

ACE

Solidarity

Bulletin

No.9 Free

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Council policy to **destroy** all community services with another **£3.5 million cuts**

Norwich City Council has decided not to blame the government for its latest round of cuts - £3.5 million, following years of blaming Conservative governments for destroying local jobs and services.

Current and ex-councillors admit that head of Leisure and Community Services, David Albutt, was employed by the then leaders of Norwich City Council with the clear and stated remit to ditch the Crome Centre, Duke Street Centre, St. Augustine's swimming pool and Chapelfield Nursery. Only Chapelfield Nursery remains, but not for much longer if the council's plans go unopposed.

Today Labour run the council and now the government. They hope we will forget their past claims that local services and jobs would only be safe when Labour return to power. In their actions they have now become indistinguishable from the Conservatives. Community services might improve the lives of the people of Norwich, but Labour council leaders have profit not people as their guiding principle. Their policies are a direct continuation of their opponents; continuing low taxes for the wealthy, cuts in services for the majority.

This latest round of cuts, along with the usual threat over jobs and services, targets Chapelfield Nursery. The nursery is used by both the children of council workers and the

general community. For the majority of parents it is a service without which they would be unable to continue working. It is run on a non-profit making basis; income from charges cover staff costs and overheads, enabling it to be affordable to the majority of its users. The loss of Chapelfield Nursery would not only force many of its users to lose their jobs, but result in the job losses of nursery staff.

The £10's of millions in cuts of recent years, have already pruned council staffing levels down to the bone. Many posts are now so under-resourced in terms of administrative support, budget, etc., that staff are under severe stress, and to add insult to injury are blamed for these shortcomings by the many managers who are only interested in "number one". Managers and executives of course continue to enjoy their large salaries untouched, along with substantial pay rises.

The Labour councillors who fancied themselves as "close to the people", now make little attempt to disprove that they are cut from the same cloth as the Conservatives. We were promised change, but get more of the same.

UNISON, the trade union for council staff, can do little more than apologise for the actions of its Labour allies. Unwilling to confront the fact that as a Labour ally, it is col-

laborating with the employers of its members - employers who have consistently attacked UNISON members' jobs and working conditions. Little surprise than it is ineffective as a trade union!

Exposing the hypocrisy of Labour, and defending our local services, jobs and living standards will only come about through council staff and users' self-organisation, under our own direct control. Illusions in the potential of UNISON and Labour must be left behind in this fight.

(Written by Council workers and Chapelfield Nursery users).

Norfolk & Norwich branch of the **SOLIDARITY FEDERATION hold monthly action/planning meetings at which future events, campaigns, solidarity actions, etc. are organised.**

If you are interested in active membership why not come along to the Solidarity Centre and see for yourself... Here are the dates for 1997 / 1998 -

NOVEMBER: Monday 3rd, 7.30pm

DECEMBER: Monday 1st, 7.30pm

JANUARY: Monday 6th, 7.30pm

FEBRUARY: Monday 3rd, 7.30pm

MARCH: Monday 3rd, 7.30pm

APRIL: Monday 7th, 7.30pm

MAY: Monday 5th, 7.30pm

Problems at Work? for support and advice on:

● employment law, ● health & safety, ● organising in your workplace,

visit N&N SF, at the **Solidarity Centre Saturdays 11am - 2pm**

SOLIDARITY BULLETIN

Published by the Norfolk & Norwich branch of the Solidarity Federation affiliated to the International Workers Association.

for Anarcho Syndicalism:

- support & resources
 - action for workplace organisation, better pay and conditions
 - resistance to boss dictatorship
- for:
- workers' self-management of industry and services & direct community control
 - production for need not profit
 - a world without bosses, politicians and wage-slavery
 - from each according to their ability, to each according to their need

**SOLIDARITY
DIRECT ACTION
ORGANISATION**
*a different kind of union
run by workers for workers*

contacts:

transport workers network-
rail, white arrow and bus workers...
write to: PO Box 1095, Sheffield S2
4YR.

education workers network -
for cleaners, cooks, caretakers,
teachers, lecturers, technicians...
write to: N&N SF, at the Solidarity Centre
(address below).

public service workers network-
local government employees,
libraries, social services...
write to: N&N SF, at the Solidarity Centre
(address below).

**postal / communication workers
network -**
write to: PO Box 29, SW PDO,
Manchester M15 5HW.
UEA branch
c/o N&N SF at the Solidarity Centre,
Norwich.

SOLIDARITY CENTRE:

Room 13, Muspole Workshops,
Muspole Street (off Duke St.)
Norwich
Tel. 01603 611072
Open: Saturdays 11am - 2pm
(at other times by arrangement).

