

Solidarity Bulletin

No. 4 August/September '94

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FREE

NO UNION IN YOUR WORKPLACE? OR AS GOOD AS?

Low pay? Health and safety a joke? At work we face, if not all, then many of these problems, day-in, day-out. Not only is work tedious and often meaningless, but managements power games, lack of job security, long and anti-social hours, stress, no childcare facilities - all presented to us as inevitable, are only so as long as we don't do anything.

The greater part of most peoples lives are spent at work; it's our labour that creates the wealth and profits enjoyed solely by bosses and shareholders - we call this wage slavery. We have the option of accepting this situation, or organising and taking action.

Traditionally one way of taking action has been to join one of the large TUC unions (TGWU, GMB, USDAW etc...). But what would this mean? On the plus side we would get union credit cards (assuming we are credit worthy), holiday discounts and a glossy magazine. On the down side we get a union official you may see every other blue moon, who would tell us what to do, compromise with management on our behalf, and of course if we decide to take action (from striking to asking other workers for support), the union would drop us immediately, saying their funds will be sequestrated, and of course union funds are more important than the membership and their jobs.

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TALKING ANARCHY WITH CHUMBA- WAMBA

Chumbawamba have been together as a band for 10 years or so, releasing 6 albums and numerous E.P's and singles. Always hard-hitting but never obvious, their music has always been more accessible and relevant than many bands from the anarcho-punk scene which was their original audience - it's also more genuine than many of the current crop of political bands.

Their stage show which mixes theatrics, costume changes, and humour with politics, never fails to entertain. A recent signing to One Little Indian records gave their recent album "Anarchy" more publicity than any previous releases. Ironically many record shops refused to stock it or wouldn't display the cover which showed a baby being born.

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Inside:

- * SOLIDARITY FEDERATION FORMED - we're in it!
- * HOW TO SPOT A BUREAUCRAT - its in the smile!
- * IT'S CRIMINAL, IT'S NOT JUSTICE - but what can we do?

.....plus news, reviews, events, letters and more!

the bulletin of Norwich Solidarity Centre

NORWICH

Solidarity Centre

Room 13, Muspole Workshops, Muspole Street, (off Duke Street), Norwich.

Postal address: PO Box 73, Norwich. NR3 1QD.

EDITORIAL

All too often politics is about moaning. "Stuff this... Stuff that... The Tories this... John Major that..." and so on ad infinitum. Of course here at the Solidarity Centre we're not averse to slagging off those that deserve it, but where does it get us? It's too convenient, a safety valve for people's dissent, rather than a way to change anything.

We think that if you believe in something it's important to be positive about it. Which is why you won't find endless rants about the Tories/Labour/whoever in this bulletin. We want to use the Solidarity Bulletin to show what we're doing, both as a local centre and as a part of the newly formed Solidarity Federation (see article in this issue).

We want to show that there's something going on that is worth being involved in. If you feel like moaning about the way society is run than that's fine but it won't worry the powers that be unless you get involved with other like-minded people. Anything is possible - but we need to get off the fence first.

If you like what you read in here and even just partly agree, then get in touch. After all what's even worse than the government shitting on us from a great height? Answer: Letting them get away with it.

SUMMER OPENING: To give ourselves a well-deserved break, or even a holiday, we'll be closing the centre over **August**, so there won't be anyone at the centre during our usual evening and Saturday times. If anyone does need to use the centre in this period you can still get in touch to arrange something. Have a good summer!

HEALTH & SAFETY UPDATE

The imminent changes to Health and Safety law detailed in the last issue of the bulletin, appear to have been given the thumbs down by everyone except the government itself. The Health and Safety Commission reported back in May, with the conclusion that no wide reaching changes are needed.

Nonetheless, the government could still forge ahead with it's original if dogma and ideology prevail, as has happened in the past.

The fund cutting suffered by the already largely ineffective Health and Safety Executive, is likely to continue in coming years. This will effectively mean the removal of health and safety standards by the back door - the laws just won't be enforced.

We must prepare ourselves for just this. Safe and healthy working conditions can really no longer be relied on to come from above, but will depend more than ever on strong workplace organisation and direct action. We will be keeping careful watch on health and safety issues, the centre receives the Hazards journal (health and safety issues) available for reference.

WE'RE APPEALING!

Well, some may disagree, but in order to make ourselves even more attractive we're launching an appeal for funds to buy a computer - for use in producing propaganda and in organising our work.

Having our own computer, rather than having to use those of other groups or individuals (thanks to those who have helped in the past) will mean we can produce bulletins etc... more efficiently and professionally. The cheapest option will cost at least several hundred pounds, and we want to buy the best set-up we can afford.

If anyone can afford to donate to our computer appeal please do help out. Cheques payable to "The Solidarity Centre" and marked "computer appeal" on the back. Also if anyone has a suitable (IBM compatible) system they can sell (or even donate!) please get in touch.

OPENING TIMES:

- 2 First four Tuesdays of the month 7pm - 9pm.
First Saturday of the month 12 noon - 4pm.

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An interviewer from the Solidarity Bulletin caught up with Chumbawamba at their recent Norwich gig, when we discussed anarchy, anarchism, anti-fascism and the music business. Guitarist/singer Boffo answered the questions.

SB: The recent "anarchy" album cover seemed to be controversial not only in terms of censorship by record shops but also from the reaction of the general public - people either seemed to love it or hate it. Do you think it's a bit sad that a picture of a child being born, something which is everyone's first experience of life, should get such a reaction?

