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Anarchist Federation
Welfare Attacks
1995

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Welfare Attacks

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Flawed

We have no interest in trying to save the capitalist system from its own problems. We have no plans to make the welfare system work. We know that the capitalist system fundamentally flawed and will never give us the life we want.

This does not mean that we do not oppose the attacks on the welfare system. They will mean more hardship for those claiming benefits and worse conditions for people in low paid jobs. The only way that the working class can get anything from the ruling class is when we act in solidarity to fight the day to day oppression of capitalism. The welfare system was only provided by the ruling class to stem the flow of revolt. When we can show our strength they will make concessions.

The opposition to the JSA and Incapacity Benefit has already started. Non-cooperation by staff in the benefit agencies and employment service has lead to pilot trials being scrapped. Setting up of Claimants Unions and groups actively opposed to the introduction of JSA and other welfare cuts is happening throughout the country and should be encouraged.

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An “All Works Test” is used to work out if someone is capable of doing any work at all. The questions are designed to get people disqualified from benefit each question is scored on a point system. Before filling in these forms seek advice.

You can also lose benefit if you are:

- Incapable of working due to your own “misconduct”.
- If you do not accept medical treatment that could improve your condition. This will be medical treatment that they believe will improve your condition. This takes away the choice as to what medical treatment you receive.
- If you behave in a way calculated to slow down you recovery.
- If you are absent from home without leaving word where you can be found without having good cause.

There is no account taken of the difficulty many people have with access or the discrimination shown by employers to people have had a history of illness and the disabled.

Training

The state is also increasing the pressure on claimants to go on training courses. With the JSA you can be forced to go on training courses to improve your chances of getting a job. This is at a time when even senior government officials have called the new DEE training program “ludicrous and offensive” and “having seriously failed to meet commitment to unemployed people”. They even described the new procedures for the disabled as discriminatory, clumsy, error prone and offensive. The training schemes are not designed to give claimants the skills they want but that needed by the bosses so that the claimant can be pushed into a job.

JSA working class people will have no position to which to bargain from.

Nearly half the welfare expenditure is spent on elderly people. The state finds them hard to attack since there is a feeling that you should be cared for when you are "too old to work". There is much talk about the problems of the increasing number of people on pensions supported by fewer and fewer people working. There have been pressure to get more people to take out private pension schemes and we are now being told that we will not be able to rely on the state to provide for us when we reach retirement age. Affording a personal pension in many low paid jobs or while claiming is impossible so it will mean that many people who have worked in low paid jobs will not get a sufficient pension. It has been suggested that the state will help. Things suggested have included abolition of tax relief on short term saving schemes, increasing the inheritance tax threshold and changes in capital gains tax to leave more assets with families. This makes it clear what class of people they are intended to help. We are going to have to put our future survival into the hands of insurance sales people, those trusted people in the City and the up and downs of the world market.

With the move towards private provision for unemployment, sickness and old age, pensioners can now be attacked as people who did not make their own provision for when they were older.

Incapacity Benefit came into effect in April 1995. It is an attempt to get as many people as possible off benefit for being sick and force them to seek work. The state hopes to get 250,000 of the 2 million claiming this benefit. The main change is that claimants will be examined by benefit agency doctors to work out if they are fit for work. There have already been cases where the agency doctor finds the claimant unfit for work but the benefit agency doctor found them fit for work. The doctors appointed are not experts in all fields of medicine and are therefore unable to say whether someone is fit for work or not. Since its introduction approximately 6000 people have already lost their right to this benefit.

THE GOVERNMENT HAS renewed its attack on the welfare system. These attacks in the form of the introduction of Incapacity Benefit in April this year, the phasing in of the Job Seekers Allowance and a renewed "debate" on such things as pensions, "scroungers" and single parents.

These attacks are not isolated to the "Evil Tories". There has been hardly a bleat from the Labour Party and Tony Blair supports similar attacks on the working class. Welfare reform has also been occurring in France, USA, Italy and even Sweden. So it is not just some mad idea dreamed up by a few right wingers in the Tory party; it is seen as part of the ongoing development of capitalism. The attack is not just confined to those who claim benefit — as we shall see the amount of savings the new measures will bring do not greatly effect the overall welfare expenditure. These measures will affect those in work by decreasing job security, cutting wages and making people feel they cannot leave the job no matter how bad the conditions. We will be forced to make our own arrangements, if we have enough money to afford them, for unemployment, sickness and old age.

Welfare

The welfare systems is present to some extent or other in most "developed" countries. There was no great flash one day with the bosses of industry and the State thinking, "wouldn"t it be a nice idea to share out some of this wealth with the poor and needy". The idea of the state supporting the working class began surprisingly with Otto von Bismarck (the German Chancellor) who stated "give the workingman the right to work as long as he is healthy, assure him care when he is sick, and maintenance when is old…". In the 1880"s Bismarck introduced a series of reforms such as accident, health and old age insurance. Other countries followed suit also seeing the introduction of such reforms as a way of counteracting

the growth of the emerging worker"s movement. Coupled with this was the need to maintain an army of healthy people to operate the machinery of war or the factories.

Scroungers

The state and its media lapdogs are proud of their attack on what they call "scroungers". Every day new cases of fraud are brought to the public attention and used as a justification for the new measures against claimants. It has been stated that they believe 10% of all claims are fraudulent.

The state also claims that they are making savings of nearly £100 million from investigating benefit fraud. This is the same amount as the taxes that the government does not bother collecting and much larger savings could be make by investigating tax fraud by companies and their bosses. Even more money could be raised by the scrapping of various forms of tax relief for companies and the rich.

There are many jobs that pay so little it is expected that people will have to claim benefit. There are one million people who earn less than £2.50 an hour and 300,000 who earn less than £1.50. Benefit is paid out to people so that they can survive on the crap wages the bosses pay. Even the most devious fraudster would find it difficult to get the equivalent of some bosses who can earn a giro or two every hour. Housing benefit is another con as it goes straight into the bank accounts of rich landlords who charge extortionate rents for poor accommodation.

Cost

The state, on our behalf, pays out £88 billion in welfare benefits. Peter Lilley has recently stated that the welfare system cost every working person, on average, £15 every working day. He uses this as

a justification for the cuts in welfare spending, promising savings of £4 billion by the end of the century and £14 billion a year in the long term, which are hardly considerable when compared to the total amount. These cuts will mean that the £15 a day will go down to £14.65 and then £12.61. Since tax cuts always favour the rich, this will mean very little reward, if any, for those people on or below average wages.

Forcing people to actively seek work under any conditions also enforces social control. As we have recently seen with the Criminal Justice Bill there is also an attack on any possible counter culture that may upset the machinery of capital and the state. It is an attack on all those who do not wish to be part of the "new order". Forcing people to at least "pretend" to be looking for non-existent jobs will force them to become part of the system.

Pricing Ourselves Out Of The Market

One argument we hear often is that people are pricing themselves out of the market by expecting too much money. How can someone on £2.40 an hour be pricing themselves out of the market while the likes of Cedric Brown (head of British Gas) gets £240 an hour plus other benefits. The question is not so much that of "free market forces" but of greedy bosses wanting to improve their level of exploitation. The bosses will play off one group of workers against each other so that we compete to give the bosses the best value for money i.e. the smallest wage packet. The real reason top bosses get so much money is not due to their "market value" but because they award the pay rises.

The whole idea of a "Job Market" is fictitious since for any market to exist we must be able to be able to bargain with the employer. The lowest bargaining position used to be that you either accept the job under those conditions or not. With no minimum wage, the decrease in workers' solidarity in many and the introduction of