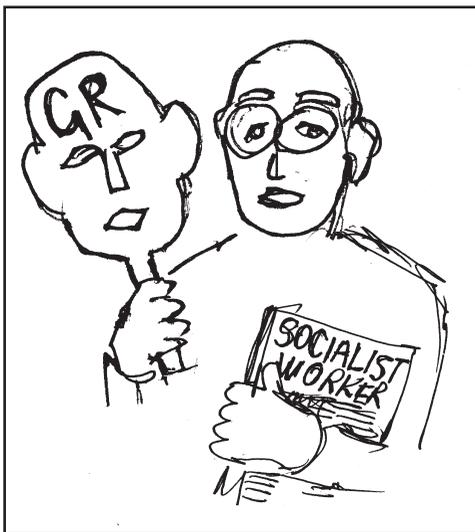
nobody's noticed. The problem is that they are actively conning people attracted to anti-capitalism away from direct action and into compromising with the Labour Party. All their activities are geared towards making our movement less confrontational and less effective. And their way into our movement is Globalise Resistance.

## WHAT A FRONT!

Globalise Resistance exists mainly to increase the influence of the SWP within the anti-capitalist movement. It is only interested in activities to the extent that its brand recognition increases. For instance, commenting on Gothenburg GR's full-time organiser and SWP member Guy Taylor said "GR has gone down brilliantly, the words on the GR banner 'People before Profit, Our World is Not for Sale' were taken up and chanted by the whole protest!"<sup>3</sup> Globalise Resistance would no more take part in an action without prominently displaying its banners and placards than an oil company would give money to an environmental project without telling anyone.

In all important respects GR is run by, and in the interests of, the SWP - it is a front organisation. This does not mean that all its supporters are SWP members - far from it. the whole point of a successful front organisation is that it involves people who wouldn't otherwise join the party while at the same time being dominated by the party and existing to fulfill the aims of the party. A really successful front organisation will have lots of non-party people involved in running it while remaining politically dominated by the party controlling it. As a speaker put it at the SWP's Marxism 2001 conference, "The united front is a way for a tiny minority to win over lots of people... Globalise Resistance is a united front."<sup>4</sup>

Soon after he attacked Reclaim the Streets in the press for being "part of the problem, not part of the solution" George Monbiot was invited by the SWP to be a main speaker at a number of GR rallies. This allowed the SWP to promote Globalise Resistance as a 'broad-based' movement involving well known figures like Monbiot. The important business of that tour was reported in Socialist Worker: "On the Globalise Resistance tour 18 people joined the SWP in Manchester, 10 in Birmingham, 9 in Sheffield, 8 in Leeds and 4 in Liverpool".<sup>5</sup>



# BRIGHTON 2001 - SEATTLE IN REVERSE

A clear illustration of the difference between the SWP/GR and anti-capitalists was their opposition to any form of direct action against the 2001 Labour Party conference in Brighton. Soon after returning from Genoa, Chris Nineham of the SWP/GR told a meeting in Brighton that *“it would be wrong to close down the Labour conference”*, arguing that attempting to blockade the conference would *“give the media an excuse to call us mad extremists”* and *“isolate us from potentially massive support”*. Instead he called on activists to *“give encouragement to those in the Labour Party fighting Blair”*<sup>6</sup>.

Two years earlier in Seattle, hundreds of workers left a union march to join activists blockading the World Trade Organisation. They waded through tear gas, pepper spray and police tanks to join an illegal blockade that stopped the WTO in its tracks. It was a major victory for our movement. What the SWP argued for at the 2001 Labour conference was a sort of Seattle in reverse - instead of trying to get unions and workers to join the direct action they wanted the direct action to stop so as not to upset the union leaders. in the face of calls for a blockade of the conference they organised a ‘non-confrontational’ demonstration aimed at *“unit[ing] everyone who hates privatisation and wants to push for real resistance from the union leaders”*<sup>7</sup>. Forget taking action ourselves, they tell us - our job is to *“place pressure on our leaders to fight”*<sup>8</sup>.