BOYCOTT MAGNET !

After 3 years of pay freezes, 350 workers at Magnet's Darlington factory took strike action in September '96 against a below inflation pay offer to 60% of the workforce, with nothing for the remaining 40%.

Magnet's profits that year were £27 million, £11 million of which was earned at Darlington. After 12 days all those on strike were sacked and Magnet have since refused all attempts to negotiate

The vast majority of these workers have long-standing service, but were sacked by a boss who had only worked for Magnet for 42 days. Magnet has already spent millions covering the cost of this strike - a decent pay rise for their Darlington workforce would have cost, at most, a mere £40,000 a year.

Physical assaults

Earlier this year the pickets outside the Darlington factory were attacked by a van load of thugs. By strange coincidence the factory's CCTV was switched off at the time. Subsequently police have charged a number of those involved in this attack, amongst whom were a number of Magnet's new scab workforce.

International solidarity

Solidarity Federation branches up and down the country have been regularly picketing Magnet's outlets and have met great support from would-be customers who when informed of the disputes' facts have in the very large majority shown their support by taking their trade elsewhere. The Solidarity Federation is as ever conscious of "putting its money, where its mouth is" and doing what it can to support workers in struggle (unlike so much of the Left, from Labour to SWP), and is trying to increase pressure on Magnet by asking our fellow European revolutionary unions to put pressure on Magnet's subsidiaries on the continent. Early news is that the CNT (Spanish IWA section) has taken up our request for action.

How you can help...

If you would like to show your support, why not make a donation to the strikers' hardship fund, join us collecting for it, and/or give a helping hand on future pickets of the Norwich and other East Anglian showrooms? If so, get in touch with N&N SF at the Solidarity Centre (Sat. 11-2pm), leave your name and tel. no. on the answerphone or come to one of our monthly action / planning meetings.

Solidarity is not a luxury, but a necessity.

Announcing..... N&NSF Education Branch.

Members of the Norwich SF are numerically confident enough to set up an Education branch. Beyond the fashionable all talk, no action, radicalism and the no longer so fashionable student hyperactivism which burns out by graduation time, we intend to address issues of education in a direct, down to earth way. That would mean treating education both as a workplace, where independent workers' unions could make a difference, and as a powerhouse where ideologies are engineered and social policies implemented.

There is a general trend towards the privatisation of education and the commercialisation of knowledge. Discussion about the organisation of alternative methods of teaching, learning and running schools is

still more open and relevant than ever. However, problems such as the underfunding of primary schools, social inequalities in secondary education, teachers' and staff working conditions and salaries can definitely not be dealt with on the same level as, say, student grant cut-backs, hazardous university labs or the military and corporate control of educational projects. We hope to see our currently UEA based discussion group evolve into an effective network for workers in universities, primary and secondary schools, as well as students.

Students and workers in education can find us at our occasional stalls at the UEA and at our meetings every second Monday of the month, 7 pm at the Solidarity Centre. Your presence and ideas are most welcome.

