

*Solidarity*

# WORKPLACE & COMMUNITY ORGANISING



**AN INTRODUCTION**

*Anarcho-syndicalism 101*





"To revolt is a natural tendency of life. Even a worm turns against the foot that crushes it. In general, the vitality and relative dignity of an animal can be measured by the intensity of its instinct to revolt."

- Bakunin

# **CONTENTS:**

<b>Introduction:</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Weakening the Dam: Shopfloor organising: –Industrial Workers of the World</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Solidarity Networks and How to Build Them: –Seattle Solidarity Network</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Anarchist Organising &amp; Dual Power: –Brisbane Solidarity Network</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Anarchist Work Groups and 1-to-3 Organising: –Brisbane Solidarity Network</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>From Workplace Resistance to Community Control: –CNT (National Confederation of Labour)</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Methods of Struggle: A Taxonomy of Tactics: –CNT (National Confederation of Labour)</b>	<b>69</b>

# INTRODUCTION:

**A**lthough the contents of this booklet are written from an anarcho-syndicalist perspective, ultimately we don't care if you identify formally as an *anarchist*, *anarcho-syndicalist*, whatever—we are more interested in what you *do* and *how* you do it. As a practice and over-arching worldview anarchism is fundamentally about sticking up for each other – against the whims of bosses, landlords and bureaucrats, against systemic and psychological systems of social control, against racism, sexism and other forces that hold illegitimate power over our lives. At the same time anarchist theory looks at how we can organise ourselves and our struggles in a way that reflects the kinds of society we want to see, and the nuts and bolts of doing this in such a way so that our movements can't be demobilised or sold out from above, or used as trampolines for political careerists, NGO's and those who seek to become managers over and above the people.

None of this theorising matters if we don't try to implement our ideas beyond the realm of traditional Activist politics & propaganda and into the areas of our lives where we experience exploitation most directly: in our workplaces and neighbourhoods.

Our situation in Queensland is one where strike action is basically illegal. Trade-Unions for the most part act as representative service organisations and NGO's do - with all the rotten fruits of bureaucracy, paid officials and hierarchy. Most of the workforce have never been in or participated in union culture and there are not many opportunities to learn from struggle. In terms of organising, this sounds bleak; there is so much to do. When we look at significant fighting organisations like the *CNT*, the *FORA*, the *IWW*, the *FAU* etc, we have to look at how they developed and the organising that led up to them. The *COBAS* in Italy for example grew out of the workplace base assembly movement.

Against the social order that demeans our human dignity, we need more and better organisers, and we need the confidence and support to make attempts where in the past we have laid down and been walked over. At the same time we need to make attempts at forming the organisations and infrastructure

necessary to build a healthy culture of working class hospitality, resistance and sustenance. In that vein, the following looks at the nuts & bolts of how we can be better organisers , and represents what we hope will be an ongoing tradition of sharing the practical wisdom that we glean from struggle – the school of social change.

*Until all are free.*

*Collective denial, subversion and sabotage our choice;*

*Self-organisation, solidarity and social-revolution our way.*

*Every workplace a battlefield; Every worker a partisan.*

—Brisbane Solidarity Network, 2014



*Notes:*

*FORA: The Argentine Regional Workers' Federation*

*CNT: National Confederation of Workers (Spain)*

*IWW: Industrial Workers of the World*

*COBAS: Confederation of Base Committees (Italy)*

*FAU: Free Workers Union (Germany)*



# Weakening the Dam

shopfloor organising from the Industrial workers of the world (Iww).



“Meaningful action, for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the equalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of the masses and whatever assists in their demystification. Sterile and harmful action is whatever reinforces the passivity of the masses, their apathy, their cynicism, their differentiation through hierarchy, their alienation, their reliance on others to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others – even by those allegedly acting on their behalf.”

## — Solidarity

**W**eakening the Dam is a pamphlet put

out by the Twin Cities IWW branch for the purpose of promoting the development of workplace organisers, based on their experiences of organising at work. Although written by and directed towards workers involved with the IWW, it offers the sort of practical advice we could all be implementing in our own workplaces and our organisations.

“To build the new society you need new people and people can be transformed only in activity.”

– Martin Glaberman, Work and Working Class Consciousness.

The bottom line is this: our organising needs to have as its byproduct a new increase in workers' willingness to resist – an increase in our propensity to act on our urges to resist the



bosses – even if the resistance is individual. This is the revolutionary outcome. This will lay the groundwork for future organizing, in this industry or others. To “organise the worker not the job” as we say in this union, is to gradually create new kinds of people, people who are most likely to never again roll over and take the shit the boss throws at them.

## **Emotional Pressure and Organisation Building:**

We want to do two things on the job at the same time: build organisation and improve conditions. We could do these separately. For instance, we could build organisation with no plan to improve conditions, like setting up a poker night or a knitting circle. Or we could try to improve conditions without building organisation, by bribing or kissing up to the supervisor. Neither of those has much to do with being a union. Being a union means union builds organisation by improving conditions, or improves conditions by building organisation.

To build organisation and improve conditions we have to take actions on the job. Action is the oxygen of a union. We start off by taking the existing informal organization on the job – the current relationships and communication and level of agitation – and directing this against the boss in the form of an action.

In planning an action, pick an issue that people care about. Ask, “*who has the power to change this issue?*” For instance, the nightshift supervisor in the receiving department at a factory probably can’t control the health insurance plan or introduce a new health plan. But they can control how they enforce policy on bathroom breaks and how respectfully they treat employees.

List the issues people want improved and who has control over each issue. List the lowest level boss with decision-making power on each issue. Generally speaking, the lower they are on the food-chain, the less it will take to make them do what you want. This is important early on when you only have a small group. Five people in one department probably won’t win much for all 100 people in the plant.

But they could win improvements in that department that can be used to recruit more people in order to take on bigger issues and do more outreach. That’s building organisation.

Early in a campaign it’s useful to focus on what could be called emotional actions or emotional pressure. Here’s what I mean. Work is a headache for us, and to a lesser degree it’s headache for our bosses. Generally it’s more of a headache for the boss the lower they are on the food-chain at work. Emotional action is when we offer our boss a choice: make work less of a headache for us or we will make work more of a headache for the boss. This is easier the lower the level of the boss. If the boss is a supervisor we see everyday, then they will care more about our opinions and how we treat them.

When we collectively confront the boss about conditions make our lives unpleasant, we give the boss an unpleasant experience. Think of this as sharing the wealth of misery that our jobs give us. By giving the boss a taste of their own medicine, making the boss take a helping of what our jobs force on us, we can start to force the boss to make small improvements on the job. That in turn helps us explain to our coworkers that we can improve our jobs by organizing together, and that if even more people get involved we can win even bigger improvements.



# Talking to Bosses: Stick to the Script!

We have nothing in common with them as a class but sometimes we need to talk to our bosses. When we confront our bosses, for instance, we need to talk to them. A lot of bosses seem to have an instinct for turning the



tables on us, and a lot of us workers have a habit of letting them do so. We spend so much time following their orders and they spend so much time giving orders that when we speak up it can be almost as disorienting for us as it is for them. That can make it easy for the boss to take back control in conversation.

For us to keep control in conversation with the boss we need to know what we want to have happen. We can't get our way if we don't know what our way is. If we don't have a plan then things can't go according to plan.

Let's say we're going to confront a boss about making someone stay late. Here are some ways the boss might respond: justify the decision ("we had more work, someone had to do it"), bring up some other issue ("well, you all are out of uniform"), try to guilt you in some way ("you do this after I got you that nice coffee maker for the break room?"), bring up the way you raised the issue ("you shouldn't bring this up in a group"), point you to someone else or somewhere else ("you should bring this up at our team meeting," "you really should go through Human Resources"), or question your right to bring it up at all ("this is a private matter between me and that person, it's none of the rest of your business.") There are other possible responses. The point is, you

should think about the different ways your boss will respond, and know how you will reply in each case.

The goal in replying to a boss's response is to come back to your issue and your goal. Don't get side-tracked. Don't argue. At most, acknowledge what they said, ("we appreciate the new coffee maker", "we tried to bring this up with HR"), but don't let them turn the conversation to be about that. State your issue again, and what you want. "You make us work late and it causes problems for us. Will you stop that?" If they keep bringing up other things, and they probably will, say "This isn't about that, we're here to talk about you making us work late." Then re-state your issue and what you want.

The over all point is that our issue and our demand is not up for discussion. We are not going to be talked out of feeling like a problem at work is a pain in the neck and we are not going to be talked into having our demand disregarded. We are making clear that the issue is a problem and we are presenting our demand to fix it. If you have to, just say "we're not here to debate with you or to discuss other things. We want to know if you will stop extending people's hours or not. That's all we want to talk about. Will you stop?"

Stick to the script and you can turn the tables on the boss.

## **Know the Union, Hear the Union, See the Union:**

On a 100 degree summer day I was in Stockton, at the Sikh temple meeting room. A middle aged trucker with a long, flowy beard asked me "How do we show the other drivers who weren't at our meeting today what the union is and why they should join?" I struggled to give him a good, clear answer on this one. I improvised an analogy on the spot. I think it paints a picture of our Solidarity Unionism organizing model in practice: "Know the Union, Hear the Union, See the Union." Let me break it down.

First you give the whole saying: "Here's how our organising works. Some workers will know the union, some will hear the union, but others have to see the union." If you have a marker and paper, draw three circles around each

other (like a bulls eye target). In the middle one write “know,” the next “hear,” and the outer most circle “see.”

You’ll get a raised eye brow or maybe a “huh?” look on the faces of folks, which usually translates to “What the hell is this crazy organizer trying to tell me now?” Don’t worry, this is actually good. If you get this reaction it means people will be interested to hear the explanation. Point to everyone in the room. Tell them that they are the workers who know the union. Point out that they are the workers that have attended meetings and are initiating the organising. From experience or being fed up, they already know collective action is needed to fight for change on the job and that this is the definition of a union. Usually this group is small, but it’s the starting point for every campaign.

The people who know the union talk to other folks. Some of the people they talk to will be quickly convinced. They’re the ones who hear the union. Maybe they won’t come to the first meeting or they might want to know that it’s a legit effort and not the malcontents of the month, but once they are asked they will participate. This is usually the first layer of workplace leaders that are brought into an organising committee.

Most workers are in the third camp, ones who need to see the union. They won’t be meaningfully won over to the organizing effort simply by telling them something. These folks are skeptical that collective action by workers can win. They’re probably scared of losing their jobs or maybe had a bad experience with another union.

Here’s how we move the workers who need to see the union in action. The workers who know the union organize and build relationships and leadership among the folks who hear about the union. Together both groups take action to change small issues. This demonstrates in practice what a union is. Other workers see the union in action and start to understand that change is really possible.

For myself this is one of the most useful concepts when beginning to organize. Organizing starts with those who “know” the union, they bring in the folks who “hear” about the union and together they take action to move the workers who need to “see” the union. How this plays out in the long run is that workers move from “seeing” to “knowing” the union through becoming involved in the organizing and action. This process builds the union and builds a conscious and militant working class.

**In** any workplace there are going to be some workers who will quickly be attracted to an organizing drive. Perhaps they've been involved in organizing before; perhaps they have some level of ideological agreement; or perhaps they simply have a high level of grievances. In any case, these workers "know the union" and typically come together to form the initial organizing committee.

For other co-workers, they'll have to be persuaded to join the campaign through a series of one-on-one conversations. They need to "Hear the Union" to get agitated about workplace issues and realize they don't have to face them alone.

Most workers, however, fall into the third camp: "See the Union". They'll have to see the power of collective action before they get involved. As our Fellow Worker summed up in the previous column:

"Here's how we move the workers who need to see the union in action. The workers who know the union organize and build relationships and leadership among the folks who hear about the union. Together both groups take action to change small issues. This demonstrates in practice what a union is. Other workers see the union in action and start to understand that change is really possible."

For our friend, "Know the Union..." proved helpful when organizing slowed and workplace militants got frustrated at the pace of growth. "Know the Union..." encouraged workers to get 'back to the basics' of successful organizing: one-on-one conversations and group meetings to plan and undertake winnable direct action grievances. It also demonstrated the role the existing leadership should play in instituting a continual process by which co-workers are led up the "hear, see, know" ladder until a culture of solidarity and collective activity is instituted in a workplace.

There's another important lesson to take away from this: many self-identified radicals have little real-world organizing experience. This is okay. Like anything else, organizing takes practice. What we do have, however, is a wealth of grand arguments supporting class struggle and a vision for a post-capitalist future. Because of this there's a temptation to 'intellectualize' the organizing process. Speaking from personal experience, I know what it's like to feel unsure about doing something new, especially when it comes to organizing. It's tempting to fall back on something we're more comfortable with—like making the argument for why we need a revolutionary union.

Reality, however, is much more complicated than a well-phrased argument. Instead of trying to ‘win the organizing argument’ we’re much better off building relationships of trust with our co-workers. Through this relationship, we engage our co-workers in small scale winnable actions. These actions, in turn, lay the groundwork for larger struggles and deeper conversations.

To put it another way, workers—conscious of it or not—undertake individual anti-capitalist acts all the time. Workmates, however, often need to see collective activity in action before they’re willing to join a union. From there, it’s involvement in collective struggle that opens a space for us, as radicals, to begin having discussion about class, capitalism, and the labor movement.

As organizers, “Know the Union” helps us not only to remember that organizing is a process, but forces us to recognize that many times “action precedes consciousness”. The most important thing organizers do is not winning arguments or making rousing speeches, but actually building the relationships that form the basis of any successful campaign.

## Charting:

Anyone who works out regularly knows that results in physical fitness pretty much come from only two things: persistence and time. The same thing is true in organising. Organising gets results when it’s persistent over the long haul. Persistent long term organising must be systematic. A key to being systematic is putting things in writing.

In recent times the IWW has mostly organized relatively small workplaces or small units within larger workplaces. With small groups of people it’s pretty easy to remember everyone’s name, what they do, what experiences we’ve had with them. As a result, many of us have gotten into the habit of keeping a lot of information in our heads. This works in smaller settings. This won’t work once we get much beyond 20 or 30 people, because it all gets to be too much to remember. What’s more, when we make a habit of storing information in our head, it’s harder to assess what’s really happening at work, because our feelings shape our perceptions of what’s in our heads even more than what’s in writing. Depending on whether we’re feeling optimistic or pessimistic, this can lead us not to see real progress, or to overlook important steps that we fail to take.

One key activity to systematic organizing is charting regularly. By “charting” I mean when the organizers on a campaign get together and do a written assessment of our current presence on the job. Start with one sheet of paper. List all the facilities or departments in our campaign. Then list all the union members in each facility or department, followed by the names of other people we have contact with, and the total number of people in each place. Next to every name, write down whether or not someone has done a good *one on one* with them, when this was, and how it went. There will be more to say that doesn’t go on the chart, of course, as people talk about what worked and didn’t work in their one on ones. (This is also a good opportunity to do a roleplay about what the organizer might have said differently, but that’s a subject for another time.)

The process of charting helps us make decisions about who to talk to – the people we haven’t talked to in a long time, the people who are slipping, the people we haven’t talked to at all. That can sound obvious, but charting tells us exactly who those people are. It also helps us identify the gaps in our knowledge. (“I just realized, I don’t know how many custodians work third shift. We should find out.”) Getting that information is a task that someone new to the campaign could take on with the help of a more experienced organizer.

On another sheet of paper, write down the tasks that have come up based on the chart. Write down who is going to do each task, and who is going to check in with everyone to make sure they did their task.

Written charts and task lists should be kept after the meeting, and ideally they should be typed up. The next time the organizers chart, get out the old ones and compare. Get out the task list too, to make sure everyone did their tasks, and to discuss how the tasks went. This helps show progress — “In the last month we’ve talked to 15 more people, this means we have talked to half the workers by now!” — which can keep our inspiration going. It also helps show patterns we might not have noticed — “We’re talking to a lot more of the white workers, and to day shift workers, let’s figure out how to break out of those networks and talk to more people” — which can in turn help us identify new tasks.

Unless organizing is systematic, it will most likely rely too heavily on the social groups at work that we are most comfortable with. Charting is not the only part of organizing systematically, but it’s one key piece of the puzzle.