Dusting down the cops at the IMF/World Bank meeting in Prague, September 2000

# THANKS, BUT NO THANKS

The instinct for unity in our movement is very strong, even amongst people with very different political outlooks. Some people see no problem with the SWP's involvement in our movement, viewing criticism of their politics as splitting the unity we need to be successful. But this is to misunderstand what the SWP are up to - if the SWP's aggressive selling of their sect's politics is successful our movement will be significantly weakened. As an anonymous posting on the uk indymedia site recently put it,

*“Many have heard of the recent British history of direct action protest, and it was particularly clear in Prague and Genoa how many have been inspired by it. How many are inspired by non-confrontational protest marches to nowhere? I can tell you, only the equivalents of SWP in all those other countries. So let's please keep up the momentum for creativity and change, and not give it up to people who advocate going back to old, stale and useless tactics! This is no call for disunity, it's a call for a movement not to commit suicide by default!”*

But if we're gonna stop the SWP/GR from blunting the impact of anti-capitalist politics, we need to examine what we're up to. Globalise Resistance advertised and organised transport for hundreds of new people to Genoa - we did not. They organised dozens of public meetings within days of coming back from Genoa - we failed to. Globalise Resistance have organised large conferences designed to raise their profile within the movement - we have organised direct action conferences in the past but nowadays, while rightly concentrating on actions, seem to act as if these conferences don't matter. They do.

We want to kickstart a debate about how we grow. How do we meaningfully involve new people in activities? How do we learn from our mistakes and pass on our experiences? How do we get our message across faced with a hostile and manipulative media? In short, how do we expand from a handful of relatively small autonomous groups into a mass movement organically linked to everyone at the sharp end of capitalist exploitation and state repression?



# WHAT IS ANTI-CAPITALISM?

The anti-capitalist movement involves a wide range of groups and diverse styles of campaigns. But there are common principles that run through all our activities.

## 1 A DETERMINATION TO RESIST CAPITALISM PRACTICALLY

Our movement is firmly based on the principle that direct action is central to opposing capitalism. Capitalism is a very practical thing, you don't overthrow it by proving that it's not very nice - you take actions to prevent its destruction of communities and ecologies. This means occupying offices, destroying jet fighters, shutting down docks and blockading summits. It means creating social centres out of derelict buildings, holding parties on motorways, defending picket lines and trashing GM crops. It means going beyond words and making resistance part of everyday life.

## 2 TAKING A LEAD FROM MOVEMENTS IN THE SOUTH

Capitalism is responsible for enormous, and growing, inequality in the world – and it is the peoples of the world's south that suffer most. The income of the richest 20% of the world's population is at least 75 times greater than the income of the poorest 20% (it was 30 times greater forty years ago). Third world debt, enforced by the military might of the United States, Britain and other rich countries, is simply a racket to keep this inequality entrenched. Every day, £128m flows from the poorest countries in the world to the banks of the rich countries.

Our movement has always been inspired by the struggles of peoples in the south, the majority of humanity, against capitalism. Massive social movements such as the Zapatistas in Mexico, Narmada Andolen Bachoa in India and Movimento Sem Terra in Brazil are fighting life and death battles to defend their communities from capital's never ending quest for profit. In recent years strike waves and popular protests have been seen from Argentina to Korea, Nigeria to Indonesia. We support and learn from these movements. We see our struggle and theirs as one and the same.

