

The Future of Resisting Work Lies in the Present

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Introduction

- The aim of this presentation is to look at work related, collective activism outside of traditional trade unions
- Resistance against work - often associated with industrial actions i.e. strikes
- Work related resistance outside trade unions is much more diverse and it needs to be so, as a strike is often not possible.
- There lot to learn from this groups regarding the discussion on the chaining nature of work & future of trade unionism.

Methodology

- Participatory Action Research project
- 18 activists groups which put forward a critique of work, such as claimants' unions and unemployed workers' groups, campaigns against workfare and unpaid internships, disability groups and (Unite Community)
- Methods: semi structured group and individual interviews, material the groups produced themselves and participatory observation of protests and meetings in a period between 2012-2016.
- I draw on insights gained through my own involvement in the member-led, grass-roots trade union United Voices of the World.

What is Work? (I)

- Quite common to distinguish between labour and work, eg. Guy Standing
 - Labour: alienated, profit generating activity
 - Work: activities of necessity, reproducing and personal development. It is self chosen and people have agency.
- ➡ Links to the question of pay. Should only labour be paid? Or all work?
- ➡ An binary distinction between labour and work helps to increase of unpaid work promote by the austerity regime.
- ➡ Capitalism is built on an immense amount of unpaid work (Silvia Federici)

What does this mean?

- Conceptually: The distinction between labour and work does not make sense
- Politically: It highlights the demand for a wage as a *transitional demand*. While a wage does not end exploitation, unpaid labour is not only a extreme form of exploitation but also invisible.



BUST YOUR BOSS!*

card for freelance art and cultural workers

During a negotiation about work you have the right:

not to remain silent about money

not to subsidise the production from your own pocket

not to accept a change of agreed conditions without a renegotiation

not to take this job on the promise of a future!

* Warning: In the cultural sector your boss may not look like a boss - they could be your friend/drinking buddy... It might even be you!



In solidarity - Precarious Workers Brigade
www.precariousworkersbrigade.tumblr.com

What is Work? (II)

- Harry Cleaver's concept of the social factory: Work/labour is indirectly or directly profit generating activity and includes
 - unwaged work in the household (eg. reproductive labour/ care labour/ emotional labour)
 - in the community (eg. volunteering),
 - the work on the self (to be employable)
 - Work is not only *key* but also *unique* to capitalism (Harry Cleaver)
 - before capitalism most societies had no generic concept of work
 - only under capitalism it does not matter what people do as long as their activities generate profit.
 - one should avoid using concepts appropriate to describe capitalism to use alternative forms of activities and relationships (which are happening here now)
- ➡ So what is not work then? Is activism work?

Resisting Work (I): Naming & Shaming

- Finding the weak spot: The importance of a good image for companies and charities to remain competitive (and thus to survive) within the capitalistic market economy.
- Famously used by in the struggle against workfare
- Also used by many other groups.
- Challenges the logic of outsourcing
- ➔ The naming & shaming strategy proved itself very successful
 - Many workfare providers pulled out
 - Government refused to make the list of workfare providers public as it feared “the scheme would have collapsed”
 - UVW gained many Living Wage victories due to naming and shaming.

Naming & Shaming examples



Resisting Work (II): Reversing the Discourse

What is unjust?

- Government: It is unfair that some “scroungers” choose a life on benefits.
- Disabled People Against the Cuts: 7200 died for work related activities for Employment Support Allowance benefits - No more death from Benefit Cuts

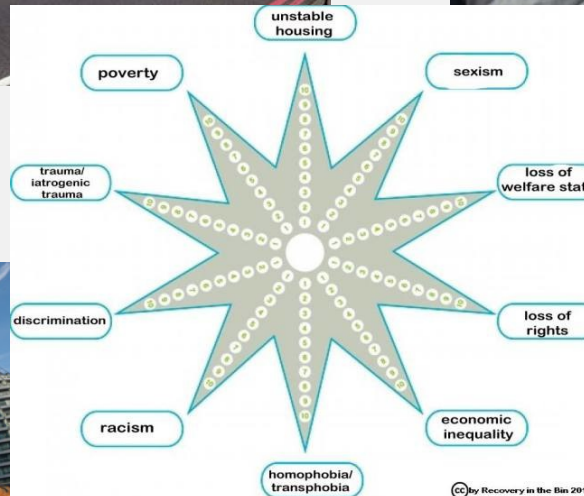
Challenging the Work-Cure Discourse

- Protests against psycho-compulsion (no job coaches in GP surgeries and no psychological treatment in Job Centres)
- un-recovery star of Recovery in the Bin

Challenging the Employability agenda:

- Training for Exploitation? Politicising Employability and Reclaiming Education”. A resource pack for “employability educators” to politicise their teaching and foster critical, practical approaches to learning and the world of work - coming out soon.

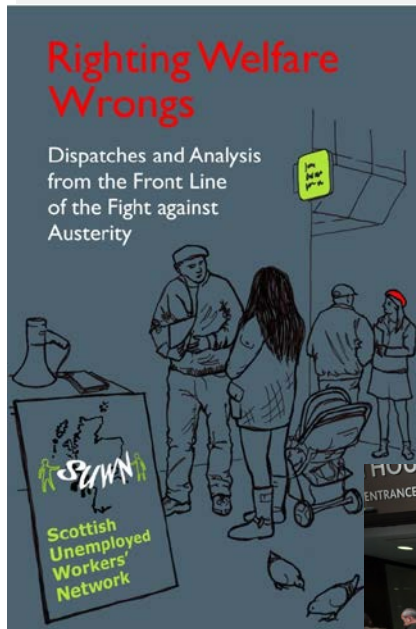
Reversing the Discourse



Resisting Work (III): Mutual Support & Advocacy

- Following the footsteps of claimants unions
 - representation and mutual support at Job Centre and Fit to Work Assessments
 - Know your rights advice through drop in sessions and stalls outside the Job Centre
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- ➡ this breaks with the individualistic practices of the coercive benefit regime
 - ➡ resembles the idea of collective bargaining by the trade unions
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- proved itself very successful. For example in Dundee - Sanction City - sanctions were reduced by 40% due to advocacy work.
 - Success also shown as the DWP often tries to repress advocacy via the police.

Mutual Support & Advocacy. Examples



Conclusion

- ➡ There are many ways to resist work.
- ➡ There is a lot of resistance to work happening outside of traditional trade unions.
- ➡ Resistance is always reactionary
- ➡ How do we move beyond work?