

FIGHT TO WIN

It's time the victims of capital stop playing
by the rules imposed by capital.



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**THE MEEK SHALL
INHERIT DIDDLEY-SQUAT**

ANTICAPITAL / ANTIPOVERTY

French Unemployed Organise and Fight!

Three Strikes and You're Out!

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This pamphlet was created to aid poverty organisers by demonstrating effective techniques and campaigns that have been used throughout the world, as well as to enrich the dialogue surrounding the use of direct action and more militant tactics. We hope you will find it useful.

Thanks to OCAP for use of the articles written by John Clarke and for doing such great work - you provide inspiration to us all, thanks to John Clarke for writing such important documents, thanks to the group that put out *Organise!* for making such a great magazine - and for focussing on the struggles of the unemployed.

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workers to a 60 hour week and, in the name of workplace "democracy," every unionized workplace in Ontario will now have to post information on decertification. If that doesn't convince the labour movement that the time has come to settle accounts with the Tories then what will?

There's a lesson here that takes us beyond the issue of organizing the poor or the fight against one government. We need to understand that Capital is no longer interested in compromises and concessions. The political regimes it sends against us are out to take away everything. The old "respectable" methods of struggle are getting us nowhere. The strength that OCAP has developed lies in its ability to break out of the normal patterns of "consultation" that have been put in place to contain the anger of those we represent. **We are hated by those in power and their gatekeepers precisely because we don't play by the rules they set up.**

In the post-war years unions and social organizations could make measured progress within the framework of compromise that had been erected. The deal has now been called off by the other side and we must all look to utilize tactics that disrupt and create crisis for governments, state authorities and corporate structures. These may be localized, small scale challenges or they may be massive, national actions. The "On to Ottawa Trek" of 1935 would be of this kind as would the creation of a vast barrier of cars to block access to Ford in Windsor by United Auto Workers members in 1945.

We are living in a period where we must rethink the whole nature of political and social mobilization. There was a time when the mere fact that many people came out and expressed dissatisfaction would often convince political decision-makers to grant concessions. Increasingly, we live under conditions where they have to feel that their ability to govern is in question before they will relent.

Mike Harris believes in the class struggle, Jean Chretien has embraced it and it's beyond a doubt that the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank think of little else. It's time we took up the fight on our side and started playing by their uncompromising rules. Our greatest hope is that OCAP's work points to and moves things in that direction.

John Clarke has been an organizer with OCAP since 1990. This article appeared in Briarpatch Magazine, April 2001. It has been reprinted here with permission from OCAP.



ANTI-CAPITAL/ANTI-POVERTY JOHN CLARKE

The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty is not a political party. We welcome people with a wide range of political and religious views if they want to resist the war on the poor. Still, we insist on being known as an anti-capitalist organization. When we go up against a landlord or welfare office, when we challenge unjust governments, we keep it firmly in mind that these individuals and institutions didn't come from nowhere. They are the products of a whole system that is unjust and that creates the poverty and misery we fight back against every day.

Anti-capitalism for OCAP isn't some 'radical' idea to tack onto our work. It is for the most practical reasons that we take this stand.

1. The Profit System is the Root of the Problem.

Capitalist society is organized around the making of profits. Masses of people work for corporations who pay them in wages only a portion of the value that they create through their labour. The rest is pocketed in the form of profits. Not only does this mean exploitation in the workplace but also that the drive for profits shapes every aspect of society. What is produced and who

can consume it has nothing to do with the real needs of people but only the enrichment of a few. The laws that govern and the way they are enforced are shaped by profits. If there's money in building condos instead of affordable housing, the homeless will stay on the streets, laws will be passed to arrest them and the most brutal thugs they can find will be given guns and badges to 'serve and protect' the wealthy. If it's profitable to clear-cut forests or pollute rivers and streams, then laws to protect the environment will not get passed or will be weakly enforced. In ten thousand ways, each and every day, the needs of people are trampled into the ground so that more profits can be piled up.

The vast wealth of the handful of families who really control everything in this society was built up over generations and was created out of our blood and sweat and that of those who came before us. Early capitalist society in Europe was set up by driving poor peasants off their land and passing laws that made it a hanging offence to be unemployed. The forerunners of today's corporations amassed their wealth through the African slave trade. They seized other countries as colonies and bled them dry. They forced people in India to grow opium

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for export to China and, when the Chinese banned the import of this drug, sent warships to bombard their cities until their 'right' to carry on this profitable business was restored. They stole the North American continent from the original Indian population and murdered tens of millions of people in the process. They imported masses of immigrants to provide them with cheap labour (as they do to this day) and kept these people down by means of the most ugly and brutal racism. They fought with their rivals in other countries over who would get the biggest share of the profits and, whenever they did, working class people were sent off to kill their brothers and sisters in other countries. Always, they have kept a part of the population unemployed and living in extreme poverty so as to intimidate those who have jobs and prevent them from winning higher wages. For generations, they have operated a system that is designed to oppress and exploit the many in the interests of the few.