## 3 BUILDING PRACTICAL ALLIANCES WITH OTHERS

Our movement encompasses a wide range of groups and campaigns with overlapping activities and ideas. We are a movement of one no and many yeses. While there are constant discussions and disagreements amongst people, our organic, decentralised way of organising minimise the extent to which abstract ideological debates prevent us from working together. New ideas are tested in practice in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

The media and others are keen to pigeonhole anti-capitalism as a cultural phenomenon defined by lifestyle, dress and age. The direct action movement in Britain has roots in various communities, notably the anti-road camps and campaigns of the 1990s, but the portrayal of our movement as a 'sub-culture' minimises the extent to which anti-capitalist ideas have taken root in many parts of society. For instance, it is simply not true to say that this is an 'anarchist' movement - anarchists play an important role, but so do socialists, greens,



*Genetic crops getting a good kicking. Nether Compton, Dorset, 2000*

communists and loads of people who wouldn't call themselves any of these things.

People are always developing new, practical links with others fighting capitalism - strikers, anti-racist campaigners and others both here and abroad - based on mutual respect and a shared determination to challenge capitalism in all its forms. The way we organise allows us to minimise the state's targetting of individuals as 'leaders' and encourages new ideas and tactics to develop in a way that would otherwise not be possible.

#### **4 SHOWING A HEALTHY DISREGARD FOR LEGALITY**

The law has always been used as a weapon to prevent effective opposition to capitalism. From the anti-union laws preventing picketing to the Terrorism Act outlawing free speech, from the Criminal Justice Act stopping people dancing, squatting and protesting to the Public Order Act's attacks on basic rights of assembly, laws are constantly brought in to attack us. We'd be mad to treat these laws as anything but an occupational hazard to be got around - we certainly don't let them dictate what we do. Opposing capitalism within the law is like playing a game of football after deciding you're not going to kick the ball outside your own half. It doesn't work.

This doesn't mean it's okay to go around attacking and robbing people everywhere - that's what capitalism does. It means recognising that the state and its laws are there to defend the capitalist system and we shouldn't be surprised when it does exactly that. It means showing that we will not play by capitalism's rules of 'legitimate protest' because they are their rules, not ours, and if we play by them we will lose.

#### **5 BREAKING WITH THE 'OFFICIAL' MOVEMENTS AND PARTIES THAT HOLD OUR STRUGGLES BACK**

The wealth of the richest 358 people in the world is more than the annual income of nearly half the world's population; 800 million people in the world are severely malnourished or starving; a tenth of children in the poor countries of the world die before their fifth birthday. We use these sort of facts to illustrate how obscene a system capitalism is. But the sheer scale of this obscenity raises an important question

- not so much how do we get rid of capitalism but rather, if capitalism is so obscene, so wasteful, so against the interest of humanity, how come it still exists?

The answer, of course, is that lots of people want it to. Many people in Britain and other rich countries are able to live in relative affluence as a result of the millions that capitalism keeps flowing in from the south. It has been estimated that if UK consumption were matched globally we would need eight planets to provide the resources needed. The cheap commodities produced by slave labour in the south, the massive 'debt repayments' to the north, the manipulation of world markets by the rich countries and their institutions such as the World Bank, World Trade Organisation and International Monetary Fund contribute to a higher standard of living for many people in the rich countries. It's not just merchant bankers and multinational directors that gain from Britain's financial power - many middle-managers, professionals and others benefit significantly.



It is from people like this - stuck between those at the top and the millions of workers, carers and unemployed with no security or privileges at the bottom - that the Labour Party and, to a large extent, the trade unions draw their membership. While there are working class people in the Labour Party and trade unions they do not determine these organisations' political standpoint.

The Labour Party has always played an important role in sabotaging, undermining and holding back effective opposition to capitalism, acting as a safety valve for capitalism, allowing people to feel they have a choice, without anything changing. A recent survey revealed that only 15% of Labour Party members see themselves as working class. This is not a party of the toiling masses - it is a thoroughly pro-capitalist organisation that is backed and funded by major corporations. From supporting the corporate takeover of our public services to arming third world dictators, from incarcerating asylum seekers to criminalising opposition with the



Terrorism Act, the Labour Party has shown itself to be not misguided or wrong-headed or badly led but, quite simply, capitalism's government of choice.

