



Julie-Ann Jumps Ship! PUP'er to Doug-ite.



Meanwhile in Ballymena: Fairhill Goes Cheap Hey.



DUP Hokey Cokey themselves to death

BLACK STAR



TYRONE SAYS 'NO!' TO GOLD MINING

'People are not prepared to lie down anymore for big corporations...it's the people driving this, not the politicians' Greencastle campaigner.

In the famous film 'The Treasure of the Sierra Madre', starring Humphrey Bogart and written by the German anarchist B. Traven, the lust for gold consumes and ultimately destroys the main characters. It is an essay not only in human greed and selfishness but highlights both the environmental damage caused by mining and the exploitation of labour at the heart of it. This was very much in the minds of Organise! activists who attended recent protests against gold mining in the Sperrin mountains of Tyrone. It kicked off a long march from Greencastle in Tyrone to Stormont in what will hopefully be the final phase of the campaign against the Canadian mining company Dalradian and their toxic plans for further degradation of a beautiful environment to line the pockets of the super rich.

Glassdoor: The Worker's Friend.



Having worked in a lot of crappy jobs over the last ten years or so, I'd like to profile some big employers in the North I may (or may not) have worked for. In this month's Black Star I'll look at Radox (who have already appeared on the pages of a previous issue!) and Covergys/Concentrix. Next month I'll finish with a look at the 'Big 4' and some general advice.

The most valuable sources of information on these employers, for the prospective employee, are definitely employer review sites. Most popular of these are glassdoor (glassdoor.co.uk) and indeed (indeed.co.uk). Both claim not to allow employers to adjust or amend the reviews or the scores they are given, however submitted reviews pass through a screening process – I assume this is to remove profanity and oaths of revenge. With a little filtering to remove the corporation's attempt to improve their profile with shill reviews written by toadies and yes-people, a picture of working life there emerges which is totally uncensored and totally accurate. As well as totally entertaining. The collected reviews are a greater description of the miseries of being a cog in the capitalist wheel, than Polly Toynbee, Owen Jones or anyone else who writes for The Guardian could ever bash out over a weekend in Cornwall and sell to Simon & Schuster for a ten grand advance.

What follows is a short description of a few big employers, accompanied by anecdotes and some insight from worker reviews. I hope you find it instructive and, for all those desperate for work and with no choice other than to darken the doors of these satanic institutions, remember "forewarned is forearmed".

Radox

With multiple, inconvenient locations like "not near anything" and "out in the middle of nowhere" – workers are consigned to miserable breaks (if they get them) with no catering around. Radox pulls out all the stops to make the experience of working there truly hellish. They get an impressive 2.3 out of 5 on glassdoor. They couldn't even muster enough fake praise to counter the tsunami of negative reviews. One review describes the place as a "graduate mill". Commonly seen in big firms in NI job postings - it doesn't matter what degree you have, so long as you have one, we'll train you. In practice this allows the company to be extremely selective in who they hire, and if you do get in, you'll be working nightmare night shifts doing backbreaking physical labour. At the time of writing, this is an accurate summary of work in the company's "COVID lab". Having

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won contracts to supply COVID tests to government – which involves processing and passing on the test results – Radox moved to a 24h business model. Several reviews mention an unholy triumvirate of moving between night and day shifts with no break in between (regardless of what recruiters promise), daily additional unpaid overtime and widespread, exclusionary cliques. Further to this, the work is very exacting – pipetting out micrometers of fluid using crappy old GCSE chemistry equipment – and repetitive, leading to fatigue and injury. The company's profits have gone through the roof, quite literally at the expense of the suffering of the workforce. In turn this causes a level of staff "churn" usually associated with Maccy D's. It's also been said that the company is actively "anti union".