2. 'Globalization'.

Despite the power that the capitalists have in their hands, people have always resisted them. After the Second World War, in the face of huge struggles that threatened their system's survival, they granted independence to many of their colonies. They also were forced to recognize trade unions and put in place social programs like medicare, public housing and unemployment insurance. By the 1970s, however, these reforms were eating into their profits in a big way. The rate of return on their investments was in decline and this they could not stand for. From the mid 70s on, capitalism has been working to take back these earlier improvements. An agenda that has become known as 'globalization' has been developed to remove any and all barriers to the making of profits. Central to this strategy have been the infamous 'free trade' deals that have led to the dismantling of social programs and other protections for working and poor people as so many barriers to 'international competitiveness'. This brand of globalization allows capital to move across borders, but not workers. This means

that employers have the freedom to hunt the globe for the cheapest labour, but workers can't counterbalance this trend by relocating to improve their standard of living. Mike Harris didn't cut welfare and cancel social housing construction just because he's a bag of dirt. He did it because the system he represents needs to get richer at our expense. Under capitalism, even the small gains we've previously enjoyed are under the gun.

3. Fight for the 'Impossible'

The British Tory, Margaret Thatcher, used to tell those who criticized her Government's cutbacks that 'there is no alternative'. She was right in the sense that there's no alternative under this system.

If we're to fight back against somebody like Mike Harris, we can't accept the limits this system imposes on us. If decent paying jobs, living income, adequate housing, health care and education are 'impossible' under this system, then we have to look beyond capitalism.

This shapes how we fight because our eye is always on what we need and not on what they claim is possible. This is the most simple but also the most important reason why OCAP is an anti-capitalist organization.

OCAP's brand of anti-capitalism is based on taking action and has nothing to do with trying to talk the system to death. At present, we are fighting one of its attack dogs - Mike Harris - but we fully understand that this fight won't end until working and poor people take society and its resources into their own hands. Democracy can and must be about more than voting every four years on which gang of pirates you want to be robbed by. It must mean the mass of people actually running things and, especially, taking control of the production of society's wealth. OCAP never begs for crumbs. While we may have to defend our crust of bread today, we're working for the moment when we take over the bakery.

This article first appeared in THEY CALL IT

STRUGGLE FOR A REASON #4, OCAP's publication. It has been reprinted here with permission from OCAP.

We called for the restoring of the cut to welfare, the abolition of the anti-tenant legislation and of the Safe Streets Act.

OCAP had little doubt that the Tories would refuse to receive the delegation and prepared accordingly. We took up the slogan of "Fight to Win!" with every intention of making the action a call to all those suffering under this government. We wanted it to be clear that moral appeals to the Tories are worse than useless and the time has come to create a mobilization that can stop them. Our hope was to start a process that would spell the end of Harris.

While we anticipated that the police would be brutal, we did not imagine that they would move to clear the grounds of the legislature as they did. As soon as the crowd of 1,500 began to press forward they sent in the riot police - not in any controlled way, but with full speed baton charges. Mounted police rode into the crowd at a gallop swinging their huge batons. Dozens of injuries were sustained that included one fractured skull, badly broken arms, smashed ribs and serious cuts to the head. Despite this, people resisted to the point where it took them an hour to move us off the grounds. The head of the riot squad made a memorable statement afterwards when he told the press that 42 of his officers had been injured and that he had been up against a crowd that behaved "as if they didn't feel the blows."

After the march on the legislature the media went on the attack on a scale we'd never seen. Calls for our heads came from the pages of all the papers, TV and radio stations. It all had no effect or, rather, it had the opposite effect from the one intended. Support started to pour in. People across Ontario wanted to know how to join OCAP. Financial donations came in like never before. When, cynically, Harris gave special \$200 tax rebates to the province's taxpayers, people started signing them over to us and mailing them in. As the police continued to make arrests, it only raised the level of support. Their ultimately unsuccessful attempts to impose bail conditions barring people from involvement with OCAP pushed up the degree of solidarity higher than ever. Trade unions and social movement supporters formed an OCAP Allies Committee that has been of huge and lasting help to us. Flying squads from the Canadian Auto Workers and the Canadian Union of Public Employees are now joining our actions on a regular basis.