The unions today are little better. They are major financial institutions in their own right, holding assets of over £1,000m. Unions are now more interested in providing financial services for its members – the better off, the better – than fighting for their members and facing the prospect of having their assets sequestered. Less than a third of British workers are in unions and those that are tend to have more secure jobs - every other trade unionist is a professional and over a third have degrees while only one in five casual workers and 6% of workers under 20 are in a union. A middle aged manager with a mortgage and a private pension is more likely to be in a union than a teenage casual worker on the minimum wage.

This isn't to say that we don't support strikes and other actions by workers - far from it. The direct action movement occupied and blockaded docks during the Liverpool dock dispute and Reclaim The Streets have taken action in support of striking tube workers. In contrast, almost all significant strikes in the last few years - the Liverpool dockers, the Hillingdon hospital workers, the Tameside care workers, the Dudley hospital workers - have been denied the support they needed to win by their own unions.

As privatisation kicks in we can expect to see thousands of workers, like the SITA workers in Brighton (see *page 15*) taking action to defend basic services against profiteering fatcat companies. These actions will only win if they are based in local communities and take the sort of action that unions, usually more concerned with staying within anti-union laws than defending jobs or services, all too often tell their members to avoid. Anyone with an ounce of anti-capitalism in them will be supporting these actions - and hopefully helping them to win.

## ***‘VOTE LABOUR WHERE YOU MUST’***

The SWP reject all these principles. While using the language of direct action, they take part in it as little as possible. Handing out leaflets in Bristol becomes an ‘action’. A book launch in London is preceded by a widely advertised ‘action’ that involves shouting slogans outside McDonalds for half an hour. While paying lipservice to the idea of direct action, the SWP prefer legal, ineffective demos - preferably with Labour councillors or MPs - everytime because they are more unacceptable to the Labour Party supporters they are trying to win to their party.

The SWP believe that the struggles of peoples in the south are far less important than trade union struggles in Britain and other richer countries. They believe that third world debt is peripheral to the world economy and that workers in Britain and other richer countries are more exploited than workers in the third world<sup>9</sup>. The Zapatistas, they reckon, are *“not in a position to provide political leadership for the movement that has celebrated their example”*<sup>10</sup>. No, that’s a role that the SWP have reserved for themselves (and since when did the Zapatistas want to ‘lead’ us anyway?).

But what most clearly differentiates the SWP from anyone with a spark of anti-capitalism is their support for the Labour government. The SWP have always voted for the Labour Party. At the last election they stood Socialist Alliance candidates in a minority of seats but instructed their members to vote Labour in the majority of seats. In the same publication that they say *“a vote for Labour is a vote for continuing inequality, poverty, privatisation and slavish devotion to the market”*<sup>10</sup> they announced that *“our approach in the coming election should be ‘vote Socialist where you can, vote Labour where you must’”*<sup>12</sup>.

The SWP would have us believe that the Labour Party and unions are full of closet anti-capitalists who can hardly wait to take to the barricades with us - as long as we behave ourselves. When they tell us that *“many who were on the anti-capitalist demonstrations or sympathised with them will also be members of the Labour Party”*<sup>13</sup> and *“anti-capitalists have to build bridges towards these outraged Labour members”*<sup>14</sup> you know that they’re not calling on Labour Party activists to adopt direct action - they are trying to convince anti-capitalists to tone down their activities so as not to upset these people. When they write that, *“combining direct action with electioneering will not always come naturally to those from a Labour background”*<sup>15</sup> you know it’s not the electioneering that will be quietly forgotten as they try to turn the anti-capitalist movement into a sad left-wing pressure group.

Of course, there are loads of people who’ve got involved in Globalise Resistance and the SWP because they really do want to fight capitalism. It’s easy to mistake the glitz and big meetings for effective organisation, especially when SWP members often simply lie about their real beliefs when out recruiting.