# Replace Yourself:

The primary task of an organizer is to build more organizers. We need more and more working class leaders and the way to do this is to constantly replace yourself. Here's a few easy ways to help you build up your successors:

Reveal your sources so others can think with you: "I had a long talk with MK recently. He really convinced me that we should reorganize as a shop committee instead of having one or two 'stewards'. He gave me this awesome article on how IWW shop committees used to work." Telling others where you got an idea from demonstrates that you think of them as equals. You also provide an opportunity for them question your sources.

Show others how it's done and take them through the process: "Hey Keith, has anyone showed you how to post an article to the union website? I'm going to post that write-up on the strike right now. Let me show you how to do it. We need another person who can post." Pass on the technical know-how so others can be 'experts' just like you.

Encourage people because you believe in them and you know they can do it: "We really need this message to get to the people upfront. Can you have a talk with Shannon? She respects you and you're the best person to talk to her." You run faster for coaches that want to win. We've got to show that what we do matters and that we believe in each other.

Ask people to do things that are difficult. Move them to take on responsibilities outside their comfort level: "I'm glad you've been talking things up so much at your shop. You're one of our best guys, Jerm. The next step is for you to start coming to the Industrial Organizing Committee meetings. I know its gonna be tight with your schedule but we're gonna help you fit it in. You have to be there or this thing doesn't move." We need to help others break out and step up. It's a sign of respect to ask people to do difficult things.

Train your replacement for an officer position: "Hey, Mei, you got a second? Has anyone talked to you about becoming the chair of the Committee? I'm going to be stepping down at the end of my term and you're everyone's pick for this position. Put some thought into it. Meanwhile I'll start showing you what the job entails." If we train new officers properly and regularly, we can avoid crust and dust in our leadership structures.

Encourage other members to read what you've read: "For those that didn't make it to the Summit, Maxine did a killer presentation on the legal barriers to organizing in her industry. It totally reminded me of this thing I read in an old One Big Union Monthly. So I ran off some photo copies of that article for y'all to check out. I think it will help us come up with some good strategies we can try." In making IWW history and principles accessible, you cut down on the knowledge monopoly and pass on valuable lessons and experiences.

Introduce people to each other and have them exchange phone numbers: "Tenaya, have you met Steve yet? Steve, this is Tenaya. Yeah, you guys both work in the same industry and would have some awesome stories to tell each other. You two ought to collaborate and submit something for the next newsletter." By introducing and ensuring info exchange, you avoid 'Old Boys Clubs' and now information doesn't have to go through you.

The task that we have is to build working class leaders everywhere we go. We are constantly looking for opportunities to teach others what we know so that they could do what we do without us.

## **The preamble of the IWW:**

"The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the Earth.

We find that the centring of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

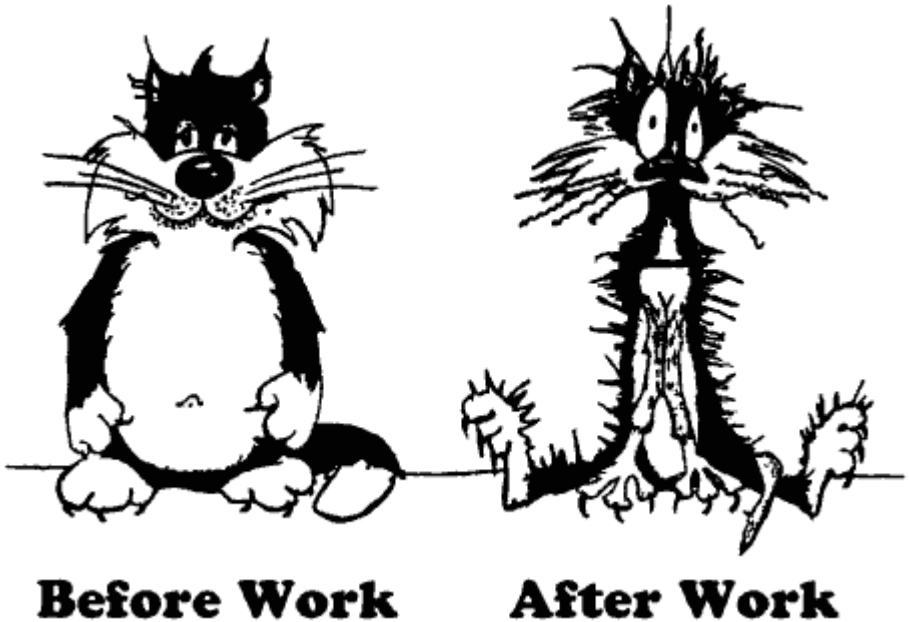
These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one



industry, or in all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old."



# Solidarity Networks

From Seattle Solidarity Network

You say you want to build a solidarity network? This is a how-to guide to building a successful solidarity network along the lines of the Seattle Solidarity Network, written by two SeaSol organisers.

Although by no means does this model offer the only solutions to these common problems, the solidarity network model, nonetheless, does offer some practical insights and examples of how we can:

1. Win fights against our bosses and landlords,
2. Attract new workers to our organizations, many of whom will have never even heard of Anarchism before,
3. Empower ourselves and our fellow workers, and
4. Establish a stable and positive presence in our community, off of which we may continue to grow in new directions.

The Seattle Solidarity Network (or “SeaSol” for short) is a small but growing workers’ and tenants’ mutual support organization that fights for specific demands using collective direct action. Founded in late 2007 by anarcho-syndicalists and members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), SeaSol is directly democratic, is all-volunteer, has no central authority, and has no regular source of funding except small individual donations. We have successfully defeated a wide variety of employer and landlord abuses, including wage theft, slumlord neglect, deposit theft, outrageous fees, and predatory lawsuits.

We’ve gotten a lot of inquiries in the past several months from folks in other cities wanting to start something like SeaSol where they live. Our mission in this article is to describe, for the benefit of those trying to build something similar, our experience of what it took to get SeaSol started and to keep it growing.

# Starting Fights:

In which we describe how we find people with employer or landlord conflicts and bring them into SeaSol campaigns.

## Postering.

From the start, our main way of finding new people with job or housing conflicts has been by putting up posters on telephone poles. We mostly post them in working class neighbourhoods or in industrial areas where a lot of people work. The most effective places to stick them seem to be around high-traffic bus stops. Someone who's standing around waiting for a bus is more likely to take the time to read a poster than someone who's walking past.

We keep the content of our posters extremely simple and direct. Because we want to elicit fights that we can win with our current size and strength, our posters list specific problems that we think we can potentially deal with: "unpaid wages?" "stolen deposit?". If someone is currently facing one of these problems, these words are likely to catch their eye.

Postering is a 'passive' form of outreach, since we're leaving it up to the screwed-over worker or tenant to contact us and ask for our support, instead of us approaching them. We do this for a reason: people who have taken the initiative to contact us are more likely to be people who are prepared to play an active role in a campaign. Also the fact that they have approached us, and not the other way around, makes it easier for us to insist on some conditions in exchange for our support. For example, they'll have to be actively involved in their own fight, and they'll have to join the solidarity network and commit to coming out for others as well. That's our deal – take it or leave it.

Getting contacts via posters isn't easy. At the beginning of SeaSol, there were doubts about whether anyone would ever call us. We started by spending several weeks working on and arguing about text and design for two different versions, one for boss problems and one for landlord problems. Then we probably put up around 300 posters before we got our first call. They get torn down so we had to keep going back and putting them up again.

There are definitely people getting screwed over in your town. Don't give up if they don't call you right away. If you keep postering over and over in a lot of different places and still aren't getting calls, consider redesigning your poster.

In our experience, the most effective posters do not look like anarchist propaganda. Try putting them on brightly coloured paper, and make sure the key phrases (“unpaid wages?”, “stolen deposit?”) stand out large and clear to a casual passer-by.

Getting a call and setting up the first meeting. When someone calls us about a conflict with their employer or landlord, the SeaSol secretary-of-the-week listens to the voicemail and calls them back. The secretary asks questions, listens briefly to their story, explains what our group is about, and if it makes sense, sets up a first meeting with them, usually in a public place like a coffee shop. At these initial meetings we aim to have at least two, and no more than four SeaSol members present, with at least one being a committed organizer who has some experience.

## **Agitate – Educate – Organise.**

“Agitate”, in this case, doesn’t mean making a speech. It means listening to their story (even if they already told it on the phone) and asking questions to bring out exactly how the injustices affect their life. In talking through this they’re “agitating” themselves – in other words, they’re bringing to the surface the emotional forces which made them want to contact us in the first place. The emotional response to getting stepped on is often extremely powerful, but most of the time people bury these feelings in the back of their minds so they can get through day-to-day life. Now it all has to come back out. Only then will they be ready to face the possibly unfamiliar and scary idea of fighting back using direct action.

The next step, “Educate”, means helping them understand how something could be done about their situation through collective direct action. We do this by briefly describing how our action campaigns work, using real examples. We give them a sense of what their first action (the group demand delivery) might be like. We don’t bullshit them or promise that we will win their fight, but we give them a sense of the strategy behind our campaigns, and why it usually succeeds. We also briefly explain the other key things they need to understand about SeaSol, especially the fact that we’re all volunteers and that we’re not a law firm or a social service.

Finally, “Organise” means getting into the specific, practical tasks that we need to ask from them. Can they help us boil their problems down to a

specific demand that we could fight for (see the 'Demands' section for more on this)? If we did fight for it, would they be able and willing to come to our meetings every week to take part in the planning? Would they be willing to become members of the solidarity network, receive frequent phone calls for actions in support of other workers and tenants, and commit to coming out whenever they could?

## **Deciding whether to take on the fight:**

We end the first meeting by making a plan to follow up with them, usually by phone, once SeaSol as a group has had a chance to decide whether we're going to take on the fight. We ordinarily vote on this (majority rules) at our weekly meeting. If it's really urgent, we use a passive consensus process called the "24 hour rule" by emailing a proposal to our higher traffic email list. If no one objects within 24 hours, then the proposal passes. But the situation is rarely urgent enough to require this process, and it's basically impossible to use it for tricky decisions (since we won't have consensus), so usually a decision to take on a fight can wait until the weekly meeting. We make sure not to invite the person (or people) requesting support to be present at this meeting — otherwise we would never be able to say no.

We use three main criteria in deciding whether to take on a fight: Is the fight compelling enough to motivate our members and supporters? Are the affected workers/tenants ready to participate in the campaign? And, can we win it?

We think about winnability as the relationship between two factors: how hard it is for the boss/landlord to give in to our demand, versus how much we can hurt them. For example: consider a restaurant that owes its former dishwasher \$500 in unpaid wages. The restaurant has one location only, and it's in a touristy area, where potential diners are not all that loyal to any particular restaurant. It is having cash flow problems.

How hard is it for them to give in? They're having money troubles, so it might be a little hard for them to scrape together the \$500. On the other hand, this is always a matter of priorities, and \$500 is not a ton of money for a business. If we pressure the boss enough, it seems likely that he might be able to come up with it.

How much can we hurt them? Our ability to hurt any boss or landlord ranges from “we can embarrass them”, which is weak but still sometimes useful, to “we can put them out of business”, which is usually the strongest thing we can threaten. In the case of the real-life restaurant used in this example, with a few months of aggressive weekend picketing we could probably have put them out of business. After weighing the difficulty of the demand versus how much we could hurt them, we decided this was a winnable fight. As it turned out, the restaurant owner, after going through the five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance), decided he didn't want to find out if we could put him out of business, and the dishwasher got paid.

When we don't think we can win a fight (or don't have the capacity, and have too many fights ongoing already), we don't take it on. Moving from victory to victory keeps the group energized and growing. Getting bogged down in unwinnable fights would do the opposite. As we grow stronger, fights which are unwinnable now will become winnable in the future.

## **Demands:**

Before we can decide on whether a fight would be winnable, we need to know exactly what we'd be fighting for. This is something we have to figure out during the initial meeting. Usually when someone first meets with us, they have a problem with their boss or landlord, but they don't yet have a demand. We have to help them come up with a clear, specific, reasonable demand that can be communicated to the boss or landlord, telling them exactly what we expect them to do to address the problem. The demand should be as simple and concise as possible. Sometimes it's necessary to include multiple demands, but it can't be a huge laundry list. If the demand isn't simple, righteous and compelling enough, our own people won't understand or feel strongly enough to come out and fight for it. If it isn't specific enough, we'll end up with confusion over whether or not we've won.

Here is an example of a poorly-formulated demand to give to a landlord:

“Address ongoing issues concerning moisture and mould which have continued to be ignored.”

The main problem here is that it isn't specific. How will we know when “ongoing issues” have been “addressed”?

Here is a better version:

“Repair the leaks in the kitchen and living room ceilings, which are causing water damage and mould.”

It’s clear and specific. There won’t be much room for doubt over whether or not it’s been done.

## **Putting it in writing.**

When we present our demands, we always do so by handing over a written demand letter. If we were to present our demands verbally, we might find ourselves getting bogged down in back-and-forth arguments with the boss or landlord, which would lead to confusion and delay. Presenting the demands in writing helps us avoid this, and it also lets the group democratically decide on exactly what message we want to get across to the boss or landlord, without much risk of mix-ups or miscommunication.

Obviously the affected worker/tenant (or group of them) needs to be involved in the process of putting together the demand letter, and they need to be in agreement with the final version we end up with. However, this doesn’t mean we let them write whatever they want. The demand letter is signed in the name of the solidarity network as a whole, so we have to make sure it’s something that we as an organization are prepared to stand behind, and to fight a potentially long and hard campaign over.

We keep our demand letters extremely short and to the point. This is sometimes a challenge, because often the first impulse of the person we’re supporting is to use this letter as a vehicle for expressing all their anger to the boss or landlord, or for presenting lengthy justifications for the demands. We have to explain that while all this stuff can be great when it comes to mobilizing our supporters, telling it to the boss or landlord isn’t likely to do any good at this point. In the demand letter, there are really only three things we need to get across: (1) what the problem is, (2) what the boss or landlord needs to do about it, and (3) how much time we’re going to wait before taking further action.

**Here's an example:**

October 23, 2010  
Mr. Ciro D'onofrio,

It has come to our attention that a former employee, Becky Davis, has not been paid the final wages she earned working for Bella Napoli, of which you are the owner. A total of \$478 was never paid to her after her month of employment. The various reasons given for this – missing invoices and a missing bottle of wine – seem to be spurious and untenable. As the owner of this company, we see it as your responsibility to ensure that this situation be resolved, and that your employee is paid in full the wages she is owed. We will expect this to be done soon, within no more than 14 days. Otherwise we will take further action.

Sincerely,

Becky Davis and The Seattle Solidarity Network  
www.seasol.net info@seasol.net 206-350-8650

## **Delivering the demand.**

Our fights always begin with the delivery of the demand en masse. We round up a group of people, anywhere from 10 to 30, to go with the worker or tenant affected and confront the boss or landlord in their office or at their home. It isn't a violent confrontation, but nor is it a friendly visit. The group is there to get the boss or landlord's attention, to show that there is some real support behind the demand, and to make them think twice about retaliating. We don't engage in conversation — in fact, sometimes these actions are entirely silent. Once the whole group has assembled in front of the boss or landlord, the worker or tenant affected steps forward and hands over the demand letter, and then we leave.

Some have argued that it would be quicker and easier just to send the demand letter by mail. In some cases this might be true, in the sense that we could get our demands met more efficiently this way, but it would not serve our larger goal of building up people power. Delivering the demand in person as a group builds a sense of solidarity, in a way that mailing a letter could never do. The people who take part in it end up feeling personally connected to the fight. This means that if the target boss or landlord gets scared and gives in quickly, it's an empowering victory for everyone who participated in



the demand delivery. If the target does not give in quickly, then all those who came out are now much more likely to be willing and eager to come out for the follow-up actions. If we got our demands met just by mailing a letter, the only people who would have participated in the victory would be the one or two individuals who had written the letter and dropped it in the mail. It would do nothing to build up power for the future.