Covergys / Concentrix

Covergys and Concentrix merged a while ago. Comparable to marrying the aroma of boiled tuna with the taste and texture of tyre rubber it's not a winning combination, but it's what is being served at the canteen of this monolith of a call centre. Their sites are well served by public transport, with the buses going to the call centres usually referred to as "the bus to hell" by locals. They provide call centre customer care and sales facilities, mostly to huge telecommunications companies like Vodafone and 02. On the plus side, they'll literally take anyone – you might find yourself in a training group with a motley crew of 16 year olds, semi-pro gear dealers, and out of luck former accountants. In exchange for minimum wage, you'll be answering customer care queries and selling phones. Those of you reading who have even been in a customer facing job will know that this involves taking a lot of abuse from people who have been messed around by the company, or are just having a bad day and looking for someone to give a hard time to. The computer systems are extremely complicated and it's not unknown for the less tech-savvy to break down in tears on the call centre floor, having been overwhelmed trying to work the account and broadband management systems at the same time. All this while calling out (unanswered) to the sea of people around them for help. Oh and literally everything you do – including visits to the toilet – is strictly timed and logged. This affects your performance against the hundreds of personal and team targets you'll have. Expect to be both yelled at or, if you are out of earshot, called by the inspector if you've spent too long wrapping your call, doing paperwork or setting something up. On the plus side, if you ever need chemical aid to get through a shift, don't worry as there's plenty to go around if you have the spare readies. Payroll errors are common, and as for the bonus scheme – which can bump you up to around two grand a month – it's basically impossible to achieve.

To be continued...



Julie-Ann Jumps Ship



Early last month it was widely reported that former PUP Belfast city councillor Julie-Ann Corr had jumped ship. Abandoning the PUP for the ranks of the Ulster Unionist Party her first comments were a curiously irony free reflection of working-class resentment of the very Unionist elite the UUP was formed to represent and defend:

For too long we have doffed our caps to those who were better off educationally and financially. But our community is no better for it.

While Doug Beattie may not be of quite the same calibre as the stiff upper lipped Sir Carson, Sir Craig, Andrews, Viscount Brookeborough, O'Neill, Chichester-Clarke or Faulkner it is beyond us how joining the UUP is anything other than taking the doffing of one's cap to new extremes. Well, perhaps not new. This is the Party that created it's own 'labour' lapdog in the form of the Ulster Unionist Labour Association in 1918. That was a direct response to the growth of a militant working-class struggle for the 8 hour day. Then as now much was promised and now, as

then, we confidently predict nothing will be done for the (part of the) working-class community Julie-Ann hails from and seeks to represent.

Julie-Ann has joined the Party that has always regarded a large section of the north's working-class population as it's natural followers. Expected to vote and die to maintain the Party's position, keep their heads down, accept their lot, and defend the statelet born in 1921 from those who would sunder their link with Britain and the Empire. Generations were expected to fall into line without question - Irish nationalism and Rome were used as bogeymen, and they played their roles well.

Whenever working-class interest has threatened to trump the interests of the Unionist elite a dangerous game of scaremongering, extremely limited and temporary concessions, lies and (early on) the abolition proportional representation were all resorted to. From the huge sacrifice of thousands of working-class lives at the Somme, to lower wages and worse terms and conditions than the rest of the UK, to the death, incarceration, maiming, violence and murder demanded throughout the wee north's existence - the price of loyalty has been too high. Loyalty to the state and the Party that ruled it unopposed for most of it's 100 years will not bring equality or the desperately needed socio-economic change Julie-Ann speaks of.

Set against the spectacular implosion of the DUP a revival of the Official Unionists, with photo ops at the multis and attempts at reviving cap doffing en masse, is not an alternative. Nor for that matter is the PUP or any variation on patriotism, loyalism or nationalism.

Meanwhile in Ballymena: Fairhill Goes Cheap.

Some of youse oul' wans might remember the advert back in the day for Fairhill Shopping Centre here in Ballymena. It featured a wee fella, flat cap in one hand and walking stick in the other saying 'it's a big shoppin' centre in Ballymena, hey'. Since then, it's fair to say that its fortunes have waned a bit. Like many shopping centres, the 'austerity' policies of successive governments, Brexit and finally the lockdown all took their toll on the disappearance of shops and growing numbers of people thrown out of work.