Based on this support we are working to set up new OCAP organizations across Ontario. We plan to take the fight against the Tories to an entirely new level. The anger is there for it. We have begun a province-wide tour to build for action later in the year based on economic disruption. The next time we move against Harris on a major scale it will not be in the form of a "protest" at one location. Rather, we will target the economic life of the province and challenge the ability of this government to proceed with its hateful agenda. In their communities people will organize takeovers, blockades and other such actions. Native communities, who have suffered so much under the Tories, will be in the forefront of this. OCAP already has a vital and longstanding relationship with militants from the Mohawk Nation and we're expanding our alliance.

We're calling on organized workers to join us and to use their powerful strike weapon in this struggle. Recent changes to the Employment Standards Act return

French unemployed organise and fight

The targeting of businesses has been a frequent tactic of OCAP's. Often the business community is linked to attacks on the homeless. In one instance, a restaurant owner successfully lobbied to close a downtown shelter. We ran an ongoing picket of his business until he wrote a letter asking for the place to be reopened. On the opening night of the Toronto International Film Festival we held a "mass panhandle" of homeless people outside. We made clear that such festivals are always the pretext for a police crackdown on the homeless. Following this action the organizers of the Word on the Street Book Festival, due to take place shortly afterwards, wrote an open letter to the police saying that they didn't want any removal of homeless people prior to their event.

To challenge the criminal situation where hundreds of empty apartment buildings are boarded up by speculators in Toronto, we marched 350 people on two abandoned buildings with the declared intention of opening them up for the homeless. The police used horses to keep us out and laid counseling and forcible entry charges against our members. The two buildings were opened as social housing a year later.

Two winters ago, during a month when four homeless people had died on the streets, the City of Toronto was stalling on plans to open up an empty former hospital as a shelter. Pressure from local yuppie residents and businesses was behind this. We took over the building and, while they sent in the police's Emergency Task Force with battering rams to get us out and charged us with unlawful assembly, the plans to open it up were put back on schedule.

In the spring and autumn of 1999 we took mass delegations of the homeless to Parliament Hill in Ottawa to demand action by the federal government. On the first occasion the Prime Minister rebuffed our demand for a meeting and, instead, had a huge force of RCMP there to keep us out. A battle ensued that created a national sensation. At the second action the government again tried to deal with the grievances of the homeless as a police matter instead of a political problem. This time it was only the use of riot cops and pepper spray that kept us back. These two actions helped convince the Chretien Government to put \$753 million into shelter programs. While far short of what is needed, a start has been made in forcing urgently needed concessions at the federal level.

In August of 1999, with shelters full and conditions in them unbearable, and as police crackdowns on the homeless escalated, we took over a well known Toronto park and established it as a "Safe Park." We were only able to hold it for three days before the police launched a violent attack on the site and forced people out. Despite this, the Safe Park led to an upsurge in our work as more and more people became convinced of the importance of fighting back. The viciousness of the response from the other side was also telling. The Mayor and Premier Harris both denounced the event, the business media went into a frenzy and the police operation against us took things to a new level. We drew lessons from all this.

On June 15, 2000 OCAP held its most powerful and important action to date. We had not marched on Queen's Park since the very early days of the Harris Regime. It had been our intention to wait until we were strong enough to have significant impact. We selected a delegation of poor people and demanded the right to address the legislature.

A MASS WAVE of occupations of unemployment benefit offices swept through France in December 1997 continuing well into the New Year. *Organise!* takes a look at this welcome resistance.

This phenomenon should be looked at in detail as it should provide lessons and examples to all unemployed who are looking to defend themselves in Britain and round the rest of the world. As the French magazine *Courant Alternatif*, the paper of the Organisation Communiste Libertaire noted in a February editorial: "Once more, libertarians were omnipresent in the action."

The movement of occupations began in December when some local unemployed groups, as well as the national unemployed co-ordination *Agir contre le chomage!* (Act against unemployment)-AC! occupied the offices of Unedic/Assedic -the equivalent of supplementary benefit- in Arras in northern France and Marseilles in the south. They demanded an immediate payout of 1,500 (francs (£150) for the long term unemployed.

A new left government under Lionel Jospin came to power in France last year. Apart from his own Socialist Party, the cabinet included 4 ministers who are members of the Communist Party. The new government promised the creation of 700,000 jobs, 350,000 of them in the public sector. The private sector promise of unemployment failed to get off the ground straightaway, as the private sector bosses refused to release finance, and the State would not subsidise

them. Similarly a government promise of universal 35 hour week has met with fier resistance from the employers.