When planning a demand delivery action, we don't want the boss or landlord to know we're coming. Without the element of surprise, the action would have much less impact. They might even arrange to be absent at the time of the action, or to have police there waiting for us. This actually happened to SeaSol once, when we had foolishly forwarded around an online action-announcement in which we named the company we were targeting. Since then, when announcing demand delivery actions we've always made sure to avoid broadcasting the name of the boss or landlord involved. Sometimes we assign them a code name.

Demand delivery actions can be a tense experience for some of our people, especially new folks. As we're approaching the target's office or home, the people in front seem to want to walk fast, while the ones in back lag behind. We've seen this lead to a situation where the person in front arrives almost alone in the target's office, and in their nervousness, hands over the demand letter and turns to leave before most of their backup has had a chance to file in through the door. Obviously this squanders a lot of the power of the action. To avoid this, we now make a point of asking the people in front to walk slowly, and the person carrying the demand letter stays in the back of the crowd until after we've all gathered in front of the target. Then, once the full presence of the group has been felt, we part like the Red Sea while the letter-bearer passes through and hands over the demand.

Why not refuse to leave until the boss / landlord gives in? Some have asked why we don't just stay there in the target's office until they've resolved the problem. No doubt occasionally this would scare them into giving in on the spot. But what about the other times, when they decide to be stubborn and refuse to give in? To counter us, all they'd have to do would be to call the cops and wait. After a while the cops would arrive to forcibly remove us, and with our current strength we would not be able to hold out for long. Then we'd be stuck spending our time on legal defence instead of planning further action against the boss or landlord. Plus, having started off our campaign with such an intense action, we'd have little or no room to further escalate the pressure.

By choosing to leave once we've delivered our message, with a promise of more action to come, we keep the initiative. Instead of trying to defend a space that we wouldn't actually be able to defend, we stay on the attack. This makes it very hard for the boss or landlord to counter us. We're there in their face before they know what's going on, and then we're gone before they can bring in the cops. We leave them with an impression of strength, and we leave them wondering what we'll do next.

Finally, depending on the demand, it's not always even possible for the boss or landlord to grant it on the spot. What about repairs to a building, or better safety equipment at work? Here the most we could force out of them immediately would be a written promise, which they would then be likely to break as soon as we were gone.

## Strategy

If the boss/landlord doesn't give in before our deadline, then the pressure campaign begins. Through a sustained series of actions, we aim to create an increasingly unpleasant situation for the boss or landlord, from which their only escape is to grant our demands.

There is no sense doing a demand delivery unless we're ready to back it up with an action plan that can force the enemy to give in. Therefore we consider, what are the pressure points we can use against the enemy? How many people can we get out to an action, and what are people willing to do at those actions? All of this takes a serious and thoughtful analysis of our own strength.

Our campaign strategy is based on the basic insight that the boss or landlord doesn't cave in as a result of what we just did to them—they cave in as a result of their fear of what we're going to do next. So we have to be able to escalate, or increase the pressure over time, and we have to pace ourselves so that we can sustain the fight for as long as it takes. At least once during a fight, we brainstorm possible tactics and order them from least to most pressure. Then we make a plan for how often and in which order we should carry them out.

To illustrate this, here's a list of the actions we took in our fight against Nelson Properties, in order from start to finish:

1. We did the mass demand delivery.
  2. We started the ongoing posting and re-posting of “Do Not Rent Here” posters around many different Nelson buildings.
  3. We started door-to-door tenants’-rights discussions with current Nelson tenants.
  4. We started a series of small pickets in front of Nelson’s office.
  5. We delivered letters to Nelson’s neighbours, warning them about an as-yet-unnamed slumlord in their midst, and promising to return en masse to discuss the problem with each neighbour in full detail. We made sure Nelson himself got a copy.
- And then we won.

## A Taxonomy of Tactics

For any potential tactic we have to ask ourselves these questions:

Does it hurt them? For example, does it cost them money? Does it hurt their reputation? Does it hurt their career?

Does it hurt us? Does it put too much strain on our people? Does it get us arrested, prosecuted, or sued?

Can we mobilize for it?

Will our people like it? Will they understand it? Will they be able to do it? It is at a time when people are available?



We want all our actions to build people’s experience, confidence, knowledge, and radicalization. We want to take action in an empowering manner,

avoiding the disempowerment that comes from relying on bureaucrats, social workers, politicians, lawyers, and other “experts.”

We take different approaches for different targets. We try to be creative and flexible. Tactics brainstorm sessions are sometimes hilarious. Picketing was great for Pita Pit because it was a public restaurant in a high foot-traffic area. Picketing was not a great idea for the Capitola Apartments, because it was hard to know when potential renters might show up to view the place, but repeatedly putting up “Do Not Rent Here” posters worked great.

Here are some of the types of tactics SeaSol has used so far. Each one has its pros, cons, and logistical considerations.

**Handing out flyers in front of a workplace.** Flyering at a workplace can be targeted at customers, at workers, or at random passers-by. Just handing out flyers is a little bit less aggressive than picketing with signs. The content can either be purely informational, just arousing sympathy and raising awareness of the issue (ostensibly—really it’s always about freaking out the boss), or it can be openly about turning away customers, as in “Don’t shop here!”.

**Picketing a store / restaurant / hotel.** The timing of a picket is really important and often warrants scouting the location to determine the time of most possible impact. We have found that direct messages garner the most attention: “Don’t Rent/Shop/Eat Here” grabs people’s attention more than a nebulous “Justice for all workers!” or similar. When we picket we usually hand out an aggressive flyer at the same time. We have also tried out other tricks to help turn away business. For example, in the Jimmy John’s fight, we handed out coupons for Subway; in the Greenlake and Nelson fights we had collected negative online reviews to show to potential customers; in the Tuff Shed fight we had a list of other shed stores to direct people to.

In some cases picketing can antagonize the current employees, especially if they are restaurant workers who are dependent on tips. Recently we have discussed the idea of always doing a week or two of less aggressive, informational picketing or flyering before we start aggressively turning away business. This would give us an opportunity to make contact with the current employees in a positive way and explain the issue to them. We have also begun taking up collections for the tip jar when picketing a coffee shop or restaurant.

**Picketing an office.** Usually picketing a company's office does not turn away customers, but it does generate embarrassment. Again timing is key. When are their busy times? Sometimes we haven't been sure if they've noticed us, so we've stood right in front of the door until they've asked us to leave.

**Postering around a store / restaurant / hotel.** Again, the content can be informational or else urging a boycott. Posters are usually targeted at foot traffic so we put them up accordingly (eye-level, facing sidewalks). Posters often get ripped down quickly.

**Postering around vacant rental units.** The posters usually say "DON'T RENT AT [name of building]", and they highlight problems that will turn off potential renters, such as pests, mould, deposit theft, etc. We emphasize that if someone rents from this landlord, they too will suffer from the landlord's injustices. Here we're appealing to potential tenants' self interest, whereas in a "don't shop here" flyer, we're typically making more of a moral appeal. To make sure the landlord sees the connection between these posters and our conflict and demands, we add a little explanatory text at the bottom, like "Nelson Properties is currently persecuting former tenant Maria. You could be next."

**Visiting neighbors with flyers.** Airing the boss or landlord's dirty laundry in front of their neighbours can often make them extremely uncomfortable. This is most effective when they live in an upscale neighbourhood. You can approach the neighbours on the pretext that, as neighbours, they might be in a position to influence the boss or landlord to "do the right thing." If neighbours do actually exert pressure, it's more likely to have to do with the fact that the boss's or landlord's activities are subjecting the neighbourhood to an uncomfortable situation, rather than based on moral considerations.

**Visiting the landlord's workplace (if any).** The issues involved with visiting a workplace are very similar to visiting a neighbourhood: to put the boss/landlord in an uncomfortable position. It's good to show up in a big enough group to get a lot of attention, speak to the person's boss and/or coworkers about the issue. We hope this will then generate secondary pressure on the landlord, via their boss ordering them to see to it that this doesn't happen again.

**Introductory letter to neighbours or coworkers.** In the past we used to do neighbour or workplace visits without any warning, as a one-off tactic. This succeeded in upsetting the boss or landlord quite a lot, but it didn't seem to

cause them to give in. The problem was, it didn't generate ongoing pressure. After we did it, the damage was done – they had been “outed” to the neighbours/coworkers. Before we did it, they didn't know it was coming. So it didn't add any pressure.

After running into this problem several times, we decided to try doing the action in two parts. The second part is the visit as described above. The first part, one to three weeks earlier, consists of mailing or discreetly dropping off (on doorsteps or car windshields) “introductory letters” to the boss or landlord's neighbours or coworkers, making a point to accidentally mail or leave one for the boss/landlord themselves as well.

Here is an example of one of these letters, from our fight with Nelson Properties.

“Hello,

We would like to reach out to you, as concerned neighbourhood residents, about a tragic situation which you may be in a position to influence for the better. Maria and her family, who recently moved after suffering health problems due to landlord negligence, are now suffering further abuse at the hands of an unscrupulous business called Nelson Properties, which is rooted in this neighbourhood. Having collected rent from them without doing basic maintenance, Nelson is now pursuing Maria and her family for even more money that they do not owe and do not have, and is also wrongfully pocketing their deposit – a small extra profit for Nelson, but a huge loss for a low-income worker like Maria.

A group of concerned activists will be roaming the neighbourhood soon to distribute more information and to discuss this issue in more depth with each household on the street.

We look forward to meeting you!  
Sincerely,  
Seattle Solidarity Network

These letters are vague and polite—we don't want to sound like thugs—but they let the boss/landlord and neighbours/coworkers know that we will soon do something that will make them uncomfortable. It contains just enough information so that the boss or landlord themselves knows it's about them, but

it won't necessarily be entirely clear to the neighbours/coworkers who this is about. This leaves plenty of room for us to get more specific when we actually visit the neighbourhood or workplace.

In this particular example, we had been fighting them for a month, and then they gave in within two days after we delivered this letter.

**Posting around the boss or landlord's home.** We have found this to be an effective way of airing the target's dirty laundry in front of their neighbours and family members. This is similar to showing up in person but easier—it takes fewer people and can be repeated over and over as posters get torn down. Make sure to include the boss/landlord's name and address on the poster and if possible a photo of the boss/landlord or of their house.

**Addressing city council meetings.** Most city councils have a public comment period where anyone can speak. These are often televised. They're usually poorly attended, so a sizable organized group with a compelling message tends to get attention. This is mainly useful if the boss or landlord has business relationships with the city, or if the council has decisions to make which will impact their business in some way. Otherwise this tactic is not likely to have much impact, unless the target is exceptionally high-profile and concerned about his/her reputation.

Come prepared with a short speech, so you're not making it up as you go along. This tactic has more impact if combined with picketing at the outside entrance before the start of the meeting. We have found it works well to have all supporters stand while the speaker is speaking and cheer after they finish. This allows for the presence of the group to be felt by the council in connection with what the speaker is saying.

**Crashing events (such as open houses).** This tactic makes the most sense in a long-running fight, where you are trying to find every possible way of making trouble for your target. When you find, usually by searching online, that a company you're fighting is holding an event that's open to the public, you can have a few people go in "plainclothes"—without picket signs—and blend in with the crowd. Then after a prearranged signal (someone yells, "yee-haw!"), they start distributing flyers to the crowd to inform everyone of the company's misdeeds. Don't forget to save some of the free snacks for your comrades outside.

**Picketing at public meetings and events.** Any meeting, convention, or other event that your target is connected to can be a good option for picketing. Your target may have dealings with government agencies, sponsor industry meet-ups, belong to a country club, or be connected to a charity. These can provide picketing opportunities where you can tarnish their reputation in the eyes of people whose good opinion they care about.

**Calling to arrange to view an apartment.** If a landlord has vacancies they are trying to fill, you can mess with them by calling to arrange viewings. This works best when combined with picketing or flyering outside the rental office or outside the for-rent unit. Then the person who arranged the viewing can either: (1) not show up and call later to say they've changed their mind after receiving a flyer about the conflict, or (2) if they're a good actor, they can go through with the viewing and act very uncomfortable about the people picketing/flyering outside.

**Online reviews.** Some businesses rely heavily on the internet for getting customers. There are several popular websites where anyone can post reviews about businesses. A sudden barrage of negative reviews can have a major impact. Plus it's a fun tactic that lots of people can do on their own time, and even supporters in other cities can help out. For this tactic to be effective, the target has to be able to see that the barrage of negative reviews is connected to your conflict and demands

**Satirical charity events.** If your target is known to be wealthy and is vulnerable to public shaming, holding highly-visible "charity" events on their behalf can be a clever way to ridicule them. To get the most possible mileage out of this tactic, plan it well in advance and advertise heavily with posters and/or flyers. Here's an example:

"Impoverished landlords Harpal Supra and Tajinder Singh need your help! For months they have not been able to maintain decent health and safety conditions – such as clean drinking water and ventilation – in the house at 24260 132nd Ave SE, Kent. In protest, the family who lives there has decided to withhold rent money from them. The landlords are in such need of this money that they are now in the process of evicting the family!

You and your family are warmly invited to a Charity Bake Sale for Harpal Supra and Tajinder Singh, from 3pm to 6pm on Sunday, April 26, at 24260 132nd Ave SE, Kent – right next to the Gurudwara Sacha Marg.



Come eat, and contribute whatever you can – even \$1 or 50 cents – to help Harpal Supra and Tajinder Singh.

When we finally won our year-long fight against Lorig Associates, one of their conditions for giving in was that we formally agree not to hold any more charity bake sales for Bruce Lorig.

**Tenant investigation.** When fighting a large landlord, you might find it worthwhile to go door-to-door informing all the other tenants of their rights and asking about landlord abuses. We call this a “tenant investigation”. We generally go in with a half-page flyer that lists a bunch of common landlord-tenant problems and invites people to get in touch if they’d like more info about their rights. We make a point of leaving some of these lying around the building, so that management is sure to know about our visit. This tactic tends to make landlords pretty nervous, and it’s a great way to establish good relations with the other tenants who are not directly involved in the fight.

**Noncompliance pact.** We’ve been in a couple of fights in which a group of tenants were all facing evictions or major rent hikes. In this situation, a powerful tactic has been for everyone affected (or as many as are willing) to form a mutual “noncompliance pact”, and to inform the landlord that none of them are going to comply or voluntarily vacate the building until all their demands have been met. This puts the landlord in a tough position, since forcibly evicting even one tenant can be a lengthy and expensive process, so for a whole group of tenants it may be more trouble than giving in to the demands. Here’s an example of a “noncompliance” letter, signed by ten residents in an apartment building:

“We, tenants of the Kasota apartments who are not Sound Mental Health clients, hereby notify you that we cannot accept the cruel and unjust way in which we are now being forced from our homes. You have presented us with a rent increase which is so extreme, you must be aware that we could not possibly afford to pay it. It appears that the intent is simply to drive us out.

If we are to be forced out of our homes, then we respectfully insist that you provide each of us with relocation assistance, so that we can find other places to live and not join the ranks of the homeless.

We hereby pledge: Unless and until each and every one of us has received adequate relocation assistance, none of us will pay the increased rent or voluntarily vacate the building.

## Meetings

Meetings may be a boring topic to write or read about, but in fact, we spend more time together in meetings than we do on picket lines. Meetings are where the actual planning of our campaigns happens. Meetings are also where we put direct democracy into practice. In this section, we'll go over a few of the key practices we've developed in the course of three years of SeaSol meetings.

We meet every week, and we really get stuff done during these meetings. When SeaSol first formed, we only met twice per month. The long gaps between regular meetings meant that most of the logistics and planning of our fights had to get done separately in between these meetings, in small ad hoc planning sessions among the most active organizers. This made it hard for newer people to start participating in a meaningful way. It was also hard on our schedules. When we finally switched to meeting every week, splitting the meeting into smaller "breakout" sessions where needed, it seriously improved our ability to grow and to take on more fights. Now, these regular meetings are the place where almost all of our actual planning gets done, and there's rarely a need for separate planning sessions in between. The regular meetings now provide a space where any SeaSol member who wants to step up can easily start participating, alongside more experienced folks, in the planning and execution of our campaigns. Having this "permeability" within the group, where new people can easily volunteer for jobs and can get involved in real organizing very quickly, gives a huge boost to our ability to bring in and develop new organizers. Also our meetings are now much better attended, since they're much more worth attending.

