

Hereford Heckler

The bulletin of Hereford Solidarity League

FREEDOM, EQUALITY, COMMUNITY • #19 • APRIL/MAY 2011



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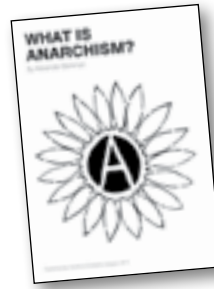
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BANKS TARGETED AGAIN BY ANTI-CUTS CAMPAIGNERS

Campaigners from Hereford Solidarity League held sit-in protests in Barclays bank and Vodafone in protest at government spending cuts and excessive bankers' bonuses.

Around a dozen protesters entered Barclays in Hereford on 16th April and held a sit-in and picnic in the main lobby. The protest lasted just under an hour before protesters moved off to the Vodafone store in the city centre.

Advertising the protest at an undisclosed location on the internet had clearly ruffled a few feathers; half a dozen police officers were dotted around the Castle Green meeting point and proceeded to follow protesters around the city.

More interestingly many banks in the city had drafted in extra security in

apprehension of the protests, with contract security guards from across the region stood outside a number of buildings.



Barclays' fat-cat Bob Diamond, who received a £6.5m bonus in 2011

Much like the protests at Gloucester in November and the Lloyds TSB occupation in January, this action was taken to highlight the fact that the five biggest

banks will make estimated profits of £52 billion this year (that's £1 billion a week!), bankers continue to award themselves billions in bonuses, and big corporations avoid paying their taxes, all at the same time as ordinary people are being made to pay for a financial crisis which these banks helped to create!

Despite government claims that 'we're all in this together', there is a very big and real gap between the rich and poor in this country. The rich award themselves billions in bonuses, big corporations avoid their tax bills and bankers continue to live their lavish lifestyles, whilst the poor lose their jobs and have their services cut as a result.

We will continue to fight the government cuts. We will continue to fight the greedy banks and capitalists that created this crisis.

Turning up the heat

The demonstrations against government spending cuts in London on 26th March marked the real beginning of our fightback. But as a one-day event it did little in itself to change anything.

Nearly a month on and workers still have job losses hanging over their heads. The spectre of homelessness looms large for tenants and mortgage-payers. The most vulnerable are still staring into the abyss of even deeper poverty.

One thing is clear: we need to go beyond symbolic protests. We need a new level of militancy and direct action.

The more moderate parts of the anti-cuts movement may not be on board with this. They believe that the whole point of any campaign should be to 'win the argument' so that laws get passed via parliament, which help our cause. But this approach is getting us nowhere.

The reason that reasoning gets us nowhere is that politics is not based on good arguments but on power relations. And since our interests do not figure in this system, reasoned argument gets us nowhere. We win the argument, the cuts go ahead anyway and at best we can feel a sense of righteous indignation.

If we want to win, we need to recognise that being right doesn't cut it. It's a matter of power. A case in point: it is true that the welfare state was founded at a time when the national finances were in a far worse state. But it's worth looking at what the ruling class were saying when the welfare state was founded. Let's hear it from a Tory: "We must give them reforms or they will give us revolution," said Quintin Hogg in 1943.

When the ruling class feared the working class, a welfare state was a price worth paying. Now they don't fear us, they feel confident to dismantle it. So the paradox is without the threat of revolution, reforms are a non-starter. On the other hand, with an unruly working class on the streets, and a strike-prone workforce, those reasoned reformists all of a sudden look like workable negotiation partners to whoever's in government.

It's all about the balance of class forces. It's primarily a power struggle, not a moral argument. We might have right on our side, but power will determine the outcome.

Thus, it is clear that symbolic protest won't cut it and we need to move from largely awareness-raising into the

realms of economic blockades in order to get anywhere.

This is where we need to look in order to effectively bring the state begging. Sustained, co-ordinated strike action against austerity looks unlikely, but economic blockades have been used to great effect in France both as a stand-alone tactic and in support of strike action.

The essence of the idea is to blockade economically significant targets from shopping centres to commuter hubs to fuel depots in order to inflict economic damage comparable to a strike. To be effective, these must be mass actions, otherwise the police are adept at arresting the participants. We don't need martyrs, we need results!

Of themselves, and across the country, such actions would prove a thousand times more effective than even the most explosive a-to-b march. And, if the unions did muster up the will to see co-ordinated strikes then that goes double.