Boffo: Yeah I think it's sad, but not unexpected. It's more interesting that it's thrown up such a reaction than whether it's sold records or not. It's fascinating really. We've lost loads of advertising from it and had shops refuse to stock it or not put the cover on display.

SB: It's interesting that the "Anarchy" posters got more reaction (in terms of being ripped down etc..) than anti-fascist posters that went up at the same time. It's almost as if the music press and liberal media have made anti-fascism such a "fashionable" issue that it's now less controversial than childbirth.

Boffo: I think culturally there's lots of reasons that politics has become so fashionable and something that record companies want to try and sell.

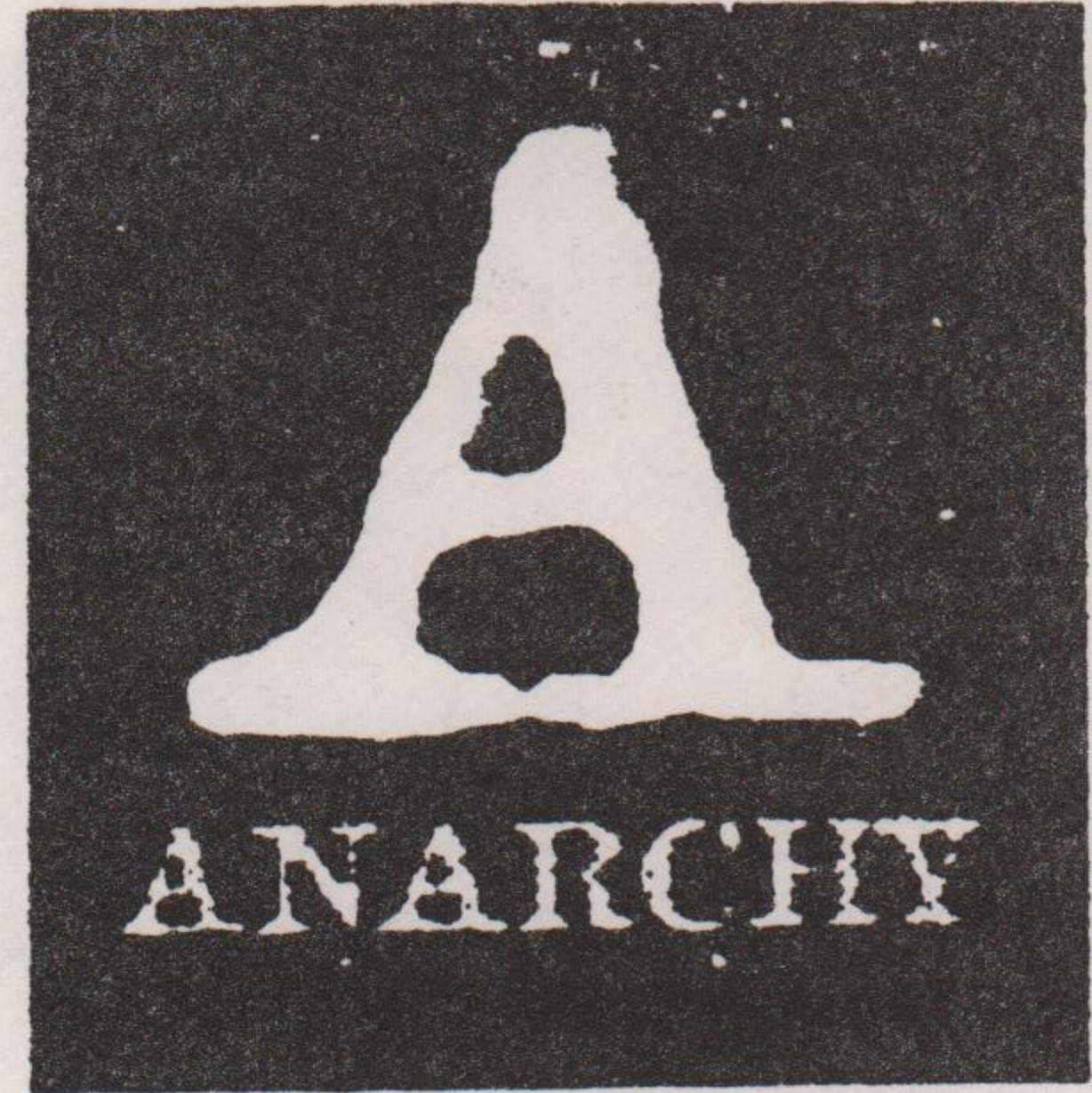
One is as a reaction to the 80's self-obsessed cultural thing. There was bound to be a backlash to that and to me what happened musically was that things. There was dance music, grunge took off, and also the whole Levellers/travellers lifestyle thing. It took the music press by surprise. It missed a lot of stuff, and so did the record companies. A lot of this that had some sort of politics to it, even crap liberal or lifestyle politics, was missed, and they shat their pants that Nirvana, the Levellers etc... had sold millions of records without the music press.

They all started falling over themselves, because it's such a large audience, everybody wanted a Credit to the Nation, Senses or Back to the Planet because they'd all missed the Levellers. So suddenly it became hip, and anti-fascism is part of that.