We assign clear responsibility for specific tasks. In a representative democracy, or in a staff-driven organization that has a Board of Directors, there is usually a fixed distinction between "legislative" and "executive" roles, in other words, between those who make the decisions and those who carry them out. In a direct, participatory democracy like SeaSol, this is not the case. Because we have no fixed "executive" who can be expected to carry out the decisions of the group, whenever we decide to do something, we then have to

ask, “which of us will take responsibility for making sure this task gets done?” Otherwise, more often than not it won’t get done at all, and our democratic decisions will be meaningless. When we give someone responsibility for a specific task, this does not mean we’re giving them authority, in the sense of a coercive ability to order others around. They just have to ask nicely for help, and hope that others are willing to cooperate. If all else fails, they just have to do it themselves.

## Tips & Tricks for meeting facilitation

- Listen for proposals in what people are saying. Try to steer the group towards making decisions and acting upon them, instead of talking in circles.
- Restate proposals to make sure everyone knows what’s being decided on. A few phrases you can use are: “What I’m hearing is...” and “We have a proposal to...”
- When in doubt, take a vote.
  
- Keep “stack”, i.e. a list of people who want to speak on a topic. Call on people in order. If it’s too much to keep track of, you can recruit a helper to keep stack for you.
- Don’t be afraid to cut people off if they are talking out of turn, over time, or interrupting other people.
- Don’t abuse your position as chair to give your opinion more weight / time / authority.
- Be neutral when you ask for votes, and use the same tone of voice for all options. As in: “All in favour.” “All opposed.” Rather than: “Does anyone want to vote against this?”
- Always have a time keeper and note taker.
- Add up the length of the agenda at the beginning of meeting so the group knows what they’re getting into. This may cause people to decide to spend less time on certain items.
- You can ask the time keeper to give you warnings (5 min, 3 min, 1 min)
- Ask meeting attendees’ permission to extend the time on an agenda item (possibly through a quick vote).
- Periodically check back in about the meeting’s remaining time, and when the meeting is projected to end.
- Need a break? Ask someone else to take over as chair.
- If your mouth gets dry, it’s a sign that you’re talking too much.

# Mobilising

Since the point of a solidarity network is to engage in direct action, mobilising people for actions is one of the most important things we do as a group. We take our ability to mobilize very seriously. We try not to waste people's time or mess people around by frequently cancelling or rescheduling actions, and we try to make sure our actions are worth showing up to.

SeaSol's main tool for mobilizing is a phone tree, currently with about 170 people. Each member of the organizing team (What's that? See the section on "Organizing capacity and group structure") is a "branch" on the tree and has about 10 people to mobilize each time we have a major action. Whenever possible we want to use the strength of existing social bonds, so for example if someone on the phone tree is a close friend of one of the organizers, then they should probably be on that organizer's calling list. We also have a mass email list for action announcements. Mass emails rarely cause many people to show up, but they're useful for a reminder or for reference. An individual email sent to a friend who checks email a lot ("Hey Kate, can you come out for this?") is a different story — personal invites can work well in any medium, depending on the habits and preferences of the person you're inviting.

Regardless of how we're contacting someone for an action, our goal is always to get an answer from them — yes, no, or maybe — as to whether or not they'll be coming. A person who has said "Yes, I'll be there" to another human being is much more likely to show up to an action than someone who's just received a message. For that reason, when making phone calls we make a concerted effort to actually talk to people rather than talking to their voice mail. Before leaving a message, we try calling on two different days, sometimes at different times.

It's important to have realistic expectations about turnout. If you want to get a lot of people to an action, it usually takes a lot of work and organization. Out of thirty people who say "yes", we've generally found that somewhere between fifteen and twenty will show up. Out of ten people who say "maybe", we might expect between zero and two (maybe means no!).

To consistently do a good job at mobilizing requires some structure and some collective responsibility. Our organizing team always has a deadline for when we should get our calls done. We report our results to each other by email.

Then the person who's "bottom line" for the action follows up with anyone who hasn't reported yet, to see if they need help and to make sure it gets done.

## Structure and organising capacity

In which we discuss the challenges of organizational structure and of developing solid organizers

At the beginning, SeaSol had almost no formal structure. There wasn't much need for it, since we were a tiny group of people with a low level of activity. We realized that we might later have more need for formal structures, as the group got bigger and more active, but we did not try to set them up in advance. In hindsight, this seems to have been a wise decision. If we had spent our time arguing about, planning, and then maintaining formal structures that we hypothetically might need at some point in the future, it would have been a serious drag on our ability to start taking action and building real strength. Instead, over time we have added on pieces of structural organization (e.g. an organizing team, a secretary role, a definition of membership) on an as-needed basis, as the group's increased size and complexity has created both the need for them and the capacity to maintain them.

For example, for our whole first year we informally left almost all administrative work to one dedicated, reliable person who had a ton of free time. That was who answered the calls, replied to emails, and set up the initial meetings for new fights. The role was not elected or even formally defined. The work just needed to get done, and if we only had one person who was able and willing to do it consistently, that was who had to do it. Then later on, once we had multiple reliable and committed people who were able to shoulder that burden, we created a formally defined role called "secretary duty", which changes hands almost every week.

As we've developed SeaSol's structure, we've always wrestled with the fact that there have been dramatically unequal levels of involvement between different people in the group. In principle we would prefer to have everyone participating equally. However, this doesn't seem to be possible in a volunteer-based organization. We will always (if we're lucky) have some people who want to spend half their waking hours on solidarity-network organizing, while others only want to receive an occasional email, and the rest

are somewhere in between. SeaSol has decided to accept this unevenness as a fact of life, and to develop a structure that makes room for different levels of involvement. We try to make it as easy as possible for people to move from one level to the next.

When someone signs up online for our action-announcements phone list or email list, and they haven't yet been to an action or a meeting, at first we consider them a "supporter". At this level, at most they'll get a phone call about once per month inviting them to an action. Once someone comes out to an action, at the end of the action they'll be invited to become a "member". Being a member doesn't require them to pay dues, but it means considering themselves part of SeaSol, committing to come out to actions whenever possible, and receiving much more frequent phone calls and emails. When someone enlists SeaSol for their own job or housing conflict, they're required to become a member if they weren't already.

The highest level of commitment is to be an "organizer", i.e. a member of the organizing committee (or "team"). Although it's technically an elected committee, we encourage as many people to join it as are willing. Organizers commit to coming to all weekly meetings and to being the "branches" on the phone tree whenever we do a mobilization. Organizing committee members are also the ones who return calls and who take the lead on meeting with people for potential new fights. The organizing committee does not have any special powers, nor does it ever meet separately from the rest of SeaSol. It's a position of responsibility, not of authority.

Having this committed core group is absolutely essential to SeaSol's ability to keep things going and to get things done consistently. When projects don't have a group of people who have committed to doing a certain amount of work, they tend to end up with one or two poor overworked souls actually doing everything to keep things together, while the people around them say, 'Wow, this just works! It's easy! It's so organic!'

Whatever energy we can spare from the basic organizing, we try to spend on developing new people's organizing capacity. We have semi-regular trainings covering the basic skills it takes to run a direct action campaign. Afterwards, we often do one-on-one followup sessions where we share our strengths, challenges, and goals as organizers.

There is often a difficult balance to strike between developing newer people and making sure stuff gets done. People don't like to feel micromanaged, but

on the other hand, leaving them to fail at a task or drop the ball can be even more demoralizing and disempowering. We have a few strategies to try to walk this fine line. First, we maintain a group culture that more or less frowns on flakiness and values solidness. When you take on a task, everyone expects that you will actually do the task by the time you agreed to, and then report back on your progress. When you do so, you gain some respect within the group. When you don't, you lose some. This generates real social pressure to follow through on what you say you're going to do. Second, we make an effort to push people to move past their fears and try out new aspects of organizing. This can be as simple as doing a task with someone the first time, and then the second time asking, "Why don't you try taking the lead this time?" The standard axiom for this is, "see one, do one, teach one," although it should probably be "see a few, do a lot, teach one". Third, we follow up with each other to offer support and to help work through any obstacles people are facing in getting stuff done. When a new person volunteers to bottom-line something, we often have someone who's more experienced volunteer to be their "backup" person, to help them through any difficulties and to pick up the ball if it gets dropped.

Finally, it's worth mentioning that the most common obstacle to people developing their organizing capacity within SeaSol has been personal disorganization, i.e. not keeping a calendar. Just by the simple step of starting to keep a calendar, we've seen hopelessly flaky people go through dramatic transformations and become awesome organizers.

## **Inside organising**

So far, most of SeaSol's workplace-related fights have been in support of someone who has already quit or been fired, and either they're owed wages, or they were fired unjustly, or the employer is still retaliating against them in some way (threatening to sue them, stopping them from getting unemployment or injury benefits, etc). Likewise most of our landlord fights have been in support of someone who has moved out of the building and has had their deposit stolen or been charged unreasonable fees. In these situations, the ex-employee or ex-tenant no longer has much to lose in fighting back, since the target employer or landlord is no longer in a position to fire or evict them. This makes it possible for us to launch almost immediately into a public action campaign to deal with the individual injustice.

On the other hand, when we're working with someone who wants our help in fighting their current boss or landlord, the strategy has to be different. If an individual worker or tenant were to target their current boss or landlord with a SeaSol campaign, while still isolated within their own workplace or apartment building, they'd be almost certain to get hit with extreme retaliation, if not outright firing or eviction. Therefore in this situation, instead of immediately launching an open campaign to support the individual, our first task is to help them build up a strong committee of workers within the workplace, or of tenants within the apartment building. This has to happen "under the radar" as much as possible, through careful one-on-one organizing. Only then, when there is a united group within the workplace or apartment building, does it make sense for them (or for SeaSol) to launch into an open, public struggle against the boss or landlord.

SeaSol is only now starting to put serious work into developing the capacity to do this kind of "inside" organizing effectively, while continuing to carry on our usual "outside" fights at the same time. We're going into this effort jointly with the IWW, making heavy use of the IWW's on-the-job organizing training curriculum. It's the next frontier. [cue inspiring theme music]





# Anarchist organising

—from a Brisbane Solidarity Network member

**A** *loss through Anarchist organising is worth more in terms of experience gained than winning through methods that take power out of your hands.*

For example, organising as equals in a housing block/workplace, forming an open assembly or network that then takes action to win a demand and which creates ongoing dialogue, counter-culture and relationships of solidarity, is worth much more -even if it fails- than calling up the RTA or tackling things as individuals through lawyers or appealing to an Ombudsman. I'm not saying that people shouldn't do the latter (even if in our experience they don't often get results anyway and in a lot of cases backfire) but rather that even these things should be done collectively as much as possible.

Reflecting on an example of my own is an organising drive I was involved in kickstarting through Brisbane Solidarity Network back in 2012. Basically there was a 2 month process of meeting with a tenant who had made contact with BSN over a slumlord's antics. To set the scene, this place was a boarding house that marketed to people in vulnerable situations (eg: homelessness, sickness etc). They charged an insane \$180 per week for a single room with no windows, the shared bathroom and kitchen were decrepit and tenants were monitored via a surprisingly advanced camera surveillance system. There was a rule board full of ridiculous rules, for example you were not allowed to openly discuss sex, gates were locked at 9pm so if you came home late you had to climb a fence (a previous tenant had told us he was given the boot for this reason) etc. This particular tenant that contacted us had left the tenancy but the slumlord kept the bond, stating that *because the tenant had raised the bond money through a charity she shouldn't be able to have it back*. Upon meeting with her a couple of times over coffee and sharing landlord stories (a discussion which became political very quickly) we arranged to go suss the place out. Three BSN'ers met with her at the boarding house and straight off the bat the slumlord barked at the tenant about not really being happy with visitors coming and started questioning what we were doing there. We talked with a few other tenants at the back about what we were about and suddenly 6 people had surrounded us

and were eager to share stories of how the landlord was continually screwing them over. This was in itself a really good experience and BSN still has connection with one of these tenants, who was to some extent politicised by the process.

We gradually got more tenants on side with the idea of supporting the tenant in question to do a delivery demand to get the bond money back (basically this involves getting as many people as possible as a show of strength & solidarity to support the tenant in collectively delivering to the landlord a letter listing the grievance, the demand and when action will be escalated if not resolved). The process of writing & refining the letter collectively in itself was a useful process, and a politicising one at that, as through the process we discussed the nature of the landlord/tenant relationship, moving to the idea that even though this landlord in particular happened to be someone with an abusive personality and enjoyed dominating the tenants and overtly breaking tenancy law, the issue isn't the landlords personality - it's their existence as a class. Bigger political questions like private property, the development of landlordism, hierarchy, State power etc also inevitably came up, and I feel the discussion added further clarity to everyone's ideas. Also useful politically was the idea that law and rights don't exist just because they are decree'd from above on a piece of paper – they were won through struggle and have to be maintained through struggle and a nourishing, resistant culture that doesn't let authority take an inch back. 'Laws are iron chains for the poor but cobwebs for the rich.'

The day came for action, we had heaps of supporters show up and.. the tenant didn't show up. We heard later that she had a hectic personal situation come up (which happens all the time when you're already marginalised, living in poverty and in crisis mode). Because of this she bailed interstate and moved into a friend's place and the organising drive ended. Now from one angle this organising drive was a loss; the demand wasn't ceded, but on the other hand the organising process led by the tenant was an empowering one, a form of collective education where people learnt a new way to deal with grievances rather than roll over and take it. Most importantly the tenant herself was thankful and reduced to tears that people would take the time and extend themselves to make her issue their own (solidarity). Obviously this could have gone further if the demand had been won, as the aim is to show people that direct action and solidarity, organising together collectively through assemblies rather than top down hierarchies, unaccountable representatives and bureaucracy not only can *win* demands, but facilitates a process that has the potential to grow into a culture of working class

resistance and forms of self-organisation that can't be demobilised from above (and ultimately which can assert itself to take more and more control back over life).

To contrast this, I was once involved in an organising drive where the tenant decided to go through the Residential Tenancy Authority (RTA) to try and resolve an issue where the boarding-house slumlord had out of the blue claimed that she owed a whole bunch of money (which she didn't) – simply because said slumlord wanted to kick her out and move a close friend of his in. The RTA was automatically on the side of the slumlord and signed the tenant up to an unsustainable payment plan which eventually made her homeless— basically these organisations turn social-justice issues into business as usual, prescriptive solutions, ignoring the huge differences in power in the slumlord-tenant relationship.

I'll give one more example where the struggle was won, but at the expense of the experience of ongoing collective organising (just because it's a good story).

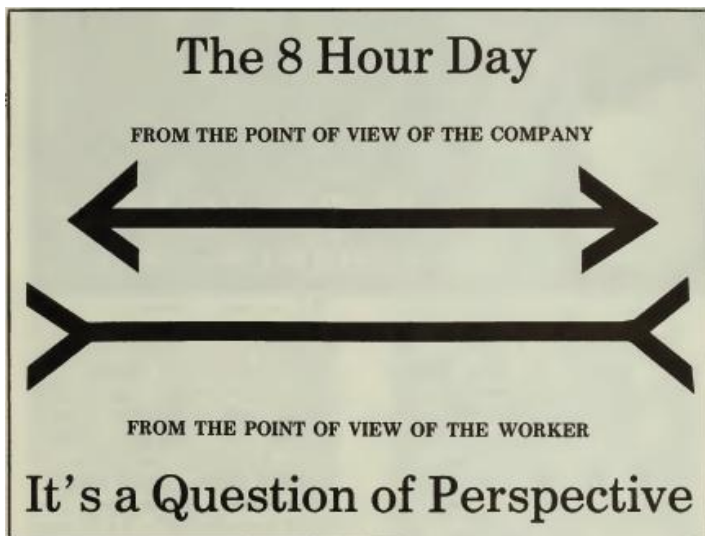
BSN were involved in organising a restaurant in the Brisbane CBD. The owner of this restaurant hired foreigners without working visas, knowing full well that their situation meant that it would be easier to control and exploit them. There were many issues, but things reached boiling point when some money went missing from the till and the boss made every worker pay back the same equal amount of money from their wages. We were contacted by two workers, who after discussing options and strategy said that they would meet with other workmates and get back to us on their decision. A week passed and I contacted one of the workers via txt to get an update and see if there was still an organising drive. The reply I got back was unexpected – *'Thanks for sorting it out'*, it said. I wrote back that we hadn't done anything and asked what happened. *'We got the money back. Someone put on a high pitched voice and threatened to hurt him (the boss) if he didn't give back the wages'*.