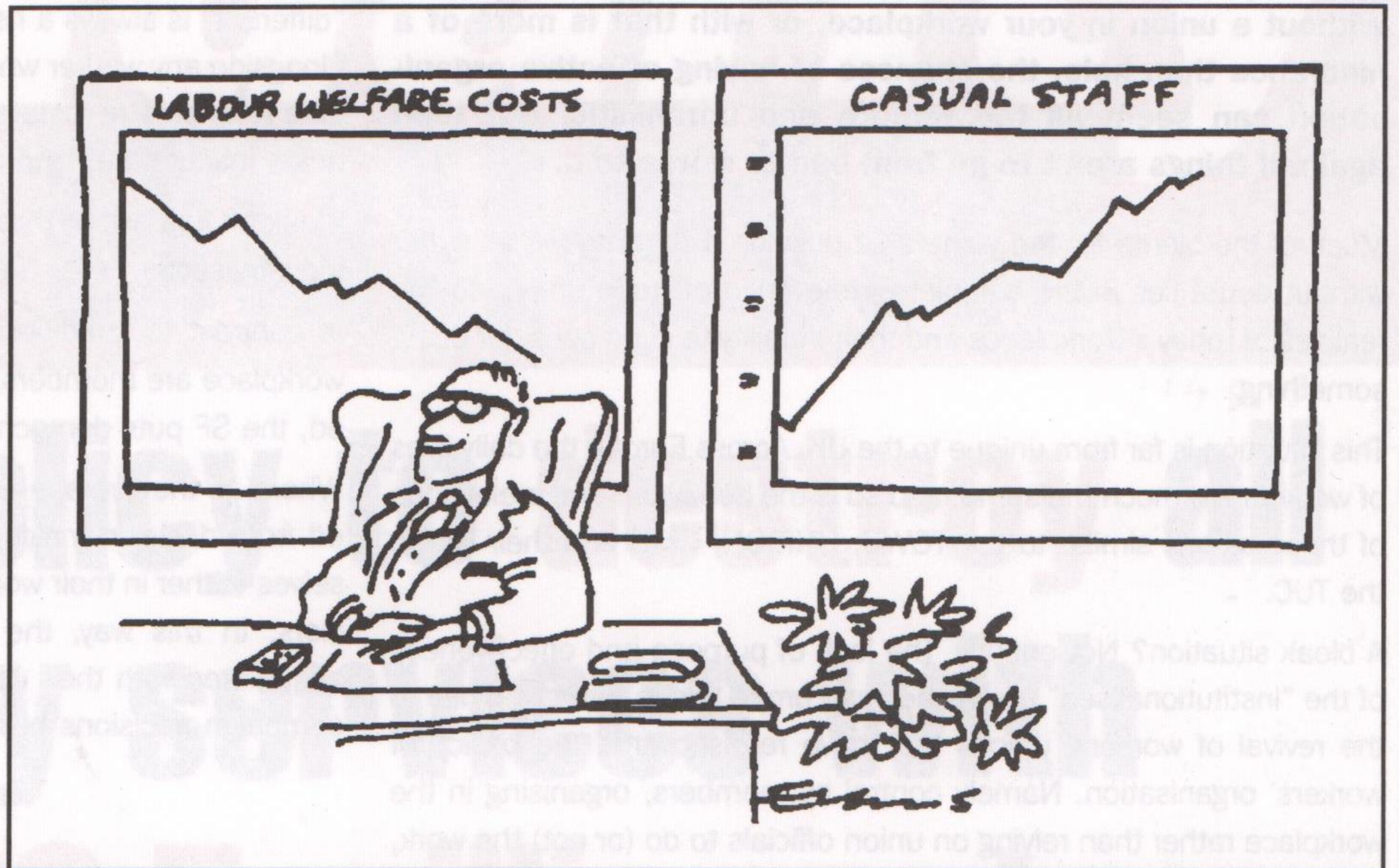
Temporary / Agency Workers

More and more people lack basic employment rights because of their status as 'self-employed' temporary workers. A large proportion of these are agency workers, hired by the day, not knowing from one week to the next how much they are going to earn. This trend is only part of a wider process within the New Order of the 'free market' - a trend towards the conversion of human beings with rights and needs for material security into profit-making machines. Employers want workers who can be hired, fired and mistreated at will and as casualisation increases, that is what they will get.

Most employers of temporary workers, particularly agencies, make their workers sign contracts stating that the worker is 'self-employed'. This because the self-employed lack protection under most health and safety legislation; the right to claim unfair dismissal in an industrial tribunal, security of employment after maternity leave, the right to redundancy pay, the right to unemployment benefit, statutory sick pay and industrial injury benefit. The 'self-employed' status of agency workers was successfully challenged by the Solidarity Federation in Norfolk, when we took on 'Staffing Solutions' employment agency and WH Knights and forced them to cease illegal charges.

However legal challenges have been less successful. The courts have generally defied common sense by treating agency workers in the same way as they would a self-employed business person. This reflects a wider tendency for judgements on employment law to reflect the interests of the employers rather than the notions of 'natural justice' that we might hold.

It might seem that the problem of the agency workers is an isolated one, an example of the 'employer-employee' relationship gone wrong. Nothing could be further from the truth. Any worker in the market system is simply a commodity to be bought and used by the employer to make a profit. The conflict between bosses and unions meant that workers were granted rights to sick pay, redundancy pay and so on. It was hoped



that these reforms would head off the conflict between the working class and employers. The situation is very different now. Employers never liked the idea of workers' rights. Rights and entitlements cost money. Once the post-war period of "full" employment came to an end in the late 1970's, job insecurity meant that workers would be reluctant to strike.

Employers and the state realised that they could now start stripping workers of their rights. This process has continued ever since. The casualisation of employment is only the latest stage in a process that started in Britain with the anti-union laws. The agency worker is the ideal worker in the employers' view. When Tony Blair talks of the need for 'flexible labour markets' it is a call for us all to have agency worker status.

If this process of casualisation is to be reversed, a good place to start is amongst casual workers themselves. A conventional union organisation drive is not the answer. An agency can get rid of union activists by simply not phoning them up to offer more work. It requires a more flexible approach. While all agencies are bad, some offer better pay and conditions than others.