SB: Moving onto anarchism. Some of the comments made regarding "Anarchy" and your views on what it means seem to support a more individualistic view of anarchism as opposed to collective class-based organisation. Is this how you see anarchism working, are you individualists or collectivists or don't you make such distinctions?

Boffo: Depends what you mean by individualist...

SB: Well I'm just going from a quote in Melody Maker where one of you was quoted as saying anarchy is "the freedom to be spontaneous" which is fair enough but not the first thing I'd say if asked to define anarchy...



Boffo: The problem with music papers is that you can give them a huge detailed explanation of something and they just pick out the juicy quotes.

The good thing about calling this record "Anarchy" is that every single interview we've done... they all go "OK what is anarchism?" So it's got to a point where you're trying to work out how far you can explain such a big idea in a way that's understandable, and it's the same with records and lyrics. So for me I just think that if we can get the idea across that we're not into authority, that's the simplest thing. Everything after that, to do with organising, and to do with anarchism as a workable alternative is surplus because people usually totally ignore it. But we are into anarchism, not just individualist politics.

I haven't asked you what people think of the fact that we've called a record "Anarchy". I know that a lot of people will think it's just a gimmick or a catchy title, that it's nothing to do with the serious business of revolution, of overthrowing the state

SB: Well, people are interested in the word "Anarchy" anyway, and a lot of people will be more interested now they've seen the record and the poster. It's got people talking about it. I can see that some people could say a picture of a baby being born has nothing to do with anarchism but...

Boffo: I think it has...it does tie in with the word anarchy.

SB: How's that?

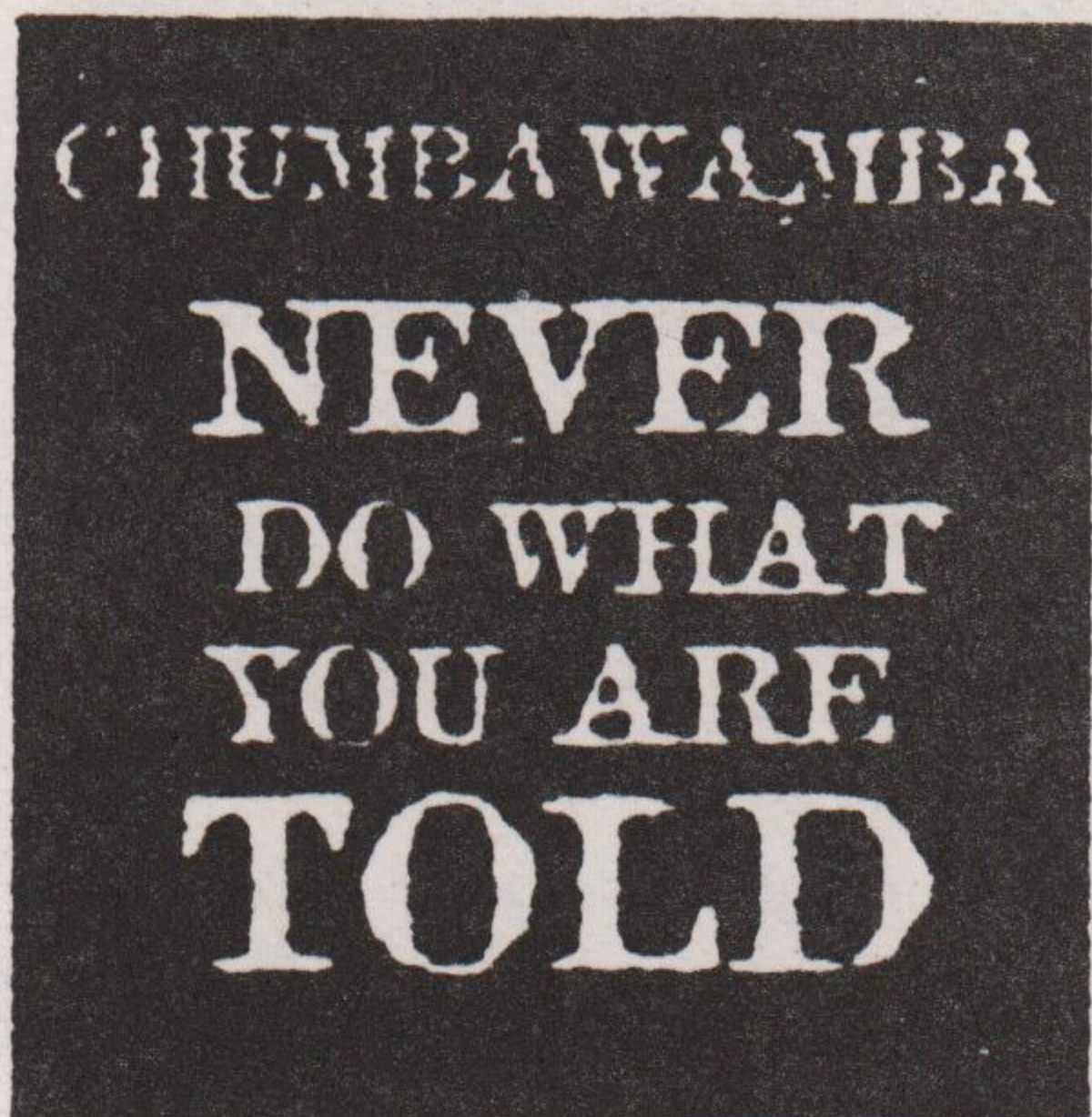
Boffo: We were sitting down, before we found the photograph, we were trying to come up with an idea. The

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idea was we wanted something which showed a balance between what people think of as being a mess, an ugly chaotic mess, which is what people associate with the word "anarchy", and something that was a fantastic, beautiful, pure thing, and to me that is part of what anarchy means.