We aren't trying to build victories per se, though our methods should lead to victories. We are ultimately trying to build a culture of resistance and dual power, a culture where people are empowered to run society and take control of their lives, a culture where top-down organisations that take power out of the peoples hands cannot use grassroots struggles as springboards into political careers, electioneering and party politics that demobilise/disempower

people from above and sell them out down the river due to the necessity of compromise and mediation that it creates.

*It's not where you're from it's where you're at.* The MST, a poor peasants direct-action movement in Brazil put it well when they say:

"We could have Jesus Christ as president, and he'd still have to do all the deals that politicians do. He would still not be in control. Unless the people can start to do things for themselves, and unless we can change our way of seeing things, nothing will change".



# Anarchist Work Groups and 1-to-3 Organising

— from a BSN member



## THE WORK GROUP.

The essence of anarcho-syndicalism is shop-floor & neighbourhood level organising; the setting up of work groups that lay the basis for taking action to defend and extend our interests, and countering the drudgery and maddening pace of the global-work machine. These groups aim to be at once **economic** (based on shared material conditions) and **political** (based on shared political ideas). The setting up of work-groups is foundational in reigniting unionism as a *pledge of solidarity* among fellow-workers and in shaping broader resistance at the sites of power where we experience exploitation and hierarchy most directly. It's important at this stage to note that regardless of whether people identify formally with anarcho-syndicalism or not, what matters is putting basic anarcho-syndicalist methods into practice, ie; our organisations, whether fluid, temporary or permanent, should ideally be controlled by the base, ultra democratic through the use of delegates and open assemblies regardless of official trade-union membership, direct-action orientated and be against intermediaries or organising methods which remove power from our hands.

The following will outline one example (my own) of the nuts and bolts of this kind of organising in practice, set in the workplace. This will be accompanied by anarcho-syndicalist lessons/writings/ideas put forward by the Waiters Union (WU), Brisbane Solidarity Network (BSN), Solidarity Federation (SolFed) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) which I found helpful.

# IN THE BEGINNING:

It's important to note that in some workplaces, particularly in production, there's a state of constant agitation and actions burst out before committees ever get built. In other workplaces agitation just never seems to take hold. Once you've landed a job, it's tempting to jump right into agitating and educating co-workers. This approach is problematic for several reasons. Experience has shown that workers who do



not first build relationships are apt to be quickly labelled as an arrogant and disgruntled employee by management and gain a reputation among co-workers as a “complainer” and/or just another naive “crazy radical.”

Depending on the workplace it's generally a good rule of thumb to allow yourself 3-6 months to get acquainted with the social landscape at your new job. During this time, organising consists of getting to know as many names and faces as possible, social mapping, building positive relationships with everybody, including management and co-workers that you may find personally repulsive. While organising under the radar, having enemies only makes things harder, whether those enemies are worthy of ire or not. You'll have to get used to putting yourself out there and getting out of your comfort zones. Learning active listening skills and getting a diary can turn a flaky person into a solid organiser.

Building a reputation as a worker who carries their load, being someone who doesn't over-commit and under-deliver, helps others, covers shifts, arrives on time and doesn't call out sick frequently is another critical element of being taken seriously and establishing credibility. Working hard and doing a 'good job' may increase the rate at which you're exploited, but it also makes the labour process easier for other workers, and they will take notice.

As one boss said to an organiser, 'you're a good worker but a bad employee' – this sums up perfectly the situation good organisers often find themselves in. There's a lot to be said at this stage, for one, it's important to **hold your own agenda lightly**.



When the Left told Jane how ideology would sort her head out, make things appear clearer, and make her feel good about herself, what they didn't tell her was how lousy it would make her feel too..

**Okay, so I believe in an ideology**



**It's not the most important thing in my life**



How slowly, she'd come to see things more and more through a narrow, single-minded perspective, how gradually all her thinking would be done for her, how the ideology would become the most dominating aspect of her life...

How she'd start to be identified not as an individual but by her ideological beliefs, how she'd lose her sense of humour and her non-ideologue friends...

**Stupid reformist.. bloody lifestylist.. Petite bourgeoisie..**



**I'm alright. I've just got a touch of alienation today, that's all.**



How in the end she's lost herself, dragged down into the abstract cocoon of ideology, into a mere shadow of her potential, having merely swapped one form of alienation for another.

We need to move away from models of organising that lecture people about why capitalism is horrible, assuming people are empty vessels devoid of political ideas or believing that getting people agitated will automatically lead to organisation because the workers are already radical. We don't want to recreate the Left that treats people like trophies to win to an Ideology – the dogma with all the answers. Instead we need to think about organising as a relationship, a back and forth between a revolutionary(ies) and their co-workers in dialogue and common struggle.

While laying out your own ideas is appealing and often satisfying, depositing ideas into people most often leads to a speedy withdrawal. Instead we want people to develop their own revolutionary ideas as part of their process about thinking about their experiences. As an organiser you try to get people to lay out their conception of their work, bosses, coworkers, and the world. Organisers work on what people want to work on, and the fights that they have interests in. It's on this basis that people learn and develop, and through struggle that they radicalise. Addressing their interests in the context of collective struggle gives us the space to re-examine theories and ideas, and change them to fit new circumstances. That back and forth between ideas and actions is called praxis.

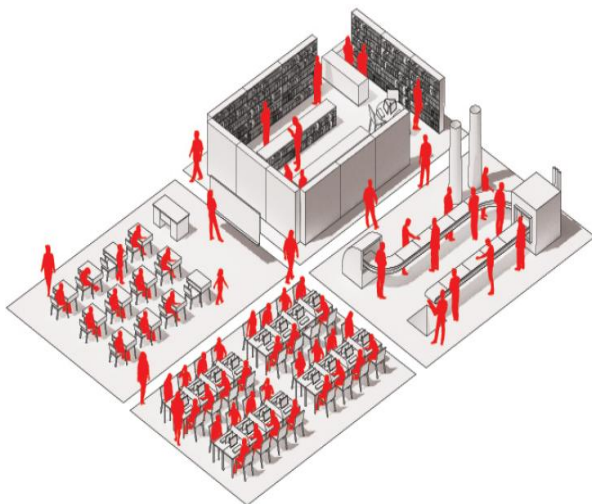
Good organising is preparing the field so that we can weather the storms that come not in 1 or 2 years, but in 10 or 30 years. This requires not just building actions, but creating new people, new protagonists in struggle. As Sam Dolgoff said,

*“We must not be impatient. We must be prepared to work within the context of a long-range perspective which may take years of dedicated effort before visible progress will show that our struggles have not been in vain.”*

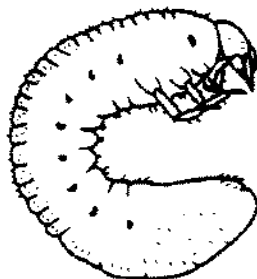
We have to remember most people face this world completely alone, and feel terror at grappling with all the pressures and insecurities to themselves and their families thrown at them. Even just to walk with someone down that path, and have someone listen to them and present alternatives can be powerful. We've been raised in a society that has socially engineered isolation and anti-social behaviours for decades, and we are swimming against the tide to try and build lived mutual-aid and solidarity in our day to day activities. Any steps we can take to back others up can create tiny ruptures and open up new spaces for reflection, sustenance and action.



## 2. Agitate, Educate, Organise: Workplace Mapping



Business-Union training around workplace mapping usually revolves around recruitment – ie who is an activist, who is hostile to the union, who is a potential member, who can help out with campaign & election work and hand out trade-union material etc. The workplace mapping we're more interested in is around class & relationships, or in more everyday terms who's a grub, who seems solid, what levels of management can be pressured into leverage, what issues people think are important etc. We're looking for fellow workers who have a natural aversion to bosses and some level of class awareness, even if its not articulated as such (ie realises the difference between bosses and workers, sticks up for workmates etc). A grub on the other hand is someone who's just in it for themselves, usually a bad worker (but a good employee), sucks up to the boss, likely to scab if given the chance, dobs into the boss etc, ie; someone who's hostile to union organising.

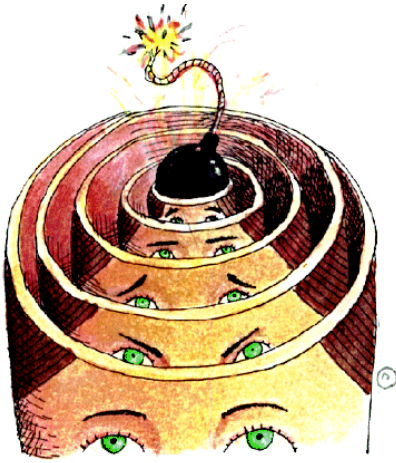


### **White Grub (Scab Larva)**

*Don't let Grubs affect  
workplace dis-ease*

#### **Known to:**

- Suck up to and side with the boss.
- Snitch without notice.
- Heap work on to other workers.
- Erode workers solidarity.
- Only look out for itself.
- Lack spine and principles
- Evolve into a Scab if conditions are ripe.



“Workplace organising is about seeing the volcano inside your fellow workers’, fanning the flames and creating a culture of class solidarity in your workplace, whether its articulated concretely like this or not. This culture is anti-boss, pro-worker and generally follows this path to its logical conclusion; that of a systemic analysis of capitalism and organisational forms which operate above and over the people. This is what we call anarcho-syndicalist workplace organising, although what matters is not that people self-identify with anarcho-syndicalism (although we don’t see it as a bad thing),

but that people identify with anarcho-syndicalist methods. Part of that culture already exists in some form, and solidarity will always be present in any workplace, but for those jobs in which division seems rife, organising necessarily demands that we do more than just integrate ourselves into existing social dynamics, and instead take the initiative to create our own. Sometimes this means as little as engaging with groups of workers where there would normally be no interaction, even at the risk of seeming awkward. Other times it might involve ruining the credibility of bosses with a high degree of social power amongst the workers. We must be prepared to work with the terrain that we are given, but also be willing to shape that terrain to make it more accommodating.”

“Building class solidarity is a dialectical process. Within the workforce, an organiser should seek to eliminate divisions that hinder class solidarity like racism, sexism etc by engaging across barriers delineated by those dynamics. This takes the form of easing into informal cliques that form during breaks, attending and arranging social functions that include diverse groups of workers, and generally refusing to accept to conform to constructs that hinder solidarity. We must facilitate the seamless weaving together of the disparate social groupings that make up our work site.”

Creating a class-conscious culture at work also means that we learn to see organising at home and in the community—with co-workers—as a natural and necessary part of organizing on the job. The working class holds its power at

the point of production, but our organising, i.e. our relationships to our co-workers, can't be limited to the confined issues and dynamics of the job site. Ruling class exploitation extends far beyond the walls of the factory, the cafe, the office and the waterfront. The more we can show solidarity on a level that illustrates our relationship to one another as members of the working class (e.g. visiting co-workers on disability, helping them raise money to replace a stolen bike or to purchase a plane ticket to visit a deceased relative, offering to help out with childcare, etc.), drawing a connection between the reality of the wage system and the myriad effects which contribute to our collective misery, the more we can contribute to the building of an anti-authoritarian, non-hierarchical working class movement.

“Effective networking involves more than establishing a credible local identity as a neighbour it means being a neighbour. that takes a lot of time – time many of us never seem to have. We always seem to be too busy to be neighbourly. We have to make time. it is a constant struggle to make sure that we are not too busy to be neighbourly. All the things once learned at an easier pace which allowed stopping, talking, reflecting are passed by. We travel so much faster than our senses were designed for, and much that speeds by is lost to us, drowned in the white noise of modern life.”

Workplace mapping is a useful tool, both in practicing to keep a journal to later evaluate experiences and in purposeful relationship building. Keeping all this information locked up in your head is nearly impossible. The taking of daily notes on the interactions you have with co-workers will prove indispensable when you want pass on that information or simply organise your own thoughts into a clearer social map. Check with fellow organisers as to how they keep their notes in order so that you can devise a system that best fits your own situation.

## Getting your 1-to-3

One-to-Three organising is based on the ‘community organising training’ given by the Waiters Union, who orientate their action towards creating neighbourhood networks based on mutual-aid and ‘houses of hospitality’.

So what do we mean getting a 1-to-3 going? It's not an original idea but it's a useful basic concept that gives you a stable foundation to work from, upon which further organising will be easier and clearer.

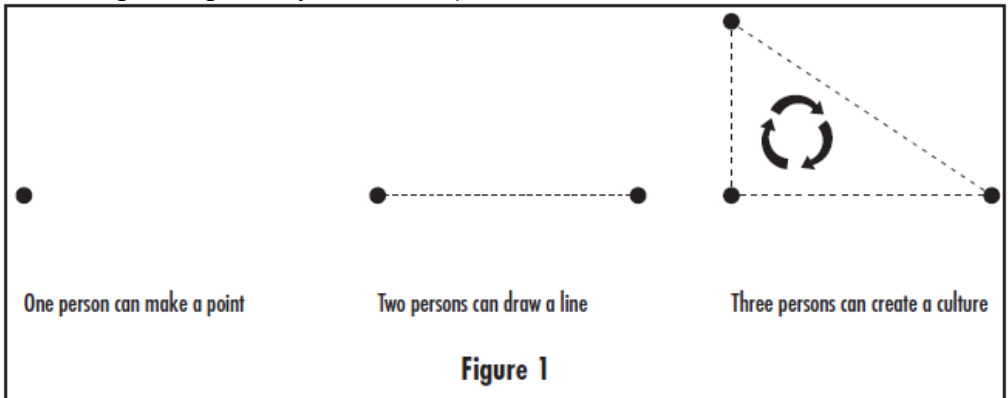
## The Waiters Union sum the 1-3 organising idea up nicely:

One person alone has no relationships, Two people have one relationship  
**But Three people have three relationships**

One person can think about a concept/idea, Two people can discuss an idea  
**But three people can turn that idea into reality**

One person alone can make a point, Two people can draw a line  
**But three people can make a space and culture to invite others into -**  
A space through which you can incarnate an alternative and invite others to experience that alternative.

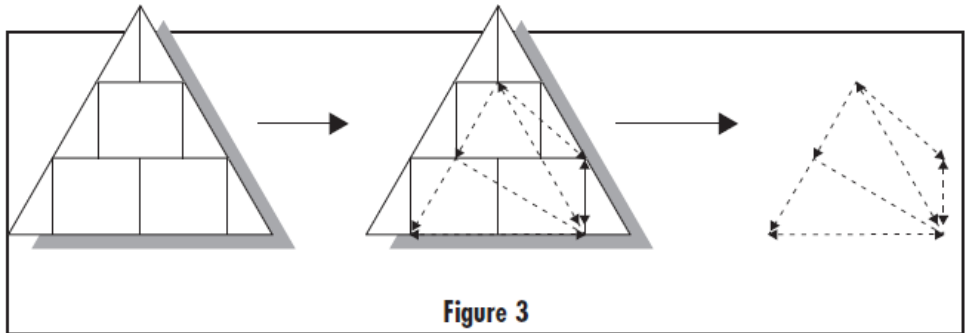
Basically, we need to find at least *two* other supporters in order to develop a *culture*; Having three people onboard is the bare bones minimum needed to go ahead with an organising drive. A good reason to start with getting your 1-to-3 is that it shields you from going ahead with ideas that possibly aren't that great or grounded in reality, which even the best of us can fall into from time to time. Generally if you can create a 1-to-3, it means the angle of your project/organising drive has some good points and that you will have a strong foundation to work from. This is in direct contrast to one organiser doing everything by themselves and then expecting others to be drawn into it (the bizarre 'build it and they will come (or we'll make it up)' model that permeates a lot of organising activity in australia).