Winning the arguments and making reasoned criticisms is all well and good, but it won't stop the cuts. We will only start winning concessions when the ruling class fear us.

'I WON'T PAY' MOVEMENT *spreads across Greece*

They blockade highway toll booths to give drivers free passage. They cover train ticket machines with plastic bags so commuters can't pay. Even doctors are joining in, preventing patients from paying fees at state hospitals.

Like the UK, Greece's government—bowing to the failures of capitalism—is carrying out a raft of drastic austerity measures, including higher taxes, wage and pension cuts, and price rises in public services. But in Greece the people are fighting back, with the 'I Won't Pay' movement gaining popularity across the country.

In a move that conceded to the power of an estimated 8,000 Greeks a day that were refusing to pay tolls, the government has now announced reductions of up to 50% in road toll fees.

In February trade union members massed in Athens to cover ticket machines with plastic bags at metro stations, preventing passengers from paying their fares, in protest at public transport ticket price hikes.

Doctors in hospitals have also staged blockades in front of pay counters to prevent patients from paying their €5 flat fee for consultations.

Many see the 'I Won't Pay' movement as the people's refusal to pay for the mistakes of a series of governments and the failures of capitalism.

A wave of civil disobedience spreading across the country is now forcing the Greek government to rethink its whole programme of cuts.

In the Athens suburb of Keratea, locals dug up a road in April to stop a new landfill site being built.

Protesters have also stormed a police station, snatching hundreds of confiscated number plates and setting light to thousands of fines.

Governments are now getting anxious as they wonder if Greece is becoming ungovernable. We should take heed of this. If the Greek working class were taking austerity lying down there would be no problem for the markets.

Greece has long proven—for those willing to pay attention—that socialists in power are indistinguishable from conservatives when they have to balance the books of capitalism. Now, it is reinforcing the message that if you want the state to back down you have to make the country ungovernable.



A census rebellion

There is a growing outcry from campaigners as well as literally millions of ordinary individual UK citizens who have deep concerns about the 2011 census.

The deadline for completion having passed, we now have enforcement officers knocking on doors, as of course, there's profit to be made from the £1000 fines threatened (note that these people have absolutely no authority whatsoever to make you do anything; don't even talk to them).

Despite the threats, the government is simply relying on people's compliance. This is why during the 2001 census only 38 people were prosecuted out of the 3 million who did not return their forms.

The very first census was taken in 1086 for tax purposes, beginning the displacement of many Britons through the dividing of land. It has repeatedly been used for propaganda, new tax policies and financial control, along with serving as a head count for various wars. Resistance to the census began as early as the 1800s, and later with the Women's Freedom League in 1911, who encouraged a boycott by not being at home during the night of the completion date.

US arms manufacturer Lockheed Martin was awarded the contract for this year's census. How can it be ethically right to assist in channeling your private details and tax money to a corrupt, US war-machine under legal enforcement of the Crown? That's the same Lockheed Martin that builds stealth-bombers, makes Trident nuclear missiles, cluster bombs and fighter jets, is involved in data processing for the CIA and FBI, and has provided private contract interrogators for the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay.

So, what to do? There are many websites with lots more info on how to avoid the census, from total boycotting, to subverting it by spoiling the sheet (think ketchup spills and obliterating barcodes). The simplest way being writing 'no contact—return to sender' on the envelope, taking the form filling from 40 minutes down to 20 seconds. Disarm the census!

www.nocensustakingpart.co.uk / tinyurl.com/5r6qw57

REMEMBER ME? I'M YOUR COUNCILLOR!

You last saw them in 2007, or some time ago in a photo in the paper, but now the councillors are back! Yes, they want something from you (there's an election, remember?!)

This time, not only was there the choice between the independents, Tories, Fib Dems and Labour (the 'butters') you're now getting the It's Our County option too (the 'I Can't Believe It's Not Butters'). Could you tell the difference? No, we couldn't either.

We say, if you want real change, get involved in your community: join your community association, trade union or start a campaign. Democracy is not marking an 'x' on a piece of paper once every four years, it's getting involved and doing things in between.

BIG SOCIETY GETS THE AXE

What do we do when the government destroys all our public services? Look to the 'big society' of course! That is, the army of volunteers (that exists somewhere apparently) who are willing to do the old jobs for free. How ironic then that Herefordshire Voluntary Action, a local organisation that supports volunteers and helps them get involved in the community, is facing crippling cuts of its own.