It came from the idea that when you fall in love with someone your body reacts in a total gut way and you can't control it and it's really chaotic. Yet at the same time it's a fantastic thing, it's a beautiful thing and it's really totally ordered and a good thing. We wanted something with a balance between the two things, so we thought of a baby.

I feel totally positive about anarchism because I think it's such a powerful thing. I feel it's either inevitable or everything goes, so I tend to believe it's inevitable.



Thanks to Boffo and Chumbawamba for the interview and for a good night out when they played at UEA. If you've not heard anarchy yet go and buy a copy, it's worth it just to be able to go into a shop and say "I'd like anarchy please!"

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The last decade and beyond are littered with union martyrs - trade unions letting disputes sink, time after time. The only victories workers have had, have been fought in opposition to union leadership attempts at control, and with disregard for laws designed to keep us in our place, more often by fear of consequences than by real threats (see "Striking: Nothing to Fear" in SB # 3).

WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE?

It's obvious really, we organise ourselves, linking up with other workers, both locally and across our industries, to create our own organisation, controlled by us and for us. This is exactly what we're doing in the Solidarity Federation.

Of course it's much easier to keep your head down and not complain... and see conditions worsen for everyone, the bosses are organised, determined and ruthless - and they act together as a class. Things won't get better until we do the same.



NORWICH SOLIDARITY CENTRE

Whilst we don't have millions in funds, we do have what trade union leaders don't. Their officials have not done a full days work in years and no longer experience or understand our daily lives. We have the benefits of experience across numerous industries and a membership that puts it's time and energy to good use.

Membership of the centre brings the benefit of overcoming isolation, through working with others we maximise our potential for taking diverse forms of action, for solidarity and for making the most of our resources. We are concerned with making concrete improvements in our workplaces and communities, encouraging others to think and act, overcoming the weakness of working in non-organised or poorly organised workplaces.

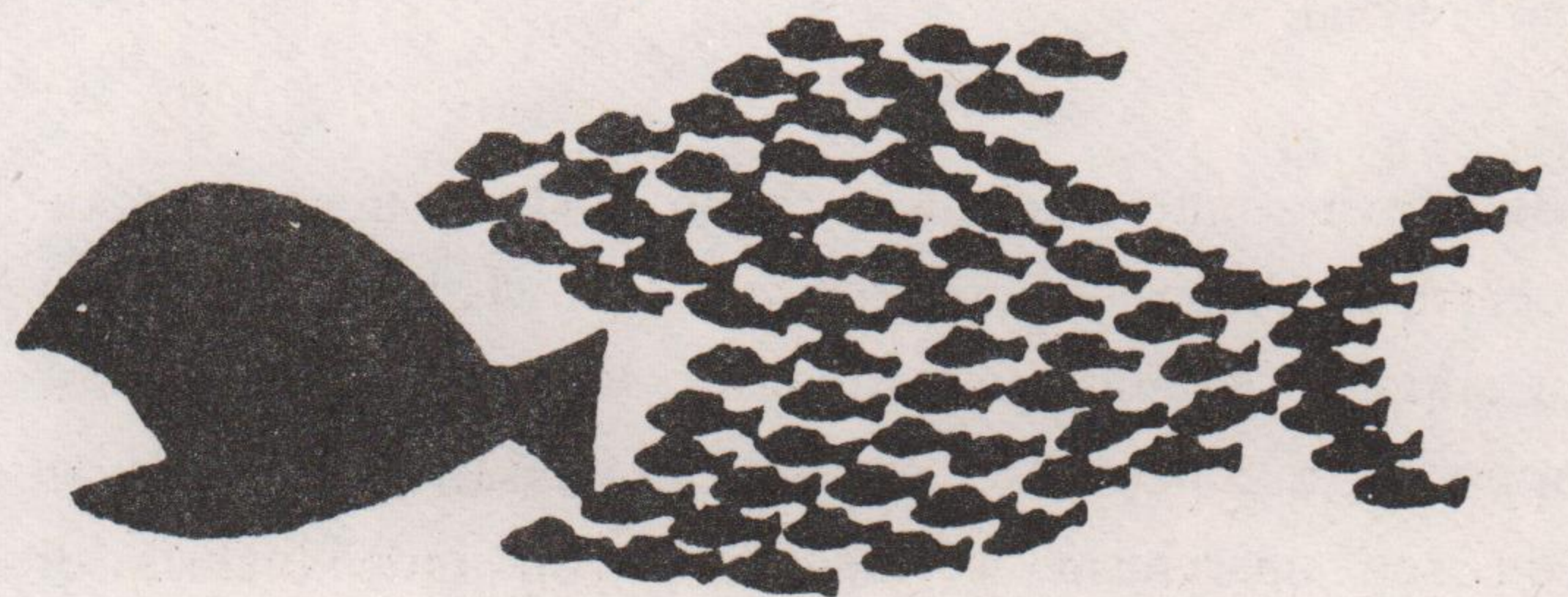
We will not see fellow workers picked up then dropped in the way that the trade unions, the Labour Party and the far-left political parties constantly do.