The election of the left destroyed all remaining illusions among the unemployed that anything would be done by the State to tackle unemployment. This is why until the usual demobilisation in France after elections of left governments, this movement, starting out with small numbers, quickly increased in size and militancy and continues to be active. This should be compared with the social movement of November-December 1995. This time it is the government of the Left in power, and as a result the usual manoeuvres of the Left to demobilise any social movements have been that little bit more difficult to carry out.

Enough is enough!

The Unedic is a joint government/union body headed up by Nicole Notat, leader of the CFDT union (noted for its "radicality" and talk of "self-management" in the 70s and for a long while a close accomplice of the Socialists). Notat refused to pay the sum demanded by the unemployed activists. Conditions have deteriorated rapidly for the unemployed in the last 2 years, to the point where many are not far off of almost complete destitution.

The actions were set off by the unemployed committees of the CGT (large union centrally controlled by the Communist Party) in the Marseilles area. But this does not imply manipulation by the Communists. Rather it was a movement from the base that was taken up by multiple unemployed groups and activists, including the CNF

(Anarchosyndicalist union) and by many anarchist/libertarian militants as well as by those in no group or organisation.

Assedic offices everywhere were occupied with large united demonstrations of the unemployed and employed in many main towns. The demand for a payout was raised to 3,000 francs, and demands were then put forward for a rise in benefits for all of the equivalent of £150, with a new benefit for the under-25s, who receive no benefits at all.

The old carrot and stick tactic that the Left in power/the unions had used to finally demobilise both the lorry drivers strike (late autumn 1997) and the struggle of the sans papiers (immigrants without official stay permits) did not immediately work this time. The movement put at the head of its priorities the human and social factors, refusing to be taken in by various economic arguments (one union leader said that the unemployed were taking jobs from the employed!). In certain areas, the unemployed broke with the old schema of trade unionism: corporatism, strike, negotiations, end of struggle.

Indeed, the frontiers of what was "possible" were pushed back considerably, with hundreds of buildings occupied day and night, and groups of unemployed demanding and taking food in the supermarkets and in the most posh restaurants! All of this might be seen as symbolic, but demonstrates the determination and willpower of a social movement, weak numerically, but which is a great novelty in a situation where most workplace struggles are defensive and well controlled by the unions.

If the movement is weak in numbers, this is hardly surprising. Hundreds of thousands are today totally defeated in their daily life where survival is their main preoccupation.

For those who did engage in struggle, for many there was a massive widening of horizons leading to the questioning of the capitalist system in its totality. Yes, when one is out of work, one has time to become totally depressed, but one also has time to *think*. If waged workers have the "muscle" to potentially back up their struggles, they are also the victims of paralysing alienation. Hence a paradox in both waged and

The Somali community, with over 90 percent of its members in poverty, has been the victim of some of the worst police harassment in Toronto. Last year, we were involved in an episode that points to how our work can prompt communities to turn out and defend themselves. An OCAP meeting was underway in a Somali neighbourhood when four young men burst in to announce, "the police are attacking us right now." Across the street four cops had gone into a local restaurant with no warrant and, the people in there told us, had not only laid unfounded charges but had actually stolen money and jewelry from Somali customers. When the OCAP members got there an angry crowd had the terrified cops backed up against a wall. Cruisers raced in from four different police divisions. One OCAP member was charged with "obstructing police" and the crowd had to be pepper sprayed to enable them to make the arrest. Since this incident police harassment in the neighborhood has dramatically declined. They are dealing with a community that will organize to confront them.

Not all our casework takes the form of dramatic confrontations. Disruption can take numerous forms. One of our most successful undertakings has been a campaign to fight tickets given out to homeless and poor people. These are acts of persecution by city and transit police for "trespass," "camping without a permit," begging beside a bank machine or subway entrance, etc. The expectation is that the victim will not be able to challenge the ticket. Last year we took over 1000 tickets to court and won almost every one of them. They have had to open three new court rooms to deal with the workload and we have started to gum up their system of legalized harassment of the poor. We are also mounting a constitutional challenge to the "Safe Streets Act" that has an excellent chance of success.

OCAP has applied the same methods of disruptive collective action to broader struggles. We have sought the means to resist the implementation of the Harris Agenda. We have avoided token protest and tried to hurt our enemies and hamper their plans. We have tried to give our actions some sting and use them to point the way forward. When the Tories brought in workfare and looked for social agencies to take on forced workers we didn't go to the Ontario Legislature for a futile demonstration. Instead, we targeted offending agencies with public actions. This was successful to the point where the Toronto Commissioner of Social Services told a visiting academic that "OCAP has created a climate of intimidation that has made the implementation of the program very difficult."