But it’s not effective. It’s a sort of convenience politics - the same everywhere, obsessed with market share, sometimes initially tasty but, in the end, not much to it. The real world’s messier, less straightforward and sometimes downright confusing - but it is the real world.

# GETTING OUR ACT(ION) TOGETHER

Over the last few years the direct action/anti-capitalist movement has developed enormously. People have been continually and creatively adapting tactics to meet new challenges and changing circumstances. Alongside big actions, people are increasingly doing things locally, in their own communities. From the fight against cuts in Hackney to the *Vote Nobody!* campaign in Bristol, activists are building strong links with other people fed up with what capitalism has to offer. This isn't a retreat away from the big picture - it's building things solidly, connecting with the spirit of resistance you find in estates and communities up and down the country, while never forgetting how all our struggles - and the struggles of millions of people across the world - are linked.

We need to build on this. In the next few years we'll need all our resourcefulness if we're gonna seize the moment, build new alliances and involve new people in fighting this mad system. We'll need to be bolder in promoting our ideas, more creative in involving new people and clearer in getting our message across.

We haven't got all the answers - and sometimes we're our own worst enemy. Our aversion to hierarchy is healthy, but too often it just means that there's some inner circle making the real decisions. This is not 'non-hierarchical' - it is often the very opposite, excluding many people from participation. Ask yourself - how easy is it for someone new to your town to get in touch with your group? Do you have meetings where newcomers - and not just people from your own social circles - are made to feel welcome and involved in things? The easier we make it for new people to get involved, the more we connect with the day-to-day struggles of people around us, the more successful we will be. It's really as simple as that.

Movements never stay the same for long - they either grow or fade away. If we fail to continually improve the way we organise, there is a real danger that people will turn their backs on direct action and be led back into the dead end of electoral politics. We can't allow that to happen. The stakes are just too high. We want to win.



# SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY-SOME BLASTS FROM THE PAST

The SWP have a long history of appearing revolutionary in the abstract - while opposing effective action in real life.

● In the late 1970s, the SWP formed **the Anti-Nazi League (ANL)** to oppose the growth of the fascist National Front. Then as now, the greatest attack on black people in Britain did not come from fascist groups but from a Labour government implementing racist immigration laws. The almost exclusively white ANL grew into a movement of hundreds of thousands holding massive rallies and concerts across the country where Labour politicians would be invited to address the crowds. But, when it came to fighting state racism, The SWP argued that the ANL should not oppose immigration controls. The SWP refused to oppose state racism rather than upset Labour Party supporters.

● In September 1978, the **Asian community in east London** asked the ANL to divert people from a big ANL carnival to the east end to oppose a National Front march. The ANL refused. SWP members argued that the ANL should not oppose the racist march because *“even such a movement on the empty streets of the city of London facing 8,000 police might not have broken through and beaten the Nazi marchers”*<sup>16</sup>. The Asian community was deserted by the SWP.

● The **miners’ strike of 1984-85** saw miners, their families and their communities fighting for survival against a determined state machine and a militarised police force. The miners had enormous support from miners support groups throughout the country but, of course, the Labour Party and trade union movement refused to give the miners the support they needed to win. Faced with the refusal of other unions to back them, miners organised hit squads to prevent scabbing by sabotaging scabs’ buses and physically prevent scabs from breaking their strike. The SWP, supporting only legal trade unionism, condemned the hit squads, arguing that *“we are opposed to individuals or groups using violence as a substitute for class struggle”*<sup>17</sup> and that *“such raids can give trade union officials an excuse not to deliver solidarity”*<sup>18</sup>.

● During the campaign of **mass resistance to the poll tax** in the late 1980s, the SWP insisted that only the unions would be able to beat the tax. Dismissing the mass non-payment movement in Newcastle, for instance, they said that *“In a city like Newcastle the 250 employees in the Finance Department are more powerful than the 250,000 people who have to pay the poll tax”*<sup>19</sup>. Chris Harman, the current editor of Socialist Worker said at the time that *“on the council estates there are drug peddlers, junkies and people claiming houses under false names. These people will complete the registration forms to avoid attention from the council”*<sup>20</sup>. If the SWP had had their way, there would have been no non-payment campaign and the poll tax would not have been defeated.