If you too are tired of parasitic bosses bleeding us dry, and recognise that us who are at the sharp end are the ones who must organise for change, then join us at Norwich Solidarity Centre/Solidarity Federation.

A WORKING CLASS ORGANISATION

The Solidarity Federation is above all a working class organisation. Our politics, structure and outlook are aimed specifically at working class people. Our immediate and long-term aims have no other purpose other than to be of benefit to our class.

We firmly believe that society is divided into classes, the ruling class recognise this and at the same time try to



encourage the myth of a classless society. But we can't fight something by pretending it doesn't exist, even if we don't like it much. We need to organise as a class to have any chance of abolishing class society in the long term.

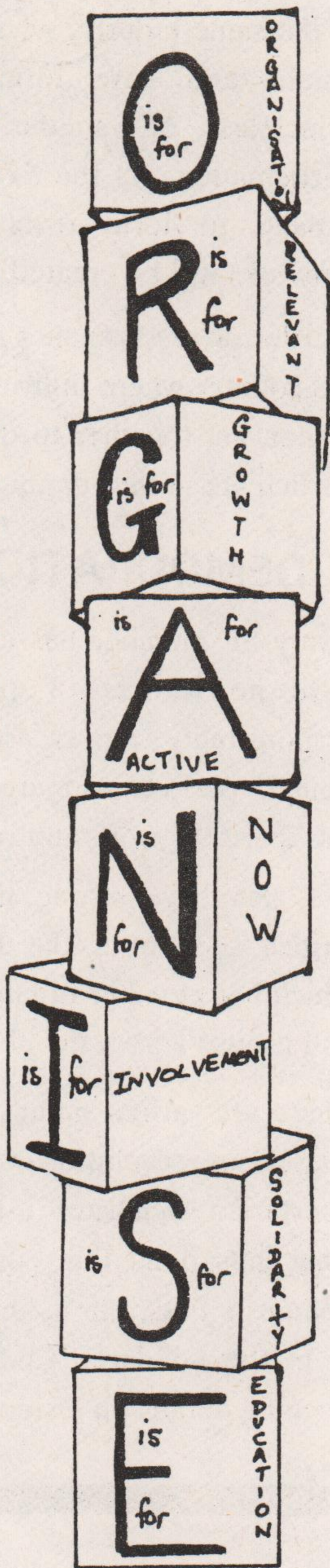
We reject elitism, we don't see ourselves as "leaders", real or imagined, of our class, nor do we think we have all the answers. We believe in fighting for immediate and long term improvements at all levels of our lives and environment. We are open to all, whether waged or unwaged, and will always be independent of all political parties and the TUC. This way of organising is called anarcho-syndicalism.

We live in a world with enough resources, both natural and manufactured, to provide for everyone well-being. That these resources are not being used to this end is down to the fact that the vast majority of people have virtually no control, either physical or political, over them.

A FREE SOCIETY

We believe a free society must entail the common ownership of the means of production and distribution, organised directly by workplace organisations and local/district committees. The mass assembly should be the governing body with each and every area. We believe all skills, manual and intellectual, all technology, new and old, should benefit everyone. We are completely opposed to capitalism - a minority living off the majority - and to state control, both of which deny our right to control our own lives. Every person that joins and gets involved brings the goal of a free society closer.

**DOLE OR
WAGE-
SLAVERY?**



WE'RE EXPANDING!

When we say that we're a growing organisation we're not necessarily referring to the waistline of certain Solidarity Federation members. But although our local membership has increased steadily since we opened in May 92, new members, new activists and an increased regular income is needed if we're to keep up the momentum.

We currently have the opportunity to expand the centre, giving ourselves much needed extra space. We have one minor problem - we can't afford it. Centre members pay a regular monthly sub, which varies according to income and other commitments, some pay £2 a month, some £15. This regular income pays the rent and bills of the the centre, pays for this bulletin and our other activities, as well as paying our contribution to the Solidarity Federation nationally.

None of us at the Centre gets any money from centre funds, all money is spent on our activities. We have no bureaucrats, full-timers or leaders. Solidarity Federation officers (eg treasurer) are fully accountable to the rest of the organisation. In short we're probably the most democratic and accountable organisation anywhere. A handful of new members would mean our plans to expand could go ahead. If you're interested please get in touch with our secretary, address on the inside front cover. Cheers.

LETTER: SOMEONE LIKES US!

Dear Solidarity Bulletin,

I hadn't seen your bulletin until issue three appeared at work, it looked more interesting than most papers we get here so I gave it a read. I just wanted to let you know that I found it more relevant and useful than any lefty papers I've seen before. You don't pretend to have all the answers but you're realistic about what needs to be done. The information on Health and Safety is pretty frightening, but the unions seem to be turning a blind eye to it, just as they do with most things these days.

Anyway, please put me on your mailing list for future issues, good luck.

Yours,

G.W, Norwich.

SB: Thanks for your letter G.W. we'll send you future bulletins, check out the Health and Safety update in this issue.

SOLIDARITY FEDERATION FORMED

The Solidarity Centre in Norwich, we're proud to say, is one of a number of groups and organisations who've got together to form a new national organisation, the Solidarity Federation.

We want to put some basic commonsense ideas back into fashion - ideas like solidarity between workers, so that we can take on the bosses with confidence rather than roll over and take another pay-freeze or even cut. Or ideas like pride in our communities, so that we can get together and resist attacks on us, whether it be government attacks like the poll-tax or anti-social elements like the extreme right British National Party (BNP) causing trouble.