When the Tories first cut welfare rates by 21.6 percent their Social Services Minister, David Tsubouchi, made the astounding claim that welfare recipients could bargain for cheaper grocery prices. We responded by taking 70 members into a Loblaws on a Saturday and filling up our carts. After the items had been rung through each one of us said we wanted to bargain around a 21.6 percent discount. This was an example of how to ridicule a government, cause a corporate financial backer pain and develop the militancy of those resisting them. The dropping of the charges against our activists, after we subpoenaed the minister, was another important element of the thing. Shortly after, he was removed from his post.



that local merchants didn't want the homeless to gather there. When I was recently in Toronto's Don Jail, a guard there told me that he had never seen so many homeless people being brought into the place as in recent months. Many, he told me, are the victims of police beatings. One prisoner he dealt with had lost an eye and another had been sodomized with a night stick.

This is a glimpse of the implementation of the Tory plan for the poor so far. Left to their own devices, they will go much further. The State of Wisconsin will abolish welfare for families with children by 2002. Can anyone really doubt that the Harris Regime is ready to go to such lengths? It is in this context that the work of OCAP must be appreciated.

As an organization, we realize that our only power is the use of collective action to disrupt oppressive bureaucracies and governments. Only in this way can hostile agendas be challenged and concessions won. Some suggest that "ordinary people" will be scared off by actions that are "too radical." We have found that it is precisely people who have no history of mobilizing who are repelled by actions that go through the motions but pose no threat to those they want to challenge. Certainly, needless confrontation and irresponsible behavior will isolate a movement, but bold and appropriate tactics will inspire resistance and build momentum.

We use this power of disruption at two basic levels. We mobilize to defend individuals and families under attack and to challenge broader political measures. In the first category, we have developed what we call "direct action casework." This is used to win social benefits, to fight evictions and deportations, etc. We have an enormously high success rate and every year hundreds of people win tangible gains. Welfare offices are a prime target because of the way they deny so many eligible and desperately needy people. We have brought countless delegations to welfare offices, confronted senior bureaucrats and, in one instance, picketed the home of a welfare manager to defend a family facing a loss of housing. These days the threat of an action is usually enough to resolve things.

Some months ago a man came to us who had worked for five days for a gas station before being laid off. Knowing he had little legal recourse, the employer told him that his time there had been an unpaid "training period." We responded by putting up a picket line and preventing the sale of gas. The employer called up the police force that is there to "serve and protect" thieves like him and they obligingly came and arrested one of our members on a bogus assault charge. When, however, we refused to be intimidated and made clear that our picketing would not stop, the owner issued a cheque.

Another major area of our casework has been Immigration Canada. Immigrants and refugees who face deportation or withholding of landed status are in a most desperate and often life threatening situation. Recently, we mobilized about 150 people to take over the constituency office of the Immigration Minister, Eleanor Caplan, in defense of several families, including a mother and five children, facing deportation back to imprisonment and torture in Somalia. Most of the people we brought out were from Toronto's Somali community and people of all ages crammed the office full to overflowing. A special meeting with an executive assistant hastily arranged to resolve things.

unwaged sectors. This vulgar economism is an enemy of all revolutions.

The new demands were met with an offer of the equivalent of £50 million for retraining and a promise that 216,000 unemployed would get additional transport subsidies of about £3 a week. This was met with an escalation in the number of occupations. The government then decided to give out £100million in unemployment benefit. Again this was met with derision. This meant the princely sum of £30 per person! Now Jospin talked about his commitments to the European Union, and refused to give any more money.

First sops, then cops

The riot cops were sent in, evicting the occupations in an euphemistic "evacuation". Up to this time, the Communist Ministers were saying things like: "The first measures taken...make good sense", supporting the sops given out by the government. Now it was: "The Assedics must rediscover the possibility of fulfilling their role"- in other words, "riot police, charge!" For their part, the Greens also supporting the Left government played it both ways, reflecting their minor influence on the government. One Green leader visited occupying unemployed and denounced police attacks whilst another said he was in solidarity with the unemployed whilst supporting the government at the same time. Once again, as in the last few strikes and social movements the extreme right Front National failed to offer an opinion apart from remarking in their paper that the unemployed were profiteers who lacked decency.

For their part, the Trotskyists put forward the usual transitional demands, seeking to limit the movement to the "possible". Some

of their organisations are deeply implicated in support for the Left government. For example, Lutte Ouvriere, a Trot group with several thousand members, denounced anarchists as provocateurs, in line with the talk of the Communists/CGT who constantly droned on about "casseurs" (breakers) and uncontrollables. For its part the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire, French section of the Fourth International, was doing its little wheelings and dealings, in line with eventually joining the Socialist Party en masse. One of its leaders, Aguiton, also a leader of AC! and the SUD union, had several meetings with Cambadelis, number two in the Socialist Party, and an eminent Trotskyist himself (in a different faction) assuring him that "we are not looking for a crisis".