First they came for the workers, then they came for the volunteers ... then there was no one left to open the libraries, care for the elderly, maintain the parks, take my rubbish away, teach my son in school...

COUNCIL CUTS PENSIONERS' CALL OUT SYSTEM

Herefordshire Council has been criticised for its plans to cut a free emergency alarm service provided to elderly and vulnerable residents.

The previously free service, which included regular home visits by housing support officers, will be replaced by a new scheme at the end of June after funding was slashed by Herefordshire Council. This change will affect over 250 people living in Marches Housing Association accommodation, leaving them with the option of paying up to £57 a month for the service, or finding 'alternative arrangements.'

The decision has been branded 'unjust and unfair' by pensioners who will be effected by the move and by directors

at Marches Housing Association, the company who provides the accommodation in which the system will be changed.

A Marches resident said, "The thinking behind it is very strange. I realise cuts have to be made but to cut a service given to old age pensioners is just wrong. It's unjust and unfair. For some of the elderly residents who only have their pension it is a hell of a lot of money."

As the government cuts set in it is the most vulnerable in our society who are most effected, we are starting to see this locally. It is time to stand up for our services and join the ever-growing anti-cuts movement in the UK. Let's take an uncompromising message to the government; we **will not** pay for a crisis created by bankers by having our services cut!

MAYDAY MARCH IN HEREFORD

On Sunday May 1st marchers gathered in the Hereford sunshine to commemorate International Workers' Day and protest against government spending cuts.

Protesters gathered at the Merton Meadow car park before leaving for the Shire Hall where a rally was held.

Speeches were given by Hereford Solidarity League, the Green Party and Anarchist Federation, speaking about the history of Mayday, the unnecessary cuts and building on the common ground that we have in the anti-cuts movement to defeat the government's plans. Speakers from Bristol also gave a short talk on the recent campaign against Tesco in Stokes Croft.

Pickets were held outside of Vodafone, Boots and Topshop following the rally to highlight corporate tax avoidance that runs into the billions of pounds.

The rally marked the first time that local Greens and Hereford Solidarity League had shared a platform together in the city.

FOOD PRICES RISE, BOSSES POCKET PROFITS

Food prices are rising higher in the UK than in any other country in Europe. Commodity price inflation over the past few months would push up prices by 3.5%, but stores have made increases of 6.5%. Just recently Tesco announced profits of £3.54 billion. Hmm, we wonder how they made that!

How much more do food and fuel prices have to rise before we kick off? At what point do normally law-abiding working class people finally say "enough's enough"?

LIVE MUSIC FOR A GOOD CAUSE

Livers were tested and eardrums damaged at Hereford Solidarity League's second benefit gig at the Victory. After the arctic conditions of the first gig back in December, March saw another evening of radical film and local music.

A big thank you to Guerilla Cinema for the 'riot porn'! And thanks also to the bands, 'Special Needs Disco' and 'Joe and the Sluts', both of whom came up from the Forest of Dean for the evening, and Hereford's own 'Planecrasher' who inflicted serious structural damage to surrounding buildings with their volume control!

Keep an eye on our Facebook page and website for details on future events.

RADICAL ART HITS THE STREETS

Hereford's radical arts scene has been bringing smiles to the city.

A graffiti artist dubbed 'Hereford's own Banksy' by the Hereford Times has been doing some quality stencil work. Some see it as vandalism, but then some people will always moan. Make your mind up for yourself, look out for Alice next time you're passing the old Sportsman pub.

The Twisted Knitters are another bunch of 'vandals' bringing a splash of colour to some otherwise dull parts of Hereford. A quick look at their blog reveals the extent of their 'yarn bombing' exploits. Anyone not familiar with graffiti knitting is strongly advised to look out for their work; we particularly like the Elgar birthday suit.

On a more political note, the Love Police hit the streets of High Town to enlighten consumers. They describe themselves as an absurdist performance art group who use comedy and sarcasm in order to make people think.

They began in London to highlight the dehumanisation of society, increasing use of CCTV and the police state. You can't miss them, just look for someone ranting through a megaphone holding a sign saying 'everything is OK'.

Houses for the rich THE 'LOCAL' TORY VISION



Nice house... if you can afford it

In a recent full page advert in the Hereford Times, the 'Local Conservatives' made a commitment to building more houses. Which should be a good thing—thousands of Herefordians are in need of a decent house and there is currently a shortage of affordable

accommodation for local working class people. So the ad boldly declared that they will deliver "an average 900 new homes a year county wide, of which about one third will be affordable." Which means an average two-thirds of homes will be unaffordable—66%, 600 out of 900. Two-thirds of homes built in the county will be for the rich.