The Solidarity Federation is a truly revolutionary organisation. We don't believe it's enough just to look at economic factors, like a trade union does (sometimes). Sure we'll fight for a pay-rise, but we also know what we want in the long run - total workers control, workplaces run by the workers not the bosses, for need not profit.

REVOLUTION

We believe, in common with many "left" groups, that a revolutionary change in society is necessary. We have a vision of the sort of society we would like to see, one based on freedom, equality, mutual aid and real mass participation, free of bosses and bureaucrats. But unlike many on the "left" we believe that any grand vision of future society is worth nothing unless it is rooted in peoples day to day lives and experiences now - and is actually useful now.

You can have brilliant ideas about what a future socialist society may be like, but unless we're able to achieve gains in the here and now, by winning a dispute at work, getting a pay rise, chasing the bailiffs of your estate, or whatever, then it's nothing more than a nice idea.

WHO ARE WE?

The Solidarity Federation (SF) is currently made up of three industrial networks, (the Transport Workers Network, the Public Service Workers Network and the Education Workers Network) and of local branches (or locals) across

the country. The networks are groups of militants working in the same industry who are fed up with the existing trade unions and have formed organisations based on the principles of solidarity, direct action and equal participation. As the SF grows we hope the networks will expand to form revolutionary unions, and that other networks will be created.

Our locals are branches of the SF in towns and cities across the country where individual members, whether in networks or not, get together to discuss local issues, plan action and participate in the running of the SF nationally.

DEMOCRATIC

Every SF member has an equal say in decisions made, we have no leaders or paid full-timers. Any positions of responsibility e.g. treasurer, secretary are taken on for limited periods and are rotated around the organisations the share the work and responsibility.

We also have strong international links. The SF is the British section of the International Workers Association which has member organisation in most European countries and groups across the globe from Australia to the USA.

There are various names people use to describe our ideas - anarchism, revolutionary syndicalism, anarcho-syndicalism, libertarian socialism - it doesn't matter what you call us, it's what gets done that counts. If you like the sound of the Solidarity Federation, and want to find out more, either call in to the Solidarity Centre, or drop us a line (address & opening details on inside front cover).

CONTACTS:

Transport Workers Network, P.O.Box 73, Norwich. NR3 1QD.

Public Service Workers Network, PO Box 1681, London. N8 7LE.

Education Workers Network, P.O. Box 29, South West PDO, Manchester. M15 5HW.

Solidarity Federation, PO Box 384, Preston, Lancs. PR1 5PQ.

Norwich Anti-Fascist Action, P.O. Box 73, Norwich. NR3 1QD.



HOW TO SPOT A BUREAUCRAT

This item is (almost) verbatim from the Public Service Workers' Network bulletin No.4 June-July 1994.

If you work anywhere in a public service, sooner or later you are going to come into contact with a bureaucrat. They aren't just people who work in an office. They have power in a way that normal office workers or even operational managers rarely have. They make "policy" which in these days is usually a euphemism for cuts.

But you might not recognize them for what they are, because they are doing their best to make sure you don't (otherwise you might suss what they're really up to!). "Just call me Ian. We're all on first name terms here...just one big happy family." Don't believe it. Bureaucrats perform the same role in public services as Management does in private industry. Their motivation is a bit different but not much. Where a manager in Foolem & Fleecem Plc is after bigger profits and a bigger salary, public service bureaucrats are after a better paid job somewhere else.

How To Spot A Bureaucrat.

* They are always on managerial grades, but not all managers are bureaucrats.