Now the CGT union moved to fulfil its role as saboteur of struggle. On January 27th they called out over 20,000 people in 3 separate demonstrations in Paris-unemployed, railworkers, road maintenance workers. All demonstrations were concerned with unemployment, but the Communists made sure that they marched in different parts of the capital.

The radicalism of the movement was shown in occupations of Socialist Party offices, in the blocking of railway lines to stop the TGV high speed trains, in the questioning of work itself. During a demonstration in Paris on 17th January, which brought out 25,000, a meeting under the banner *We Want Shit Work paid with Crumbs* a group of people whipped themselves whilst demanding work at any price. Some of their slogans were *Work, no wages and overtime - One solution, exploitation, - Bosses join us, your slaves are in the street, - The unions are our friends, they have never betrayed us, - 35 hours a day*. The meeting went from

0 to 400. After this demonstrators broke a police blockade of an occupied building, occupied a shopping centre and forced one of the swankiest Parisian restaurants La Coupole to provide food. On other occasions attempts by the AC! bureaucrats to negotiate were thwarted by mass meetings. At many mass meetings, people questioned the whole nature of waged work.

Demobilisation?

In towns like Nantes the high school students began to take part in the struggle. A thousand marched to join the unemployed in Nantes and took part in an occupation. The Act-Up committees (organising around AIDs and HIV) took part in most of the actions calling for the same benefits for AIDs sufferers as for other claimants.

The number of anarchists/libertarians involved in the movement was far from negligible (for example 400 people in the Federation Anarchiste contingent on a Lyons demo). Beyond satisfaction at the good health of different libertarian organisations was there the influence to create a self-organised movement of unemployed and those in temporary work, independent of the parties and the State, leading to the creation of a movement of social resistance capable of creating a new society?

The Left government has put forward its plans for a 35 hour week that it says will solve unemployment. It hopes to introduce this by the year 2000 and to encourage bosses to create jobs. But in actual fact the bill does not mean that pay will not be cut in line with reduction of hours, that 35 hours will be compulsory, that job creation will not be paid out of taxes rather than by the bosses. In addition, the 35 hours will be "flexible". It will be calculated annually, so that one week you might work 60 hours, and another 10, which suits the needs of the bosses very well!

The movement is being demobilised on this 35-hour promise. The Communists are busy winding down the movement. AC! and other unemployed organisations feel smug that they have been received by those in power, have begun to be integrated into negotiation structures, and will go along with these manoeuvres At Marseilles where the action first started, this is already under way, but as we write other towns have seen an increase in the strength of the movement. The government will both hope to destroy the movement with the help of its allies in the Communist Party and the unions, and with brute force. Already a member of the Federation Anarchiste,

Christophe Fetat, has been arrested in Lille for taking part in actions. If the movement does come to an end, what needs to be built upon by anarchists/libertarians is a radicalisation of those involved, and the establishment of occupied buildings that can continue to service the unemployed, operated by autonomous committees of unemployed/those in temporary work outside of the control of the parties.

And In Germany

After the German government announced the highest unemployment rate since the war, 4.8 million-14% of those able to work-a mass wave of demonstrations effected 200 cities and towns and involving 40,000 people in early February. Contacts between French and German unemployed have been established with the French giving advice from their own experiences.

STOP PRESS: As we go to press, we hear of the following.

THE MEEK SHALL INHERIT DIDDLEY-SQUAT

It's time the victims of capital stop playing by the rules imposed by capital.

The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) has been around for over ten years. We began our work challenging the Liberals under David Peterson and then, for seven years, confronted an NDP Government that had gone over to the other side. Since the arrival of the Mike Harris Tories in 1995, however, we have had to fight our sharpest struggles.

It would be impossible to understand OCAP over the last five years without looking at the misery of the Harris "Common Sense Revolution." One of the first measures the Tories implemented was a 21 percent cut to welfare rates for over a million people. With no cost of living increase since that time this has now become an effective 32 percent reduction. Other changes to social assistance followed denying income to 16 and 17 year olds, attacking the disabled and introducing workfare programs. More recently, they have denied benefits for life to anyone caught "cheating" (or "creative accounting" as it's called when the rich do it). They are now even bringing in mandatory drug testing for welfare recipients as a means of degrading and criminalizing people.

Obviously, these kinds of measures increase insecurity and desperation and enable employers to drive down wages and undermine working conditions. Leaving nothing to chance, however, the Tories have cut the budget of the Ministry of Labour by 40 percent to ensure that employment standards laws will be largely unenforceable. They have now returned Ontario to the 60 hour work-week that used to exist under the Master and Servant Act of the 1940s.