On a side note, the Solidarity Network model similarly offers one effective way of supporting workplace/housing struggles and initiating organising drives in areas where you have no strategic base. Again, this is in direct contrast to the

'build it and they will come model' (eg: organising a wage increase drive for fast food workers and then expecting them to sign up to it via website).

Once you get your 1-to-3, the next step is to take that culture outside of the battlefield (work) and let it germinate (fig 3) before bringing it back inside.



When I started working at a new care-work company two years back there were no links between workers, we were isolated and split into different sections (cleaners, front desk staff, support staff, care-work staff, security staff etc). Workers frequently were made to take on work that was not on their job description including ridiculous and dangerous tasks. Workers were fired and we did not learn why. We were spoken individually to by management. The shift-work roster was all over the shop. Straight off the bat I noticed that the section of foreign workers employed for a specific job were frequently working shifts that went between 12-16 hours, occasionally more. There was no official trade-union membership (apart from myself) and they offered nothing in terms of assistance (as usual), operating more like a service delivery organisation or representative NGO.

I made an effort to get to know everyone at the workplace and became good mates with many of the people there. I started mapping the place out and found that probably half of the workers had grievances that were worth forming solidarity and potentially organising around. In particular, I built enough trust with the section of foreign workers to learn that they were (unofficially) being paid less than minimum wage cash in hand and were knowingly (by management) being exploited by their subcontractor (the boss was asking for \$30,000 under the table to provide a permanent residency letter – basically indentured labour).

From here I worked on getting a 1-to-3 going. I identified one work-mate who was involved with the Waiters Union, and one work-mate who had community organising experience in his home country (India). We slowly broke down barriers between different workers regardless of what sub-contracted organisation they were employed by, had lots of 1-1's, shared information with each other - and what used to be glances of recognition turned into solid chats.

We all became good mates and grievances became a frequent topic – lunch breaks were utilised between different workers to relay information ('the workers telegraph'). One worker suggested we should meet up outside of work to have a proper discussion and clear the air around what's been happening and alleged grievances – something I was delighted to hear and was aiming towards anyway.

We had a BBQ in Kangaroo Point, these BBQ's turned into regular events, sharing food, shisha, beers etc. The key point is that these weren't just social events, but had an extra intentional political character with an organising focus; a few people still kept their 'organiser' hats on even though they were having fun. I started handing out organising material/articles from Brisbane Solidarity Network relating to the industry we worked in (care work) including '*Crisis: Ipswich—Brisbane*' – a handbook written by support workers (which despite not being updated for 4 years is still used as a default resource by a few agencies). This developed into a semi-informal, irregular discussion /reading group, where even if not everyone read the articles, at least some of the social event would focus on the article and everyone chipped in their two cents.



*Time is money, steal some today!*

Over a year period various topics and articles were discussed. A highlight being the discussion of workplace theft after it came out that lots of people were racking things from work. We discussed both (taking extra breaks, making the job easier) and overt theft (racking goods) and how they justified it. Usually this justification had a political nature (the boss is making us do all this overtime, they waste so much stuff anyway etc). Also overt was discussion around the class nature and root causes of various social issues which the organisation we worked for was involved in.

A fellow worker set up a private facebook group ('workmates') and although this was mainly used to post memes, cat pictures etc it was occasionally used to continue workplace discussions. Someone made a logo for the group which was probably its only step towards formality – badges were also considered! At one stage a new worker who we'd taken into the fold was added to this group and invited one of the people we identified as a grub. We freaked out at this stage thinking that he'd snitch but fortunately there was no drama. During the entire organising drive, I utilised organisers involved with Brisbane Solidarity Network as a sounding board to share notes and ideas, gain support and confidence in what I was doing and explore possible ways forward. This organising process drastically changed the feeling at work, and although there were no grievances reaching boiling point at this stage, it made being at work that little bit more bearable, occasionally even enjoyable as we brought in food for each other and played cat and mouse games with the bosses. More important it paved the way for a better response when issues did begin to surface.

For example:

We were able to have a coordinated response in resisting work speed-ups and some of the more ridiculous work, instead of just shirking it as individuals. For example, there was a new rule imposed that we had to call management every time a certain incident occurred, effectively taking away our autonomy and ability to use discretion in our decision making. We made sure to call everytime even the smallest incident happened, regardless of the hour (shift work) and the rule was quickly repealed.

- We were able to get all workers along to paid 'team meetings' outside shift hours, rather than the previous case where the boss would with one section of workers as individuals during their shift.
- We were able to open up discussion around some of the attempts by the boss to split workers through racist rhetoric. 'Those workers are x, therefore they x' - She even used the classic 'I'm not racist but..'. A few fellow work-mates had previously accepted this rhetoric, but through opening it up to discussion we were able to counter some of its effects.
- For the section of subcontracted foreign workers it was a stressful game trying to get the correct pay – it'd be 6 or 7 back and forth emails to explain why between \$20-100 was missing from the paycheck, or why pay would come in on Friday instead of Tuesday. No one wants to have to constantly check their bank account and do the maths to make sure they got paid correctly. By getting everyone to

collectively write to the employer threatening action this mickey mouse game ceased (at least for a while). We also secured a small pay-rise for some of the foreign workers who were being unknowingly underpaid.

- It's a fine balance and some came to the conclusion that the job just wasn't worth it. Eventually one fellow-worker (a staunch organiser) employed by the security subcontractor was fired for breaking a bogus 3 month parole period (a concession that we secured when they first tried to fire him). In response all the other 4 workers under that sub-contractor walked off the job mid-shift and deleted data off all the computers (sabotage). To go along with this we collectively wrote a letter outlining all the dodgy practices of the management and the subcontractor and sent this out to the entire company. The four who walked out decided to never come back to work.

The group has ebbed-and-flowed in activity, mostly due to the casual nature of the workforce and frequent change in workers. The culture of solidarity has had to be constantly rebuilt & reinforced, partly through sharing the work site's history with new workers. At the time of writing we are currently meeting once a fortnight around multiple issues, including unpaid/stolen wages, disciplinary meetings, and the unfair dismissal of one of our work-mates mentioned above. One promising development has been inviting workers from other workplaces but in the same industry to these work-group meetings to share our experiences. Although the above example may seem small and insignificant (and still remains largely informal and covert), I think it's important that we share our nuts and bolts attempts. I see this kind of organising work as the foundation for broader anarcho-syndicalist union activity; federations of work groups and industrial networks from the bottom up.





# From Workplace Resistance to Community Control: *Puerto Real*

The recent struggle in and around the shipyards of Puerto Real, Spain, in both workplace and community, against threatened closure witnessed the anarcho-syndicalist union CNT playing both a prominent and decisive role. The CNT's involvement meant that the methods of organising and the forms of action taken departed from those common to reformist unions -- with dramatic consequences. When the PSOE government (socialist in name, but Thatcherite in practice, announced a programme of 'rationalisation' at the Puerto Real shipyards, the workforce came out on strike. The CNT was at the forefront in spreading the action to the surrounding population. Not only was the government defeated, but a number of pay and condition improvements were secured.

In this not only did the great determination and ingenuity on the part of the workers bring results, but that of the communities too. Mass assemblies both in the yards and surrounding localities involved workers, their families, neighbours and all supporters. Initiating and maintaining entire communities' involvement in mass assemblies alone was fine achievement. By all accounts the work of the CNT in and around Puerto Real established direct democracy as an inherent part of local political culture and resistance - people deciding for themselves, rejecting control by unaccountable politicians, union officials or 'experts', ensuring control remains in the workplace and locality. Not imposed unchallenged from above, be it by boards of directors or government, local or national.

Since the 1987 strike in the shipyards, other disputes, campaigns and issues have been linked-up - struggles around health, taxation, economic, cultural issues and environment have all been drawn together into activities of resistance.

Here in Australia, as in Spain, we have the same problems, not only in shipbuilding across the whole spectrum of industry. Communities and livelihoods are decimated by the bosses' and government's self-perpetuating dogma of profit, profit, profit. Capitalism's ability to adapt in the face of change and crisis shows no re whatsoever for the consequences felt by the individual and society. We are, or rather we are encouraged to believe, that we are powerless to effect any real change in our lives. No political party or trade union has anything to offer but yet more bitter medicine and false promises. The crisis of society and grip of poverty only deepens. The time has come for real resistance, the building of a labour movement fights not just for higher wages and better conditions, but against the whole capitalist system. The experiences and actions of Spanish workers have provided valuable lessons in the past, but today as we approach the 21st century new ideas are needed. It is to serve this purpose that this pamphlet is published.

## **Rationalisation and Resistance**

Pepe Gomez, of the Spanish anarcho syndicalist union CNT's Puerto Real / Cadiz section, was the guest speaker at the "Trade Unionism In Crisis - Building An Anarcho Syndicalist Alternative" dayschool, hosted by transport, public service and education workers' networks in London, 30th October 1993:

"I would like to bring greetings from the Spanish anarcho syndicalist organisation the CNT. I hope that links between British and Spanish workers through this particular conference can be increased.

Today I would like to talk about the rationalisation of the shipyards in Puerto Real in the south-west of Spain and the kind of activities the CNT has been involved in.

First of all I would like to place rationalisation within its context in 1980's and '90's Spain. Rationalisation is a capitalist necessity, something which is in response to a permanent situation of needing to rationalise and change the mode of production. Capital changes its course throughout society and changes its destination in order to increase profits in certain industries, with capital not being fixed but moving around. I'd also like to point out that there is no solution to this ever-increasing process of rationalisation within the capitalist system, but rather we'll propose a revolutionary solution to the problem of rationalisation.

Within this context I'd like to point out that capitalism needs certain instruments to be able to achieve a status quo. Capitalism needs its political parties, it needs its reformist unions, which have become pillars of the capitalist system itself. Reformist unions have been bred by capitalism and the mainstay of the reformist has become one whereby any kind of rebellion or questioning from a working class perspective is essentially neutralised. I don't think that I need emphasise the failings and the outrageous nature of reformist unions and the political parties, so I'll go on to talk about the specific situation in Puerto Real.

There are two points inherited from a marxist perspective. First of all, marxism separates the political and the economic to try and promote the idea of economic unions, unions that deal purely and simply with economic issues, whereas the political issues are tackled by the political party. Secondly, we are left with the need to struggle against the whole culture that has been built up around delegating activities, around delegating power to others. Anarcho-syndicalism is trying to oppose these negative legacies of marxism, so that people are actually re-educated in order to destroy this culture of dependency and to build up a new kind of culture that is based on activity and action for people, by themselves.

Real revolutionary organisations and real revolutionaries are not necessarily the first and should not be defined by whether they take up guns or weapons to fight against exploitation. What we are really concerned with is building an organisation whereby people can actually properly participate and make decisions on their own two feet. This we see as a much more valid form of direct action than resorting to armed struggle.

I would like to illustrate through slides that through many years of education and struggle, something like fifteen years in Puerto Real, we have managed to form an organisation that is in permanent dialogue. It is an organisation which has provided the possibility of solutions to particular problems which are outside of the parliamentary arena.

The most important thing that I would to point out, is that we managed to create a structure whereby there was a permanent assembly taking place. In other words decisions within this particular conflict were made by those people who were directly involved in the conflict:

Every Thursday of every week, in the towns and villages in the area, we had all-village assemblies where anyone who was connected with the particular

issue, whether they were actually workers in the shipyard itself, or women or children or grandparents, could go along to the village assembly and actually vote and take part in the decision-making process of what was going to take place. So we created a structure which was very different from the kind of structure of political parties, where the decisions are made at the top and they filter down. What we managed to do in Puerto Real was make decisions at the base and take them upwards, which is in complete contrast to the ways in which political parties operate.

Anarcho-syndicalism, or as some people prefer, the term revolutionary syndicalism, is nothing unless it has an anarchist base. What we tried to do in Puerto Real is show that the anarcho-syndicalist union is not just an industrial organisation that takes on factory disputes, but rather has a much wider social and political aim. What we have done in Puerto Real so far is attempt to interlink various different disputes, taking on various struggles around education, around the provision of health services, cultural aspects, and we've been struggling against the proposed construction of a new golf course, the privatisation of a cemetery, we've been fighting against various local tax increases. In other words we have been trying to show that the anarcho-syndicalist union is much wider than just focusing on industrial issues.

What we've managed to do is organise a movement which is co-ordinated on an ecological level, in order to struggle against these various projects which are being talked about. We have managed to link together twelve different organisations within the local area that are all interested in fighting these various aspects, whether it's increased taxes or the golf course mentioned earlier, or the privatisation of the cemetery. So again, anarcho-syndicalism in Puerto Real is not just fighting on the industrial level, but has managed to interlink all kinds of disputes of a fairly diverse nature.

We have tried to ensure that this organisation, which is composed of twelve different bodies, is directed by a sense of consensus rather than any organisation imposing their particular ideas on the organisation. So we have tried to establish a system of direct democracy, whereby the organisations can put various points on the agenda and those points will be discussed. There is no central or overall control, or directing group which has the power over the rest, it is very much a federalist and openly democratic organisation.

# Direct Action and Direct Democracy

The whole conflict kicked off as a result of people at the shipyard not having work for something like five years. What the government wanted to do was shut them down completely. At the end of 1987, when the King of Spain was due to visit Puerto Real, the CNT in order to highlight the dispute, decided to block off the main road and only bridge linking Cadiz with Puerto Real - an important and strategic place. What the CNT did was to barricade the road to prevent the King of Spain from coming across.

Every Tuesday was dedicated to acts of sabotage and direct action; telephones were cut off, the whole province was without telephones every Tuesday; Every Thursday we used to concentrate on the assemblies in the villages.

Over a thousand police from different parts of the country came to Puerto Real to try and contain these activities. Accusations were made that a child who was on the way to hospital died because of the CNT barricades, but we always let ambulances through. They were the only vehicles allowed through.

Each Tuesday we occupied the offices in the shipyard from 7am until 3 o'clock in the afternoon. As the shipyard was very large, we were only able to build barricades in certain areas. Every Tuesday as the occupation finished, we had to protect people from the police as they retreated, so comrades were up on one or two of the ships armed with catapults and other things, to defend people as they retreated. At one point when the barricades were set up on the outskirts of the town, of course they wouldn't let the police in. From the roofs of flats people would throw plant pots, fridges, tables, all old useless stuff at the coaches bringing in police. The railway line was also cut by building barricades and also felling the telegraph poles.

Also on Tuesdays were the assemblies in the shipyards themselves. Any decision that was taken in these assemblies of course was independent of any official union presence or official union ideas.

We managed to get a great deal of support from the rest of the CNT, of course. There were meetings that took place all over the country, from Galicia to Barcelona. There was also economic help which came across. One of the

most important things, a key element in the dispute, was that the CNT was particularly strong in Puerto Real itself. So that was where most support came from. Workers who were in different industries and also different unions supported the struggle. Another important thing was that of the four thousand workers at the shipyard, two thousand of those workers were members of the UGT (socialist union) and Comisiones Obreras (communist union), and in the workers' assemblies the proposals of the CNT, in opposition to the approaches of the other unions, were always carried bypassing completely any suggestions that were made by the other unions. A very important aspect of this particular conflict was that the CNT's proposals were always accepted unanimously.

After about six months of sustained activity, instead of closing they got some work for the shipyards. Eight ships came in to be refitted. That was one of the results of the sustained activity. Another achievement was a decent early retirement package at 55, where the pension would be linked entirely with the wages of those workers still working - a 100% link, equal to that of those still in work, also linked to any increase in salary achieved over the next nine years up to the age of 64. So that was quite a remarkable achievement.

We also achieved a rotation of people, so that if there was not sufficient work some comrades would work for two months, others would not work for those two months. But everyone would receive 100% of their wage. After two months those people who had been working would come in. So there was rotation of work in accordance with what was available, but everyone received 100% of the wage.

The shipyards are still functioning and there is a lot of work especially from the building of double-hulled ships, ecological ships, from a joint project between Great Britain, France and Spain.



# Organising beyond the Workplace: Community-wide Action

What we've tried to do is show people that various different problems are interlinked, such as the golf course, problems over taxes and other things. So what we've tried to do is show that for example ecological problems are not just ecological problems, but have a political and social basis. Over the last eight months we drew together these different forces and organisations for a combined project, and so far it's been very successful. It's really just a question of proposing different methods of struggle to different organisations, and the fact that they've been adopted.