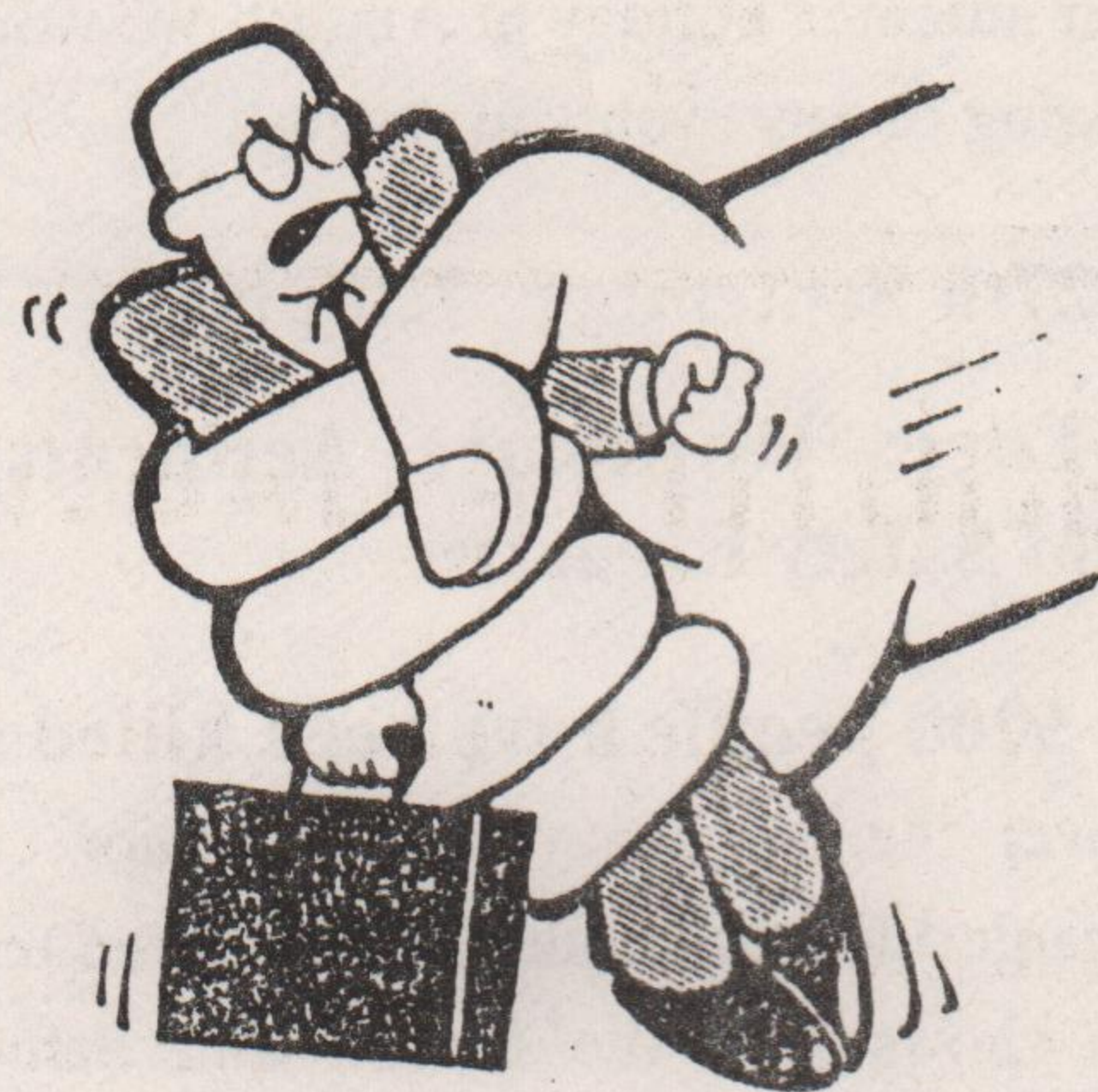
* They don't tend to stay around for more than a few years in any one post. Too long in one job is bad for the CV, and would ruin your chances of being taken seriously for the Directorship in the neighbouring authority... "They are passionate about reorganizing things. This is because it always looks good on a CV (and creates "work" for bureaucrats!). Have you seen how many high-power jobs are asking for people who can be "positive responding to change"? Never mind the needless disruption to services and workers' pay and conditions.

* They contribute nothing at all to the service. If anything they get in the way. Services are provided by workers, NOT bureaucrats.

* They are increasingly difficult to tell apart from the private sector managers who are bringing their expertise at union-busting and mass redundancies into the NHS and local government.

What Can You Do About Them?

Recognizing they're there is the start. Then you won't fall for any of this "We're all friends" bull. Remember they're building their career on your work (or even your unemployment!), show them the contempt such parasites deserve. And it follows that anything you can do to disrupt their career progression is hitting them where it hurts most. So resistance to their pointless reorganisations and new procedures is a good place to start. You won't get a directorship if all you've got on your CV is "Tried to carry out a major reorganization but failed due to concerted workers' resistance." - Organise to stop bureaucratic "re-organisation" otherwise you might be re-organised on to the dole!



IT'S JUSTICE BILL, BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT!

Campaigning to stop the Criminal Justice Bill go through Parliament, as with almost any legislation, is most likely to be a hiding to nothing - why should a politician vote the way we want, he's been voted in, he "represents" you already. This isn't an argument for inactivity - just the opposite. Experience shows that legislation stands and falls on what happens after it becomes law. Look to the poll tax, despite warnings from some of their own ministers and massive campaigns the government pressed on with it - and were forced to go back on it.

Of course the CJB supposedly targets groups we don't like anyway - travellers, squatters, ravers, hunt saboteurs... It reads like a list of Tory party prejudices. But the CJB is much broader than that - giving the police and judicial system greatly increased powers in many areas (abolition of the right to silence, introduction of non-bail detention for 10-13 year olds). So if we look at it piecemeal we're missing half the point, which is that breaking a law on a massive scale is the only way to get rid of it. Meanwhile as politicians of all persuasions wring their hands over rising crime figures (it's a good campaigning issue), the sick society which creates so-called criminals (and politicians) goes on. It's this that needs changing - don't keep it to yourself!

NORWICH

Solidarity Centre

VIDEO SHOWINGS AT THE CENTRE

Due to our summer holiday in August, we won't be having a video showing or any events in August.

Tuesday 27th September 7.30pm

Cutting Edge: Workplace Accidents and the Health and Safety Executive.

Although 5000 people have been killed in workplace accidents over the last ten years, no senior employee has ever been gaoled for culpability. Using three test cases, this programme shows how the Health and Safety Executive have failed to discover crucial information about companies' safety records and have no interest in considering the crime of manslaughter which at least one QC maintains there is sufficient to support.

Tuesday 25th October 7.30pm

The Free Women of Spain: Mujeres Libres.

Unlike in many so-called revolutionary situations, the women of Spain played a significant and major role in the Spanish Revolution of 1936/37. Their own organisation, Mujeres Libres, consistently argued the necessity to fight for the freedom of women from capitalist and male oppression, not as a side issue but as an essential part of revolution. Mujeres Libres groups are still active throughout Spain today, giving inspiration to women in struggle everywhere.