Harris has abolished effective rent controls and made evicting tenants much easier. This goes under the ironic name of the "Tenant Protection Act." In the City of Toronto alone, there are now 2000 evictions a month, emergency shelters are packed to overflowing and the Council has been forced to declare homelessness a disaster. This year alone the Disaster Relief Committee has tracked close to 40 homeless deaths.

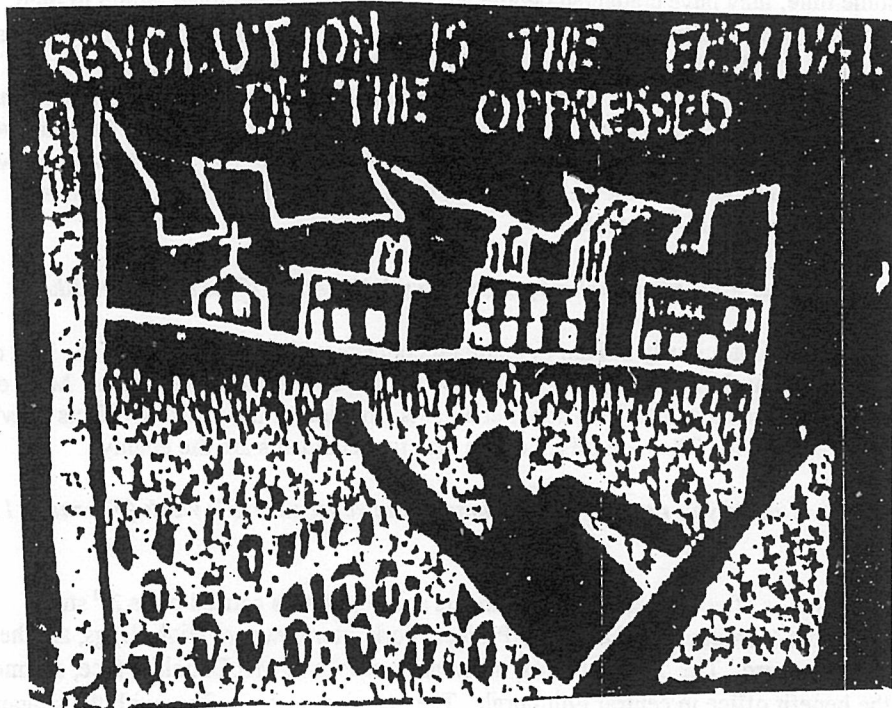
Of course, homeless people present a face of the city that is bad for investment and threatens the "quality of life" of those with the money to pay for it. So, the Tory Government has moved to find a solution. As you might expect, decent wages, living income and affordable housing did not occur to them. Instead, they have replaced social provision with police repression. Their infamous "Safe Streets Act" makes it illegal to squeegee and, effectively, to panhandle. People now go to prison (soon one of their new "super jails") for asking passers by for spare change.

Taking its cue from the Province, Toronto has now introduced an initiative called "Community Action Policing" that has increased the harassment of the homeless by the police. The obvious intention is to "socially cleanse" the central part of Toronto well ahead of the hoped for arrival of the Olympic Games in 2008. One staff sergeant told me quite openly that the "removing of vagrants interfering with business" was his intention. I have witnessed a cop giving a 78 year old homeless man a ticket for "camping in a park without a permit" when he merely sat next to his unopened bag on the grass. He was told

courts. The 3 strikes resistance continues.

Legal Note: In court the claimant pled guilty to the charge as above; the prosecution dropped the part of the original charge that he made "abusive, offensive and threatening remarks." He stated that although he had delivered the letter, he was not a member of Edinburgh Claimants nor had he been involved in any other 3 strikes related activity. Please bear this in mind in anything written.

This article was taken from ORGANISE! For Revolutionary Anarchism, the paper of the Anarchist Communist Federation, number 48.



Occupation of public transport building initiated by CNT in Paris. Building surrounded and 80 (!) arrested by police armed with assault rifles. After identity checks all released.

11th February 150 unemployed/temporary contract workers arrive at the Cash Converters store. This scummy business buys the property of the poor who urgently need money, at derisory prices, and sell it to other poor people at a profit! That's the market for you! The objective of the 150 was to bring the goods out on the pavement to distribute it free. The police attacked violently. 40 arrests. 30 released in the evening, the rest kept overnight in cells and released the following morning. Possibility of prosecutions. Media imposes blackout on many actions. At Poitiers police physically attack occupying unemployed (5 Feb.) Growing radicalisation as many unemployed see the role of the Left and of the police.