# FIGHTING PRIVATISATION

In June 2001 Brighton's refuse workers went to work to find that their employers, the French multinational SITA, had imposed increased workloads that were impossible to deliver. When the the 160-strong workforce protested they were sacked. The workforce occupied the depot.

This is the sort of dispute that makes the left go all wobbly at the knees with paper sellers flocking to the picket lines to tell the workers 'how to organise' - and 'why not join our party while you're at it.' But what happened was something entirely different.

Within a few hours, people from the Anarchist Tea Pot were down at the depot with food and blankets. Other activists helped design a leaflet with the workers to give out around town. The next morning, SITA brought in casual employment agency workers to scab against the strike. It didn't work. Supporters of the Free Party successfully persuaded the agency workers that if they scabbed they wouldn't be welcome anymore at Brighton free parties! Then someone using good old-fashioned direct action skills locked onto one of the trucks for five hours, preventing the rest from moving. As one striker put it, "*This fellow is crazy but what he has done is much appreciated*". Next, activists picketed recruitment agencies that were advertising the sacked refuse collectors jobs - within a few hours they had all pulled out. Thursday morning was spent with scouts on bikes looking for scab trucks while 30 people sat in a park waiting to spring into direct action.

By Thursday evening, SITA had caved in. All the workers were reinstated, getting full pay for the time they were on strike. As GMB official Gary Smith told SchNEWS at the time, "*We had enormous public support from the local unemployed centre, direct action people and loads of different communities who are fed up with their services being run for profit. We should take inspiration from this fight, because it shows that when people get together we can stop privatisation in its tracks.*"



Refuse workers occupy the SITA depot, June 2001

# THE OKASIONAL CAFE

Squat cafes and community centres are a great of getting people involved away from the intimidation from the police and authorities that you would expect to get at an action. In Manchester, the Okasional Cafe is a squatted social centre that has been appearing occasionally for the past four years in different buildings around the city. It's a friendly, accessible place where people can get to know each other, start working together and build up trust. On election day this year, it was the base for a Manchester anti-election day of action with street theatre, free food and music.

More recently, people from the Okasional cafe heard about a film called *Injustice* dealing with deaths in police custody - wherever the film was due to be shown, the Police Federation would threaten last minute legal action and the cinema would be forced to pull it. Some people from the cafe decided to get in touch with the film makers and offer the squat as an alternative venue in case this happened again. Sure enough, a local cinema was soon forced to pull out of showing the film because of threats of legal action and the Okasional cafe stepped in. Activists shepherded an audience of about 100 around the corner from the cinema to watch the film in the cafe. People who wouldn't normally come to the cafe were told that they were in a squat and what else was going on there. After the film there was food and a discussion with the families of victims of police killings and the filmmakers about their campaign for justice.

# AVIN' IT IN HARINGEY

The Haringey Solidarity Group from north London have been involved in radical community organising for years. Originally set up to fight the poll tax, they decided to carry on after the tax was defeated. Since then they have been involved in everything from supporting local workers' struggles and fighting casualisation to keeping an eye on police surveillance and the exposing the cost of corporate regeneration of the borough.