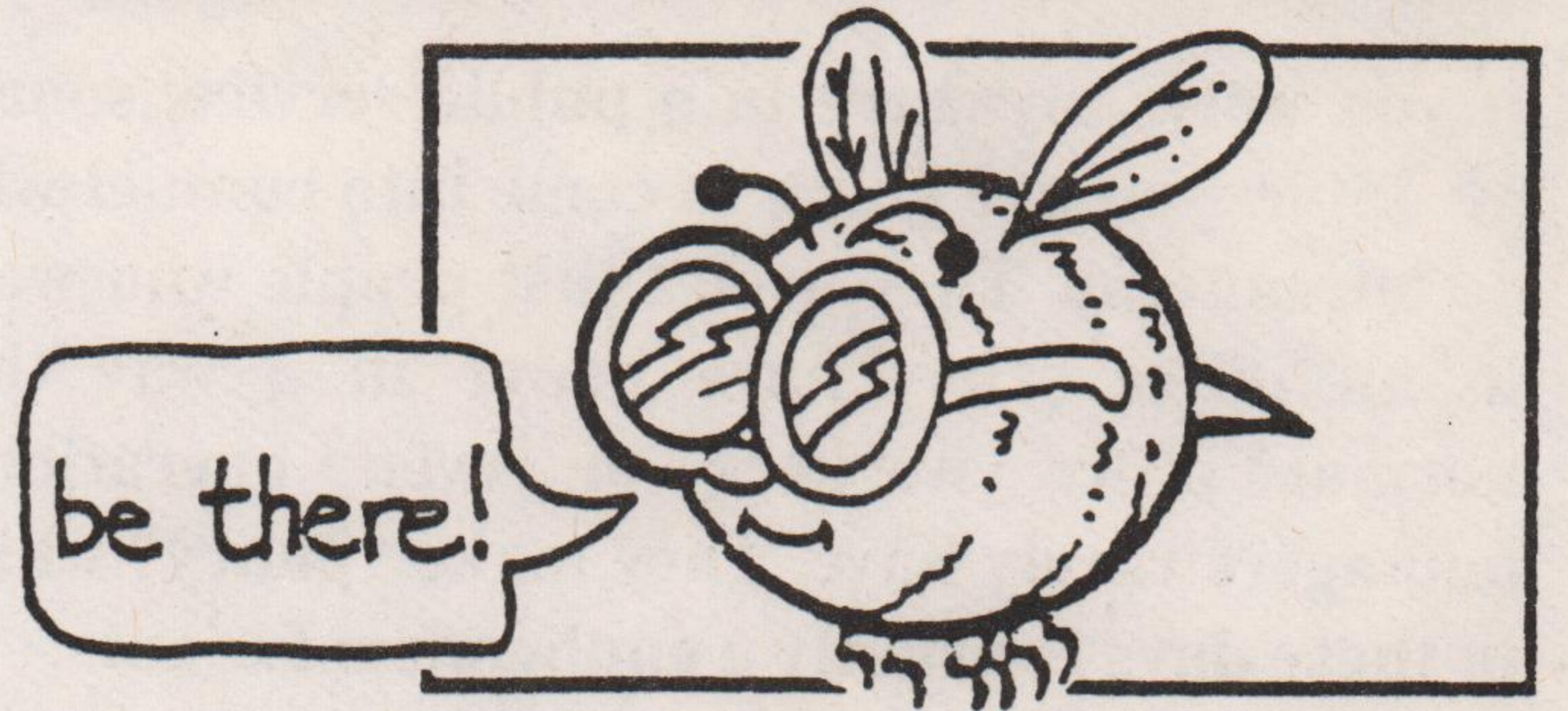
Tuesday 22nd November 7.30pm

Open Space: Fighting Talk.

Hosted by Norwich Anti-Fascist Action.

When the BBC gave Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) the opportunity to make their own programme for the Open Space slot on BBC2 they ended up with one of the best, most down-to-earth analyses of fascism and how to

fight it, that you could hope for. Aside from the exciting footage of street-level anti-fascism (!), this programme quite simply shows why AFA have had such an impact on fascists over the years. After the programme there will be a discussion on the work of AFA, with members of the Norwich branch present.



REVIEW: BAD ATTITUDE

Is a bi-monthly (ish) Radical Women's Newspaper, produced by a collective of women (self-styled "Baddies") based at the 121 Bookshop in Brixton. This is a brilliant publication, restoring my faith that there are still women out there interested and active in radical politics on a global scale.

It contains news, information on the cancer of world capitalism and the ways in which women organise to fightback. The latest issue contains articles on Zapatistas, the Criminal Justice Bill, single mothers (bogey women) and the child support act, eco-feminism and the anti-VAT on fuel campaign. There's fun too, in the form of music reviews, letters, sex fiction, exhibitions and national listings.

All in all it has to be the best and most exciting women's newspaper I've seen recently, better still, the paper is also available on cassette for women with impaired sight. The printed version will shortly be available from Norwich Solidarity Centre, at £1 a copy it's cracking good read. It's cool to have a bad attitude! Give it a go sisters!

If you can take further copies of this bulletin to distribute to friends, or at work etc... please fill in the form below and return to PO Box 73, Norwich NR3 1QD

Please send another _____ copies each issue.

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