We have also tried to create embryonic structures of direct democracy and participation, rather than the town councillors just making decisions about health and education. All these questions have been discussed in local communities and on estates, so that through a process of pyramid-type democracy (from the ground-up), we've managed to take ideas, questions and problems up from the base to form at the pinnacle a concerted idea of what all the local areas think."

## Questions from the floor:

**What percentage of CNT members are in the CNT because they are politically committed to anarcho-syndicalism? What advice can you give to us in Britain?**

"First of all, most members of the CNT are there on a ideological basis and agree with the standpoint of the CNT, but mainly they will have come from different organisations into the CNT - different unions, etc. So what the CNT is also doing is providing evening classes on various different aspects, from ecology to liberalism, to democratic society, so there is also a large slice of education which people are participating in as well. On the second point, it's a bit difficult for me to say, but all I can suggest is that you do the work and you'll see the fruits".

## **Did the assemblies just occur during the strike, or have they carried on?**

"There is a permanent dynamic role of the assembly, what we've tried to do over the years is build assemblies for every shift of whichever factory we're talking about that's on the industrial sphere. In the villages and in the town these assemblies still take place. About two weeks ago, around 2,000 people went to participate in the town assembly. So these do take place, but also we're concentrating very much on the estates and local areas - local assemblies, as well as the main larger one.

Every week the CNT visits different workshops, different factories, taking advantage of the morning break, about 11 o'clock, to go into factories and actually discuss different things with workers, that is something else we do, going as the CNT and talking with people on their breaks".

## **Do you have recallable delegates, and do have you ever had a case where delegate have not represented the views of the members and have had to be recalled? And we those individuals demoralised or pissed off about that? What did they feel about: being kicked off a task?**

"No one has ever had to be recalled, however if any delegate did go against the decisions taken in the assembly they would be recalled and also expelled from the union. But each delegate is there for a fixed period of time, either six months or twelve months, but no one has ever been recalled because no one has ever gone against what's been laid down in the assembly".

## **Considering what you have been doing, what has the state done to stop you?**

"One of the things that took place was in Adra which is further east along the coast the CNT was accused. - some of the members were, of having taken part in a hold-up in Adra. This was used as an excuse to arrest CNT members and try to crush the union, but since 1977 when the CNT was again legal (following the death of Franco and the end of the dictatorship since 1939), it has been the victim of several different plots, and different acts of repression in order to eliminate the union.



What we concentrated on also was that any acts of violence, or direct action, would involve the whole village itself. We did not set ourselves up as a vanguard group that would go and do these things. We involved the whole village, the whole town or whichever people it concerned, to do that. We were not a vanguard organisation, any violence or direct action taking place was essentially carried out by everyone.

I was accused personally, and other comrades, of various things, having caused damage up to the value of 15 to 20 million pesetas, and also I had my telephone tapped and various things like that. But those were things that happened to me, and things happened to other comrades as well. So there was a concerted effort to criminalise the members of the CNT, especially those in prominent positions."

The CNT, Spanish section of the International Workers' Association, has been in existence throughout the 20th century. Up to the coup of General Franco in 1936, the CNT was with over 2 million members the largest workers' organisation in Spain. Following the death of Franco in 1976, the CNT re-emerged as a significant organisation despite being plagued for the following 15 years by many who would rather it did not exist. Today the CNT is well on the path to re-establishing itself as an effective workers' organisation across every region of Spain.

## Interviews

(Taken from "Icaria", a CNT magazine. "Icaria" spoke to the women who had organised independently of the men and played a big-part in the struggle).

### **Icaria: How and why did the women of Puerto Real start to take part in the shipyards' struggle?**

Spokeswomen: It started when a woman saw that we were all worked up because on Tuesdays our menfolk were confronting the police and suffering from repression at the shipyards while the media called them all terrorists. This woman took the initiative, contacting neighbours and friends. In turn, they contacted many groups of women and they went out with a megaphone every Tuesday to demonstrate, meeting other women affected by the shipyards problem. At that time the men carried on the struggle inside the shipyards but the problem affected us as much as them. They were not so much demonstrations of support but our own because we depended on the men's

wages.

**I: Why did the struggle develop independently of the men?**

SW: Because they were not here - they were in the shipyards which the women weren't able to enter so our struggle was in the town. On Thursdays when the men brought the struggle into the town we went together to the demonstrations and in this way we could create quite a large group of autonomous and independent women.

**I: What type of organisation did you have in the group?**

SW: A co-ordinating committee of 6 women was elected but they didn't take decisions of any kind. Their function was only to co-ordinate. The decisions were made by the assembly on Wednesdays where proposals were made and voted on by a show of hands.

**I: How many women were there in the group?**

SW: The number varied - we started with 100 and grew to 500. The crossroads where the motorway, National IV, ends, was the symbol of our struggle and where we went to block the motorway.

**I: Were there any women in the 'collective' who were not dependent on the wages of a shipyard worker?**

SW: The majority of women are from shipyard workers' families. However there are women from other backgrounds in the collective.

**I: Was this the first experience of direct action the women had had in the streets?**

SW: Yes, within the context of 6 women's collective.

**I: What did they think of the violence reported in the media concerning Puerto Real?**

SW: What did we think of the violence? The only violence here was that by the police and it was very heavy. It was heaviest around the 'Cartabon', which was our 'Hill of Martyrs'. We were a totally independent and autonomous collective. We want to say that we weren't treated gently by the forces of repression because we were women.. Our struggle was not only on Tuesdays but a daily struggle with the 'forces of order'. We tried to explain this to other women to get them to understand. We received support and telegrams from feminist organisations, associations of political prisoners and the Assembly of Women in Cordoba...However there still remains a lot to do.

# After the Strike . . .

(Interview with Pepe Gomez, summer 1987, from paper of French CNT)

**Q: Now you've won some concessions notably construction of a ship, won't this risk demobilising the workers?**

A: Since the last general assembly called by all union sections (CC.OO, UGT, CNT, CAT) on July 9th we've broken relations with the others as they wanted to sign a worse agreement than previously. We decided to continue the fight and prepare a general strike throughout Cadiz industrial zone. The following week we called an assembly attended by 1,500 workers.

Workers well understand the contract is due to their struggle. As other unions and the works committee no longer want to call assemblies the contract will give the CNT a few months' respite... to hold meetings throughout the district, with slides of the struggle and to denounce the agreements signed and other unions' refusal to organise assemblies. We want to show that 1 ship means nothing... Once we've covered all of Puerto Real we'll call a general assembly of the population - if other unions don't join us (we'd like to call it together) we'll denounce them and do it in the CNT's name. We want it all to coincide with what will happen from October, November and December onwards with the thousands of workers whom 3 years ago the government promised and signed new jobs or reinstatement if they agreed to go on the FPE (National Fund for Promotion of Employment - workers would be paid 80% of basic pay for 3 years). As we know they can't keep their promises we can expect important struggles throughout the country.

**Q: Nationally, what precisely do you see happening given the UGT and CC.OO remaining the largest unions?**

A: We've prepared meetings with all minority unions like the Left Current in Asturias, a major force in small and medium yards with some prestige like the CNT in Puerto Real; INTGA, a Galician nationalist union which also has a good base; CAT of Euskalduna in the Basque country which is a significant force there... if we unite our potential we can mobilise 20-30,000 shipyard workers outside the bureaucratic unions. We'll have the meetings without the UGT and CC.OO who favour social contract with the state and bosses. Although they haven't signed the new pact, they'll reach a tacit agreement...

From this the CC.OO particularly, will expose its contradictions. For example in the ASTANO yard (Asturias) the majority of workers are in the CC.OO, which will have to call an assembly and if, simultaneously, we do information work and our call is sufficiently solid and united, we can develop a strategy of direct action in the affected areas -something that is difficult to do alone.

### **Q: What makes the CNT's actions so difficult?**

A: When for example, we called the last workers' assembly in Puerto Real alone there were cops from all over Andalucia, sent by the civil governor. From the start all acts of terrorism, vandalism, violence, etc have been blamed on the CNT. When we made a call alone the governor seized the opportunity to hit our organisation hard. We must be careful, especially now, to maintain momentum, not to get isolated and avoid police set-ups as have happened before. Most importantly for the CNT in Puerto Real is that the struggle and radicalisation continues to be taken up by the workers' and community assemblies. Our role is to organise the means to defend all workers. Our outlook is that after this summer the struggle will broaden but in the future, on the fundamental question of re-deployment, we won't succeed. The balance of forces today favours the Socialist Party who can rely on the UGT to dampen down social protest, and the CC.OO who give the impression that it's radical but in practice prepare the ground for the Communist Party and its electoral project within the 'United Left'. Thus they need to demobilise workers so that they remain dependent on politicians and their sales-pitches. However they are in a deep financial crisis in maintaining their bureaucracy. Although, if on the fundamental question we don't succeed, the conflict creates a revolutionary dynamic - many CC.OO comrades have torn up their membership cards and joined the CNT.

It's clear redeployment is worldwide and that today's situation favours capitalism. The exemplary struggles waged by workers over the last 10 years and the fact they've seen in practice how they are manipulated, frustrated and betrayed forms a base from which we can grow and build real workers' organisation to resist the state and bosses.

# METHODS OF STRUGGLE

—CNT

*The following text was written to help people discover, remind themselves or popularise the various syndicalist methods of struggle because in any battle, one must start from a few key ideas:*

**Hitting the enemy harder than they can hit you**, or better – hitting them so they can't hit back.

**Analysing the power balance:** -How great are our numbers -How much other workers and the general population will sympathise with or reject our struggle -What are our financial constraints, ie. financial and material resources available to continue the fight

**Avoiding exhaustion:** fighting too arduously from the start can be a weakness: the employers are prepared to overcome short term difficulties by transferring production, resuming production in other places, maintaining stocks, using scabs, financial reserves, etc.

**Knowing how to stop a fight**, avoiding fighting to the end when the situation is unfavourable. A continued minority occupation of a business ends up offering the boss discontented people who can he can turn against the strikers. Wages lost become so great that resuming a struggle becomes difficult. Disillusionment makes mobilisation harder.

**Allowing for a return** to the struggles or demands.

**Analysing the history, strategy, and objectives of the forces in play:** Bosses/workers: (moderate or hardline employers, combative or passive employees) Organisation/struggles (whether the unions are weak or radical, if the fights benefit from autonomous experience etc..)

**The fights are defined by the employment category, territorial extent or by their content.**

**Employment category:** struggles of unskilled workers, skilled workers, postal workers or nurses, white collar workers, teachers, technicians etc ... called sectional struggles. If the struggle involves the entire company or institution and deals with claims for all staff, the struggle is industrial.

**Territoriality:** if the struggle takes place in one particular location of a business, it is a local fight. Example: Visteon.

A fight at the **group level** is located in several places but within the same company: Example: the postal strikes.

The struggle may be in a **sector or industry:** examples: the health sector or education sector. The struggle can take place in all business lines and sites.

**Content:** content of the struggle can be **material** (wages, pensions, working conditions hours, health and safety), **political** (changing a law, a critique of anti social policy, gaining new union rights, the formation of worker counter-power within a company...) It can also of course **combine the two aspects:** for example the simplification and standardisation over grades and qualifications in a given industry. This material claim allows the unification of workers in the same industry and thus open the prospect of larger struggles.

The fight may also simply be held in **solidarity with other struggles.**

## The different types of struggle

**Verbal protest :** this type of struggle is the most simple.

**Petition:** a written denunciation, a complaint, expressing a desire, a disapproval. The petition can, sometimes, exert influence to obtain a list of benefits, often illusory, insubstantial or demagogic (designed for political power by appealing to rhetoric). Some unions which do or wish to do little or nothing engage in petitions for an election or to keep their conscience clean.

**Walkout:** the cessation of activity for a few hours at most. The stoppage expresses a greater dissatisfaction, the birth of a certain radicalisation. The stoppage is used as pressure for negotiations on short term or minor claims. Example: the lack of ventilation or heating, breaks, bonus issues, problems with safety equipment etc.

**Partial strike:** Workers stopping in rotation. Advantage: minimum loss of wage to individuals whilst the company is practically paralysed and the company still pays its employees who are now less productive or indeed idle. Employers try to put to work non striking employees, supervisors, agency staff or contractors. If this proves insufficient it may close the company for a while, locking workers out rather than paying people to be idle.

**Go slow:** a reduction in the rate or work to become as unproductive as possible.

**Work to rule:** excessively strict observance of instructions and regulations which hinders the proper functioning of the work.

**Limited strike:** workers stop working for a specific amount of time.

**Indefinite strike:** cessation of work by employees until they have resolved the issues in the conflict (or otherwise decide to return) Advantage: expresses a degree of radicalisation, involvement in struggle, blocks all or part of production. Disadvantage: substantial loss of wages for the striking workers. The company may continue production with non striking workers, contracted staff or they may move production to another site.

**Picket line:** The creation of barriers to prevent non striking workers entering the workplace. The material conditions of pickets are often deplorable: no shelter, being subject to the weather. Some non striking workers sometimes manage to enter the premises or remain inside to ensure continued production.

**Economic blockades:** For example disruption to and occupations of businesses and commercial communications (everything from roads to e-mail). This is the sort of action UK Uncut and the Solidarity Federation have been advocating and undertaking. It includes also mass non-payment of, say, bus fares (see the article on Greece elsewhere in this issue), and occupations and solidarity pickets of workplaces where workers face redundancy or victimisation.

**Social strikes:** which go beyond the concept of workers downing tools and support for economic struggles. We need these because workers, even those in unions, have very little clout in the current legal climate. Why should we wait for them to kick-start action on issues that affect us anyway? Tactics

include sit-ins, read-ins, teach-ins and even work-ins where services are threatened, such as old peoples' homes, libraries, NHS buildings, and voluntary sector projects such as the CAB, homeless shelters, women's services. Also, it means support by workers for people without economic power, for example by dole office workers in support of claimants, including people in receipt of incapacity and disability benefits.

**General assemblies:** To co-ordinate this action, involving everyone affected by the cuts, regardless of whether they work or not. These may be in town centres, colleges, day centres, communities or wherever people identify their collective interests as lying. If they take over contested spaces such as universities or wasted space such as empty Job Centres – both of which have happened – so much the better. They must be horizontally structured and avoid organisational models that would allow authoritarians to take over.

**Occupation:** The striking workers occupy the workplace and evacuate all non striking workers. They take control of meeting rooms, canteens, dormitories, copiers, telephones and vehicles.

**The internal action:** limited to within the company, confined within the institution.

**The exterior action:** the invasion and occupation of institutions, establishments, administrations or government departments favourable to the employer: the Department for Work and Pensions, courts, city halls, local political offices, newspaper headquarters, the Chamber of Commerce, management's living quarters, or a company to which production has been moved or which is linked to the conflict.

**The fight should seek to obtain the support and collusion of the general public, explain the demands and avoid disturbing other workers and the public where possible.**

**Local demonstration:** It publicises the conflict, popularizes the fight, maintains pressure, helps to assess the balance of power.

**National or international demonstration:** follows the same rules as local but on a large scale.

**Rumours:** spread rumours, information of all types to weaken the enemy.



**Discredit:** make public criticisms of the quality of the products or facilities of the business.

**Sabotage:** (See “Sabotage” by Emile Pouget) This ancient method of fighting is quick and direct. It is still practised but not publicised. It should be handled by people aware of the risks – usually in closet affinity groups. Catastrophic destruction can even result in the closure of the company. Perhaps a scale of actions may be made to avoid major problems. Sabotage is very effective, low cost for the strikers whilst very damaging to the employer. Always remember that the action must be harmful to the employers but not to users themselves, eg. utilities, transport, electricity, healthcare, food etc...

**Re-appropriation:** Recovery and control by workers of goods produced by the company – that is to say produced by the workers themselves.

(Unauthorised) **Sale of stock:** Selling the company’s stock to build a war chest and compensate workers.

**Autonomous production:** The strikers use the company’s machines to produce good which can be sold directly to the people at lower cost. This will satisfy everyone and bring funds to the strikers.