According to a recent study, Herefordshire has one of the highest number of rough sleepers in the country. The latest figures from Homepoint show almost 5,000 people on the waiting list for social housing. And yet the 'Local Conservatives' have the nerve to admit they will be building houses for the rich.

Whilst government is giving out little sweeteners for the rich here, there and everywhere, help for working class people is being attacked: housing benefit has already been cut; local housing groups like Supported Housing for Young People Project have had their budgets cut.

We should not be in two minds that this is class war, waged on the poor by the ruling class. Let's give it back to them twice as hard.

SPORT

THE RESURGENCE *of women's football*

On the 5th December 1921 the Football Association banned women's football from all FA grounds in the country. One of the official reasons was that "football is quite unsuitable for females and ought not to be encouraged". The ban was eventually lifted in 1973.

On Wednesday 13th April 2011 the Women's Super League (WSL) kicked off with full backing from the same FA. Some would say that the FA are doing the right thing and backing the fastest growing women's sport. They have invested £3 million in the eight teams that make up, what is now, the top tier of the woman's game. Unlike the women's Premier League the WSL will be played in the summer in the hope of increasing attendances. The FA has also secured TV rights for four years with ESPN. Clearly those business minded people in the governing body are very enthusiastic. General Secretary Alex Horne said: "Hopefully, if we set this up right and we expand the right way, the game will become professional."

Hmm, 'set up right' and 'expand the right way'. Sorry to be cynical but is he referring to the way the men's game is being run? Perhaps what he's saying is "if this works then we can make loadsa money", because that is their attitude toward football in general. When it came to organising and promoting the World Blind Football Championship last year the FA were an utter letdown. Why? Because blind football isn't big business yet. They see the women's game for its commercial possibilities and can't wait to get their slimy hands on it.

Can we really trust these people to run women's football when they've made such an arse of the men's game? The rampant commercialisation has created a sport that mirrors society as a whole. The rich get richer and the poor feed of the scraps and are expected to be thankful. Due to the mismanagement of the FA we will never have another 'Wimbledon', a club that moved from non-league all the way to the top. In fact the team that will finish top of the non-league pyramid this season, Crawley Town, spent £1 million on transfer fees!

So, although it's great to see women's football become more organised, and we look forward to a successful WSL, fans should be wary that this great new dawn could well become a nightmare if the men over at the FA have their way.



Helen Heckler

■ 'Cash-strapped' Herefordshire Council will be spending £26 million on flashy new offices, resulting in further cuts to schools, roads and social care. But ssshhh! They're trying to keep the news a secret. So let's blow the whistle a bit: **NEWSFLASH, NEWSFLASH: COUNCIL TO SPEND £26 MILLION ON FLASHY NEW OFFICES! COUNCIL TO SPEND £26 MILLION ON FLASHY NEW OFFICES!**

■ The new Tesco on Holme Lacy Road is now open for business. As is another Tesco just opened over in Britol, after two years fighting local opposition. The new shop hadn't been open five days before a crowd of 200 locals smashed it to pieces, closing it for a week. And we're sure this won't be the last of it either. Woop woop, smash a window for me, Bristol!

■ Herefordshire residents Heather and Phil Gorringer were apparently invited to the royal wedding in London. Heather said that she loves that "the British can 'do' monarchy like no one else on earth". Personally I liked our approach to monarchy best when Charles I got his head chopped off in 1649. No messing around, just getting rid of the parasites. The French had a good approach as well. Chop, chop!

■ Oh, did we mention the council's new £26 million offices?

■ **Hereford Solidarity League** works to build a society based on the ideas of **freedom, equality and community** ■ **Anti-fascism is an important part of our politics**, but we believe that all politicians maintain a system of inequality, privilege and control that divides communities ■ Real change does not happen at the ballot box and can only come about by **independent working class action**; that is, people looking out for each other and organising themselves to deal with the problems that they experience on a day to day basis ■ Our aim is to increase the fighting spirit and self-confidence of working class people to change things for themselves.

FIND US ON THE INTERNET—Join our **Facebook group 'Hereford Heckler'**; visit **www.herefordheckler.wordpress.com**; or email **kay.bulstreet@hotmail.co.uk**