*"We are a group of local people who feel things need changing and we don't have much faith in politicians and other so called leaders to do it for us. Things will only get better for ordinary people when we decide what is best for us. It is not for some boss or so-called leader to decide what they think we need. We believe in doing things for ourselves wherever possible and we try to encourage others to do likewise.*

*"We also feel that when ordinary people fight back against the system - be that your boss, the local council or some multi-national company - they need to be supported. So we agreed from the birth of Haringey Solidarity Group onwards that, where possible, we would work with and support local campaigns and try to get them to support us. By this we don't mean taking over a campaign. We mean sharing skills, giving each other confidence to do things and learning from each other's successes and failures. People need to feel confident before they can even think of starting to fight back themselves. We know this may be a slow process but it is far better than starting something up and telling people what they must do. We don't want to just become the new set of leaders."*

# FIGHTING CASUALISATION

## THE SIMON JONES MEMORIAL CAMPAIGN

Simon Jones was killed in 1998 on his first day as a casual worker at Shoreham docks - another victim of Britain's casual labour economy. His death would have been brushed under the carpet like hundreds of others - except this time a campaign of direct action was set up to support Simon's family's fight for justice.

The docks where Simon was killed in were shut down, the employment agency that sent him there occupied. When it was clear that nothing was going to get done, the campaign occupied the Department of Trade and Industry, shut down a bridge outside the Health and Safety Executive and blockaded the Crown Prosecution Service. Eventually, the state agreed to prosecute the company involved.

This victory would not have been possible without direct action. Dozens of local union branches gave money to the campaign which they saw as fighting for the most basic union right - the right not to be killed at work. But while union activists kept telling the campaign how they fully supported the campaign's effective tactics, they also said that they couldn't do that sort of thing for fear of breaking union laws - they saw the direct action movement as being able to take the action it couldn't. As one union activist put it, *"Nowadays, unions are just too scared to do this sort of stuff. I wish that wasn't so, but it is. Let's hope that changes."*

## GET YOURSELF CONNECTED...

One way of breaking down barriers and encouraging more cooperation between people is to have a regular get together for different anti-capitalist groups in an area. In Brighton the Rebel Alliance is an irregular get together of the various direct action/non-hierarchical groups in the town. Groups such as SchNEWS, Hell Raising Anarchist Girls, Anarchist Tea Pot, Simon Jones Memorial Campaign, animal rights and permaculture groups, etc are given a couple of minutes to say what they are up to. This allows new people to see what's happening locally and decide what they want to get involved in. It's also a great way for everyone to meet people they might not normally come across, exchange information and discuss what's going on in the big bad world beyond your own campaign or group. Similar stuff happens in London with CltY and in Manchester with the Riotous Assembly, where each meeting has a topic with speakers and films as well.

Hard core activists are probably used to waking up to in-depth discussions about globalisation, so it's sometimes easy for them to forget that there are few places where new people who don't happen to be mates with activists already can listen to what we have to say and discuss stuff with people who are involved. You can use these get-togethers as opportunities to discuss fundamental issues - for example the violence/non-violence debate has old political hacks crying into their beer/herbal tea but for new people it might be the first time they've had the chance to discuss some of the arguments.

# WATCHING THEM WATCHING US

We all know that the mainstream corporate media is controlled by people who don't exactly take kindly to anti-capitalist ideas. We have our own media - hey, you're reading it! - and there's never anything stopping people getting together to publish a newsletter, stick up a website or whatever. From small, local newsletters to the worldwide Indymedia sites - the Italian Indymedia site alone was getting over a million hits a day during Genoa - we certainly have ways of getting our message across.

But that doesn't mean we can avoid the mainstream media altogether. It's certainly true that journalists can stitch you up, misrepresent what you say and try to make you look like an idiot, and in the past people involved in actions have often refused to have anything to do with the media because of this. The problem is that nowadays our silence is being used by groups like *Globalise Resistance* and self-promoting academics to speak 'on our behalf'. So whereas in the past we could often let our actions speak for themselves, it's now quite important to consider talking to the media - so that someone else doesn't come along and claim to speak for you.