A well organised group of workers employed by different agencies can gather information about pay and conditions in different agencies. Boycott campaigns can be organised against the worst agencies. As long as the

work of picketing and leafletting an agency is not done by those workers in the group actually employed by it the risk of victimisation is greatly reduced. The problem of agency workers often only working with each other for short periods of time before being sent off on different jobs, makes self-organisation difficult. Permanent staff who work alongside agency workers therefore need to help out with organising. They could distribute details of the agency workers' organisation to other agency workers and help them to get in contact with each other.

The key is that agency workers start getting together, whether they are employed in an office or veg processing plant. Norfolk & Norwich Solidarity Federation continues to consider this a priority - if you do too, then get in touch.

solidarity centre

bookshop

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- ❖ SYNDICALISM
- ❖ WORKING CLASS HISTORY...

**OPEN SATURDAYS
11 AM - 2 PM**

Public Meeting:

Turkish workers speak on social struggles and the current situation in Turkey.

Saturday, 6th December,

2pm at the Solidarity Centre.

Free admission - all welcome.

Revolutionary Unions Work !

Without a union in your workplace, or with that is more of a hindrance than help, the chances of having effective organisation can seem all too remote and unrealistic. But then again, if things aren't to go from bad to worse to....

Much of the blame for the vulnerable position that today we all suffer without doubt lies in the complete irrelevance of trade unions to the realities of today's workplaces and their inability to even consider doing something.

This situation is far from unique to the UK. Across Europe the daily lives of workers are much the same, and so is the behaviour and irrelevance of those unions similar to the TGWU, UNISON, GMB and their like in the TUC. -

A bleak situation? Not entirely. The lack of purpose and effectiveness of the "institutionalised" unions across Europe has in turn given rise to the revival of workers' unions that have re-discovered the basics of workers' organisation. Namely control by members, organising in the workplace rather than relying on union officials to do (or not) the work, on direct action not that of politicians to win back a greater share of the wealth we create, support for others in struggle (rather than allowing solidarity become a meaningless term) and finally, challenging the false-logic that capitalism and wage-slavery are inevitable, by promoting the goal of workers' and community control (not to be confused with the pseudo version of marxists who seek dictatorship not genuine democracy).

The growth of revolutionary workers' unions (sometimes called anarcho syndicalist to emphasise their independence of and hostility to political parties) in the last ten years, has taken place as much in the new "service" sectors as in traditional manufacturing and other sectors.

The return to effective forms of organisation and resistance has not occurred due to chance and cannot be dismissed as foreigners doing things differently, although the Press in the UK might have us think so! Nothing more mysterious than workers sick of being sponged off by big unions who never do anything meaningful in case it should risk bad press, being taken to court or being criticised by politicians in their hurry to protect the interests of the rich and powerful. Revolutionary unions are returning due initially to the work of very often just a few convinced individuals showing that there is an alternative, and one that works, and works much better. Invariably it begins with a few like-minded people in a particular town, industry or workplace discreetly laying the foundations of trust, unity and solid organisation.

Today in France, Italy, Sweden and Spain there are many hundreds, if not thousands, of workplace branches and regional organisations in the main federated to the International Workers Association, as is the Solidarity Federation. Here they face the same problems, the same cynicism, but also the same desire for real change as we do in the UK.

There are of course questions that any person with an ounce of caution would ask after agreeing with this analysis, before deciding to put their ideas into action and play a part in promoting the ideas and organisation of revolutionary unions.

Will joining the Solidarity Federation get me the sack?