**Unity and Struggle --
Only Road
to Defeat Fascism**



Three Strikes and You're Out!

The following is an interview with a member of Edinburgh Claimants, Jim, about attempted police repression of the Three Strikes (anti-Job Seekers Allowance) campaign; on the 21st of January [1998 - ed.] a claimant was found guilty of Breach of the Peace and sentenced to 150 hours of community service. His offence (sic) had been to deliver a 3 strikes warning letter to a Benefits Office Official at High Riggs Unemployment benefit office in Edinburgh. The Sheriff (judge) called it "a sinister offence" and said that he was considering a jail sentence; in his summing up he called the campaign a "premeditated and illegal attempt to undermine the welfare system."

Organise!: Can you tell us about the context of the Three Strikes campaign?

Jim: There has been a continuous independent claimants presence in Edinburgh since the early to mid 1980's around the Edinburgh Unemployed Workers Centre and Lothian Claimants Union. The Centre successfully occupied by claimants opposing its closure, and claimants established a presence, particularly at unemployed benefits offices (UBO's).

Tens of thousands of leaflets were distributed, consisting of practical information for claimants, for example about how to resist Restart - Snooper Harassment and Actively Seeking Work measures. Although the numbers of activists involved have been small, they have gained the respect of many claimants and have had a big influence. The idea that people should be accompanied at interviews, for example. The Three Strikes campaign began in early 1996, and has struck a chord with unemployed people, though it has been unpopular with Union and Labour party bureaucrats because it gives claimants power. The underlying idea is that this should be a part of building a claimants' power in all areas of social life, to counter oppression and exploitation. The first warning letters were given out in 1996. The information received from claimants showed the same names of bullying Benefit Office officials kept recurring, e.g. Alistair Mathieson, client adviser at Torphichen Street UBO in Edinburgh. This slimebag forced claimants onto Jobplan and Restart courses, showed political bias during a restart interview, emotionally abusing claimants, sometimes reducing them to tears. Following 2 warnings there was a 3 Strike demonstration against him. Fifteen people took over the Benefit Office, went to his desk and photographed him. Mathieson responded by running away. The demonstrators left before the police arrived. Mathieson's photo was flyposted throughout the city with a list of his sins, the posters urged people to refuse to be interviewed by him. The campaign has received quite a lot of coverage in the local press over the years. It has not been sympathetic, but claimants can read between the lines, and contact addresses and phone numbers have been quoted at times. The campaign has been important, but it is only one direct action tactic to build claimants power; complementary would be a phone tree consisting of 30-50 people. They would be 'dole-busters' who were available at 24

hours notice to actively support claimants facing harassment. I believe such a phone tree has been developed in Brighton.



Organise!: What has the reaction of the authorities to Three Strikes been?

Jim: The benefit office authorities have been very worried by it. Edinburgh claimants have been very involved in supporting the Liverpool Dockers struggle locally. The PTC (a civil service union which is mostly managers) have consistently written to the support group urging them to get rid of us from the group. The author of the letters is Bernie Jaster, a benefit office manager and real nasty. The police have been showing an interest for some time; they have contacted people who they think are involved, going to their houses and trying to interview them. In Nottingham of course they have actually carried out raids on people's houses. There have been questions raised in the Houses of Parliament about 3 strikes; the answer maintained the Groundswell made anonymous and illegal threats against those carrying out JSA sanctions. Police helped deter Groundswell from implementing their threat to harm staff. The 3 strikes policy against Mathieson was described disapprovingly from the platform at the CPSA (Civil and Public Servants Association) trade union conference.

Organise!: What have relationships generally with Benefits Office staff been like?

Jim: We have continuously striven to maintain contacts with UBO workers. The best of them seem to have left now; up to half of those left are on temporary contracts. Most of them now seem to have little idea about claimants situation or the possible effects of what they are asked to do. They are raised of the idea that claimants are the enemy.

Organise!: How do you react to the outcome of the court case this week (February 11th 1998)?

Jim: Four hours after the verdict, 20 claimants and supporters carried out a 3rd strike action against Marianne MacDonald, a Project Work interviewer at High Riggs, and her manager Mr Laird. The demonstrators, all wearing masks of MacDonald's face, stormed into the benefit office in central Edinburgh. They carried posters of her with the slogan 'NO ONE LIKES A BULLY.' Protesters gave out leaflets bearing her photo, detailing how she had consistently harassed claimants and tried to cut their benefits on 8 documented occasions. The leaflets denounced Labour's New Deal as compulsory slave labour and condemned the cuts in single parent's benefits. Police arrived, but were too late to stop the action, there were no arrests. We won't be intimidated by the police and