So how can you get your message across? Well, when *Justice?* set up a Squatters Estate Agency in Brighton a few years back to advertise local empty property to potential squatters and draw attention to homelessness in the town, there was an incredible media interest. Everyone from Australian TV and the German press to Radio 1 and Newsnight were desperate to hear what was going on. Luckily enough, *Justice?* had had a media training day a month before, learning how to deal with dodgy interviewers, so were able to prepare for the onslaught quite well. "We got half a dozen of us together, went through the basic points we wanted to make - so many empty homes, so many homeless people, why? - and did the interviews sticking to those points. Because there was a group of us, no one got seized on as leader - and it was great being able to beat MPs and government ministers in discussions by keeping to the basics."



# RESOURCES

## ● Reclaim the Streets

PO Box 9656, London N4 4JY Tel 0207 281 4621 [www.reclaimthestreets.net](http://www.reclaimthestreets.net)

## ● Earth First!

PO Box 487, Norwich NR2 3AL Tel 01603 219811 [www.eco-action.org/efau](http://www.eco-action.org/efau)

## ● Peoples Global Action

Helping to coordinate international days of action [www.agp.org](http://www.agp.org)

## ● Haringey Solidarity Group

PO.Box 2474, London N8 Tel 020-8374 5027 <http://home.clara.net/hsg/hhome.html>. Check out the leaflet *What can we do in our local area?*. Also produce *The Agitator - a directory of autonomous groups*.

## ● The Independent Media Centre

[www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org) or [www.uk.indymedia.org](http://www.uk.indymedia.org) for the British site. Indymedia began life at the protests in Seattle against the World Trade Organisation and now has sites all around the world. This network of collectively run media outlets is “for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of the truth”.

## ● The Squatters Handbook

Available for £1 + SAE from Advisory Service for Squatters, 2 St.Paul’s Road, London N1 2QN Tel 020 7359 8814 [www.squat.freeserve.co.uk](http://www.squat.freeserve.co.uk)

## ● The Pork-Bolter

Have produced a ‘How to set up a local newsletter’

PO Box 4144, Worthing BN14 7NZ. [www.eco-action.org/porkbolter](http://www.eco-action.org/porkbolter).

## ● The Activists’ Media Toolkit

£2.50 inc p&p (cheques payable to Oxycetylene) 16b Cherwell Street, Oxford OX4 1BA [www.toolkits.org.uk](http://www.toolkits.org.uk)

## ● Vampire Alert!

A short leaflet produced by anarchists in 1999 alerting people to the SWP’s decision to become involved in anti-capitalist activities. Available at [www.leadsef.org.uk](http://www.leadsef.org.uk)

## ● The Tyranny of Structurelessness by Jo Freeman

A seminal essay from 1970 about the debate over small/unstructured group organisation that has been raging from the 70s till today. Available for £1.50 from AK Distribution, PO BOX 12766, Edinburgh EH8 9YE or at [http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/hist\\_texts/structurelessness.html](http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/hist_texts/structurelessness.html)

# REFERENCES

1 Chris Nineham speaking at SWP/GR meeting 18th July 2001, Genoa convergence centre 2 Socialist Review (SR) January 2000 3 Quoted in “eyewitness account from Gothenburg” at [www.brightoncollective.org.uk](http://www.brightoncollective.org.uk) 4 SWP speaker at Marxism 2001 5 Socialist Worker (SW) 17th February 2001 6 All quotes from posting at [www.uk.indymedia.org](http://www.uk.indymedia.org) 7 SW 1st September 2001 8 SW 15th September 2001 9 Alex Callinicos at Marxism 2001 session on *Is third world debt central to the world economy* 10 International Socialism Journal (ISJ) winter 2000 11 ISJ Spring 2001 12 ISJ Spring 2001 13 SR January 2000 14 SW 8th September 2001 15 ISJ Spring 2001 16 SW 30th September 1978 17 SW 25th August 1984 18 SW 11th August 1984 19 SWP speaker at National Action Conference against the Poll Tax, quoted in Lorna Reid, *Poll Tax: Paying to be Poor* 20 Speaking at the Socialist Conference 1988, quoted in *ibid*.

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