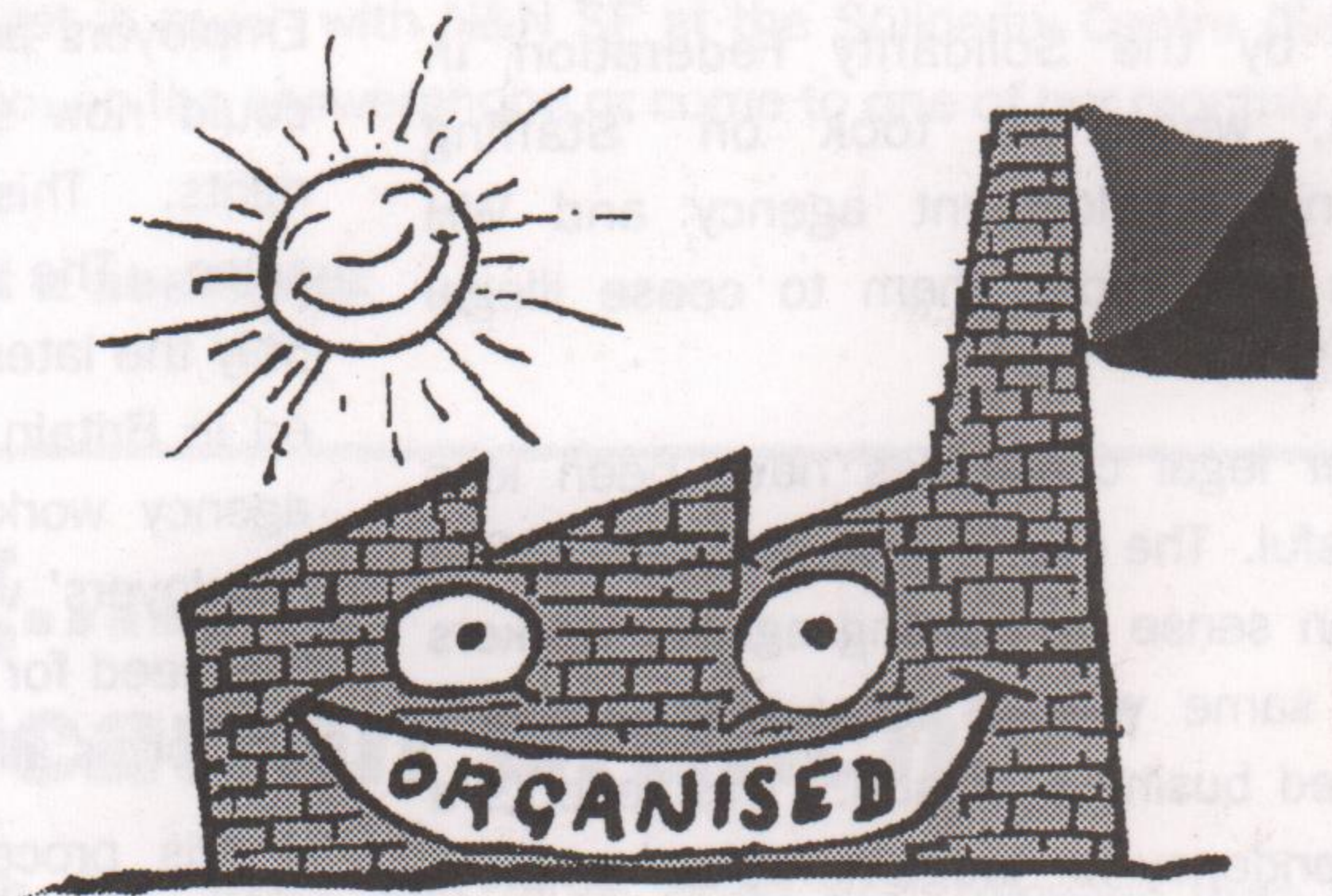
The SF operates with discretion and anonymity in any workplace whilst its members are few in numbers and at the early stages of promoting the ideas of worker-controlled organisation and effective action. The SF does not operate pointless paper sales that are "all mouth, no trousers". Obviously the time for a visible presence comes when sufficient preparation is achieved by building trust and cooperation amongst fellow workers. Getting the sack for just "thinking", or being

"different" is always a risk, but the SF does not just stand behind, but alongside any worker who is victimised and will use every means available to ensure re-instatement. Solidarity, rather than the more typical union inaction has and does get results.

Wouldn't just two or three people in a workplace or locally in the same industry/sector never have any influence or get things off the ground?

In contrast to "traditional" union structures where the majority in a workplace are members, a few make decisions and none are consulted, the SF puts democracy and effective action as its priorities.

Where as the average union keeps members uninformed and excluded from decision-making, the SF functions with the members themselves (either in their workplace or locality-based branch) as the organisers. In this way, the three, four or more people who are best acquainted with their concerns make their own tactical, strategy and campaign decisions based on what is most appropriate and likely to



get quick results. Of course, the resources, experience and support of the wider SF membership and branches is there to be drawn upon.

Most importantly the SF branch, whilst making its own decisions, always seeks to involve all other workers in addressing the problems that all face, and jointly deciding on courses of action through holding mass meetings / assemblies. In this way the SF not just promotes real democracy based on the free and equal involvement of all workers, but encourages the decision-making on demands and actions to draw on the widest range of experience, which goes to build crucial unity and solidarity.

In this way a small SF branch can create and have influence far beyond its relatively small numbers; the strength of the workforce being far greater as a collective than as isolated, passive individuals.

(For a fuller explanation of the methods and principles of revolutionary unions and the Solidarity Federation we recommended reading: An outline of our ideas on organisation & what we are fighting for today. [otherwise known as the workplace platform].