**Unauthorised work:** using their own tools strikers repair, manufacture or provide services to individuals for a fee. The proceeds are put into the strike fund. (Example: hairdressers in Rennes, cut people’s hair in a public square. In Australia the tram drivers ran the trams freely for the population.)

**Boycott:** On the request of workers struggling in a company people do not buy the products or services provided by that company.

**Civil disobedience:** refusal to comply with the laws of the state. Eg. To support and assist repressed people. Refusal to pay taxes, refusing to show identification etc.

**Generalised strike:** A strike situation which affects one or several sectors of production (or commerce) in a region, country or several countries.

**General strike:** A strike which crosses sectors in a region, country or internationally. It is a conscious and concerted action, which differentiates it from the generalised strike. It is the weapon desired by and defended by

anarcho-syndicalists. It is an act by the masses, the population, which is anarcho-syndicalist whether they understand it or not. Indeed, at this stage, people want and intend to fight and challenge their adversaries. They do not rely upon governmental elections, or promises for the future, to effect reform. The people struggle, here and now, relying on direct action, intend to resolve their demands. The general strike expresses the conflict of opposed classes clearly. If it is large, the balance of power is favourable and new choices may appear.

### **Good Work Strike:**

Good work strikes involve doing your job to help customers, not bosses and can involve distributing goods or services without demanding payment, and more. Instead of a conventional strike, workers with demands that the bosses are unwilling to meet can collectively decide to have a good work strike.

One of the biggest problems for service industry workers is that many forms of direct action, such as go-slows, end up hurting the consumer (mostly fellow workers) as much as the boss. One way around this is to provide better or cheaper service – at the boss's expense, of course. Workers at Mercy Hospital in France, who were afraid that patients would go untreated if they went on strike, instead refused to file the billing slips for drugs, lab tests, treatments, and therapy. As a result, the patients got better care (since time was being spent caring for them instead of doing paperwork), for free. The hospital's income was cut in half, and panicstricken administrators gave in to all of the workers' demands after three days.

In New York City, USA, Industrial Workers of the World restaurant workers, after losing a strike, won some of their demands by heeding the advice of IWW organisers to “pile up the plates, give ‘em double helpings, and figure the checks (bills) on the low side.”

**The insurrectionary general strike:** for various reasons the strikers form barricades, create disorder and riots. Everywhere the people rise up in arms, opening the prospect of the expropriation of the capitalists.

**The expropriatory general strike:** the strikers, masters of the street, seize the means of production, exchange and communication. Businesses, commerce, governments are under the control of the committees of struggle. This is the prelude to a profound social change which opens up the possibility of libertarian-communism.

## –Some Advice–

A number of techniques of struggle from syndicalist history and practise have been presented. **It is necessary for everyone to judge their usefulness.** Each technique must match the stake. It is not necessary to deploy heavy means for a small gain. Example: for a small struggle, walkouts, partial strikes, go-slows and work to rule are sufficient.

After applying a technique, evaluate it. If it proves to be insufficient, **graduate to a more radical method.** Always keep the pressure applied. Starting at too high a level and stepping back may expose, or be considered to be, weakness which the enemy can take advantage of.

**Beware of false radicals:** consider whether those who spread radicalism are sincere or not (even if they are right at that moment in what they say). There are those who come forward and push for unsuitable conflict, they try to play hard in order to stick with and gain the trust of the strikers, eventually to do away with the movement or kill the fight, or knowing that defeat is assured, they wish to capitalise on the trust they have gained in an election. If they are in collusion with the enemy, they will start a tough and ultimately doomed struggle which will weigh heavily when the boss attacks later (with restructalisation, redundancies, etc.), because the previous defeat will make it hard for the workers to fight back.

**Analyse the relationships of power:** for example, upcoming union or political elections which will pressure the powers that be to avoid conflict.

**Analyse the level of public discontent,** and the financial and economic situation at the company where the strike action is to occur.

**Analyse the status of stock held by the company,** if they have large amounts the employers will continue to sell their products whilst simultaneously reducing their payroll due to the strike. In contrast, low levels of stocks, or perishable stocks will disadvantage the employers a great deal. Note that after the strike the employer may attempt to force increased overtime work in order to make up for losses suffered during the strike and catch up on delayed orders.

**Review** the status of upcoming orders, the extent of financial reserves, possibilities for transferring production to other locations. We can prepare the ground for a fight by using a combination of techniques such as a go slow, limited strikes, sabotage, work to rule, or absenteeism to reduce production.

**Avoid retaliation** by ensuring that the identities of those taking action remain unknown. Make sure the employer knows as little as possible about who is who and who does what. Obscure the number of people involved in the conflict, as well as dates and locations of meetings. Agree to actions at the last minute to avoid disclosure.

**Opt for a strike committee** which is wider than the union branches. The strike committee must emanate from and be directed by the base general assembly of the strikers.

**Multiply the base of your actions:** media, propaganda, finance, independent production and unauthorised work in support. This forces the enemy to draw upon more of their resources to fight the strike.

Apply direct democracy in the general meetings to avoid having a small group seizing control for purposes other than those decided upon by the general assembly. Close attention is required when people advocate a vanguard party or trade union: even if legal it cannot serve the interests of the people. If conspiracies are suspected, or closed meetings, document and report them.

It is **useless** to send people to negotiate with the boss, the director or the board of directors. Nor is it useful to send staff representatives or 'experts' in negotiation. They serve no purpose except make you believe in them, and impose a delegation of responsibility, persuading people of the necessity of reformist unions. The bourgeoisie knows how to use tools to analyse unrest. For example, production slows or quality falls, absenteeism and sabotage increase. The employers will quickly understand that the workers are unhappy, even if they try to deny or hide this. The management knows the grievance and what it will propose to the workers: **representatives are useless.**

Send to the press, the population and the employer a list of demands signed by the strike committee.

**If the employer wants to negotiate** or offer to meet some demands, they can make their proposals known through the media, publishing them in the press, by posting a notice or by speaking to the workers at an assembly. The committee will respond in writing. There is no need to send delegates to a negotiation who risk being satisfied with crumbs, or will defend their own ideas instead of remaining with the agenda of demands, especially if they are representatives of a reformist trade union.

**Force the opponent** to sign an agreement not to engage in repression after the conflict. Require pay for strike days. Try to minimise the financial impact of the conflict for employees, so if the management decided to counter attack, the employees are not weakened and can bring about a new conflict.

With the same thing in mind, **raise funds, hold concerts and festivals to gain financial support** for the fight. Take action to seek material support for the fight.

## **–Legalism – Illegalism–**

You should stay within the law as far as possible in order to avoid repression. But we should note that the law does not support our interests. Very quickly, workers have to act illegally in order to meet their goals: picketing, occupations, independent production. But we need to analyse calmly the advantages and implications. You'll quickly discover that the law, legitimised by the state, is not neutral and serves the interests of the bourgeoisie above all.

Based on Bakunin's idea "Law merely reflects the existing state of affairs backed by force" what we impose will become legal.

## **–Violence – Non Violence–**

The situation doesn't necessarily have to be one or the other, it could be a largely non-violent struggle with occasional violent incidents, or vice versa.



Sometimes a non violent and determined conflict can be effective, sometimes not. A large well behaved protest can be effective, but a rowdy one can be even more so. It's a question of context and the choice of the people engaged in the struggle.

However, be cautious about violence and who is provoking it (whether it is the strikers or their opponents).

Anarcho syndicalists are supporters of a world without violence, without weapons: this is our goal. But we also see that aggressive resistance of employees can be legitimate violence against the violence of the bourgeoisie: repression, prisons, exploitation, lay-offs, wars, pollution etc. Eg. A strike may be a non-violent method, but the process is not without violence; the question in choice is then how to respond to repression.

## –Organising Ourselves–

We must now consider the **type of organisation appropriate to the fight**. Does the Business Trade-Union defend the interests of the workers, or other interests? Does it prepare for the fight, defend it, without introducing models of conciliation and mediation favourable to the bourgeoisie? Does it pacify struggle? Can it be radicalised? Is the legal protection of trade union representatives effective? Do recognised unions guarantee the protection of union members?

Apparently, given the thousands of union members who have been laid off: no. In any case, recognised or not, protected or not, participating in illegal actions will expose you to lay-offs. So the protection is in this case useless.

Worse, trying to protect themselves through legal means leads the supporters of these methods to comply with laws which are favourable to the employers, to not engage in fights outside the legal framework and therefore to defend the bourgeois legality become counter revolutionary.

Engaging in double talk: having the façade of legality whilst acting illegally, is unsustainable because union officials will be obliged, consciously or unconsciously, to defend the legal framework, strengthening themselves whilst weakening their critics in order to maintain the legal protections they enjoy. Furthermore, when the legal framework protects some individuals it becomes difficult to reject it.

And don't doubt: if the struggle threatens the bourgeoisie's position they will ignore the law, and union officials will be left to reflect upon their supposed rights under the law.

The average full-time worker in Australia works 70 minutes of unpaid overtime a day; that's 33 full eight hour days a year. As society we give over 2.14 billion hours, worth \$72 billion as a present to employers. Whilst some of us struggle to find work, others of us struggle to find time away from work. The majority of so many people's lives are taken up with making a wage in work that is often dangerous, stressful, boring, exhausting, pointless and frustrating. Every society has to do a certain amount of work to maintain a decent standard of living, but the way we organise work has very little to do with something worth calling living.

We are a business run society. Our dignity and humanity are second to the overwhelming and overriding need for profit for investors. Ritually, we're allowed to vote in a new State manager once every three years, but ultimately decision making power, resources, the media and the things we need to survive are controlled by a tiny elite and their corporate empires that are private, unaccountable and beyond any meaningful level of popular control – Even if formal democratic practices exist, making changes in the 'shadow' of democratic governance doesn't change the system casting it.

The privileged and powerful have a passionate hatred for real popular control and democracy. We – the common people – have to be kept from interfering with the central institutions in our society (ie: the entire commercial, industrial and financial system). We're allowed to be spectators but not participants, because if we were participants we understandably might threaten their privileges and authority.

“So long as the immense majority of the populations are dispossessed of property, deprived of education and condemned to political and social nonbeing, so long as labour continues to be the slave of private property, the State and of capital, so long as human society continues to be divided into different classes as a result of the hereditary inequality of occupations, of wealth, of education, and of rights, there will always be a class-restricted government and the inevitable exploitation of the majorities by the minorities, with all the social dysfunction that this entails.” — **BAKUNIN**



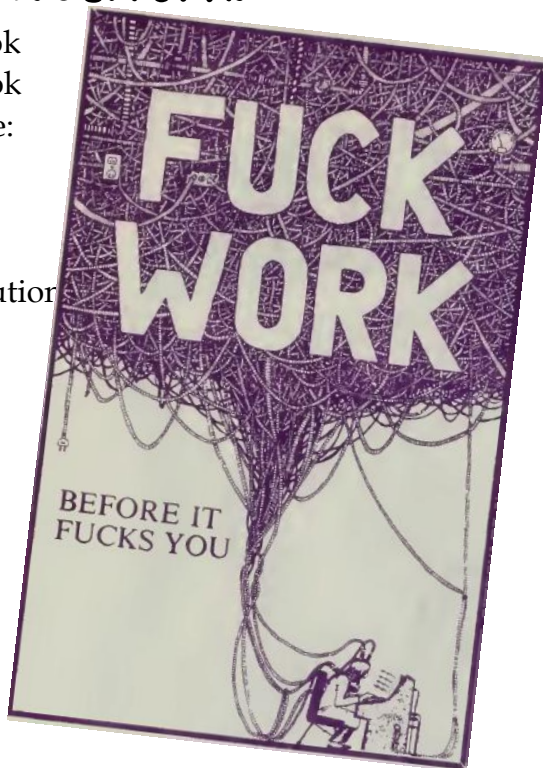


# More literature available from Brisbane Solidarity Network:

- ★ McDonalds Resistance Handbook
- ★ Queensland Squatter's Handbook
- ★ Don't Forget Those on the Inside:  
*Notes on Prison Abolition.*
- ★ An Introduction to Anarchism
- ★ Fighting for Ourselves (SolFed)
- ★ Anarchism and the Black Revolution  
(Lorenzo Kom'boa)

## Organise!

- ★ **Brisbane Solidarity Network**  
[www.solnet.co.nr](http://www.solnet.co.nr)
- ★ **Industrial Workers of the World**  
[www.iww.org](http://www.iww.org)



“We need to organise struggles ourselves along direct action lines. And if we’re not capable of doing so at present, we need to aspire to that capability; we need to move from being a political propaganda group to being a revolutionary union. The Solidarity Federation describes itself as a revolutionary union initiative to signify this intent. So far, the struggles we have initiated have been small scale and often focussed on individual grievances. But that merely reflects the limits of our present capacities, capacities we are always seeking to expand. Specific political organisation is not sufficient to this task. We seek to become an organisation which is at once political and economic.”

– From *‘Fighting for Ourselves’* (Solidarity Federation)

# Don't be a thicky, take a sicky!

## It's good for you:

Whether you work in a high-stress office or a factory filled with toxic chemicals, most jobs today are a health hazard. Having a day off will help your body recover. *A sicky a day keeps the doctor away!*

## It's good for your family:

Most of us work hard so we can afford to buy the things we think our families need. But by spending so much time at work, we forget that the most important thing in any family is love. *The family that wags together, stays together.*

## It's good for the economy:

When you stay away from your job for a day, you create the opportunity for the employment of temporary workers. If you use this time to take your family to the beach or to the cricket, the money you spend is also creating more jobs for Australians. *Take a day off work, and help get this country working again!*

Written and authored by Howard Beasley on behalf of the Deaf-franchised Workers Union,  
PO Box 197, Latchford NSW 2140

# BOSS

Cathy Morris

Aussies love a drink, but our national day is not an excuse for a hangover at work or taking a Friday sickie, bosses warn.

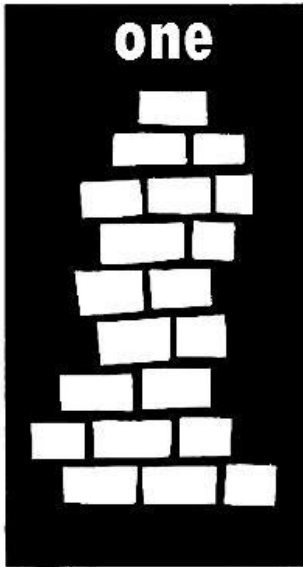
Hangovers cost businesses \$5.6 billion a year and more than 6 per cent of people who drink too much show up to the office drunk, according to research collated by newly

launched digestive drink Secur-

ity Feel Better. NSW Business Chamber chief executive officer Stephen Cartwright urged Australia Day revellers not to get carried away when they had to put in a full day's work the next day.

"While Thursday is a day off for many Australians to celebrate their national holiday, Friday is a normal working day and employees will be expected to show up to the workplace bright-eyed and bushy-tailed," Cartwright said.





Rise like Lions after slumber

In unvanquishable number,

Shake your chains to earth like dew

Which in sleep had fallen on you -

Ye are many - they are few.

**Every workplace a battlefield;**

**Every worker a partisan.**

**You've just started up in a new housing or workplace situation and don't know where to begin.**

As a practice and over-arching worldview anarchism is fundamentally about sticking up for each other - against the whims of bosses, landlords and bureaucrats, against systemic and psychological systems of social control, against racism, sexism and other forces that hold illegitimate power over our lives. At the same time anarchist theory looks at how we can organise ourselves and our struggles in a way that reflects the kinds of society we want to see, and the nuts and bolts of doing this in such a way so that our movements can't be demobilised or sold out from above, or used as trampolines for political careerists, NGO's and those who seek to become managers over and above the people.

None of this theorising matters if we don't try to implement our ideas beyond the realm of traditional Activist politics & propaganda and into the areas of our lives where we experience exploitation most directly: in our workplaces and neighbourhoods.

**The following was compiled in preparation for BSN's *'Neighbourhood Organiser 101 Training Forum'*. It contains a useful set of guides, frameworks and practical examples to get you started in confronting issues at work and in the community.**