Debenhams, Topshop, Quiz, Oasis, Burton and Dorothy Perkins are all gone, which might partly explain why local property developers Magell, owned by the Walker family cartel, bought it up the other week at £37 million less than the estimated price. The Walkers already own half the town and clearly have the ear of the DUP, so nobody will be holding their breath for an imminent revival of the town centre. The usual shit jobs and non-unionised workplaces are on the cards.

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DUP Hokey Cokey Spectacular.

The goings on in the DUP closely resemble a drunken hokey cokey. One of their Christmas shindig favourites no doubt, but this time daggers are most definitely not only out but firmly sank into each others backs.

Foster out, Edwin in, but (perhaps imagining himself as a latter-day Carson) declined the post of First Minister, so Givan in. For how long remains uncertain. Then we got treated to the 'shake it all about'.

Poots, whole self jumped straight back out and in jumped Donaldson. MLA Alex Easton has now joined the numerous others to have swung their whole selves right out of the party (we hope his hangover is a killer).

Donaldson's not for having that Irish sea border. As anarchists we are obviously opposed to this new border, the north south border and each and every fucking border dividing humanity across the globe. But we digress. He has swung in behind an apology for the party's 'save Ulster from sodomy' and it's 'terrible' record on LGBT rights. In the meantime the Donaldson First Minister foot is hovering. We predict they'll all fall down in a drunken mess without a foot to stand on.

Join Organise! Build An Anarchist Alternative

Organise! is a small group of ordinary working class people who are fed up with being fucked about by the profit system, fed up with seeing our communities torn apart by racism, patriarchy, nationalism and sectarianism, and sick of a greedy few getting rich off everyone else's backs.

We want to improve everyday conditions for ourselves and other working class people, but we also struggle for the revolutionary transformation that can create a free and equal society, one based on mutual aid and co-operation. Sound crazy? Maybe it does, but all the alternatives assume the continuation of the present system... and that's even crazier...

The current system isn't working - stress and overwork affect more and more people while others are flung on the dole; for increasing amounts of workers it is precarity, zero hours contracts and the stress of being unable to plan or budget our lives; we live in a world of plentiful resources yet millions starve; some people make vast fortunes just because they own companies, land, property or natural resources, but those of us who create the wealth, work the land and build the properties are left struggling to pay for the natural resources; politicians tell us there's no money - not for wages, benefits or local amenities, but there's always plenty for war; both locally and globally the gap between the richest and the poorest sections of society has never been so great; instead of a war on poverty they've got a war on 'benefit fraud', a war on drugs and a 'war on terror' and the same institutions that create war, poverty and environmental destruction stigmatise, imprison and deport the resultant refugees.

We don't think these things are inevitable or coincidental, we think they are related to capitalism - an economic system defined by wage slavery and the accumulation of profit out of other people's work. So we support all workers against their bosses in demanding higher wages and better conditions. We try to intervene practically to support workers engaged in disputes and are also active in our own workplaces and communities. Not only against exploitation but against the multiple oppressions faced by members of the working class in all our diversity.

But it's not just a question of trying to struggle by in a world of exploitation and oppression; we look to a future where workers control production and society in their own interests. And unlike some people who claim to oppose capitalism, we don't want to be a new set of leaders and we refuse to be led by anyone else. We advocate direct democracy in the workplace and through the commune in our communities - working in federation to ensure that the needs of all are met and that no-one is ever again in a position to oppress or exploit another human being.

We currently have members in Belfast, Derry, Newtownabbey and Portadown and want to actively build our organisation - on the basis of active involvement and participation.



If you are interested in these ideas, we'd encourage you to have a look at our website and consider getting involved. You can find more information about Organise!, including the practical things we are involved in, here:

<https://organiseanarchistsireland.com/>

To talk to us about getting involved send an email to:

organiseasi@gmail.com

Dupont/Lycra Apprenticeships in Derry



Long one of the most aggressive anti-union employers in the north-west, what used to be known as Dupont, now the Lycra Company, has recently offered apprenticeships worth £12k a year.

In reality, these training 'opportunities' offered in a partnership with the local Tech, are inductions into the world of what Derry used to call the 'Dupont-made man'. This is a servile species of worker who vows never to cause trouble, because they are 'lucky to have a job', and to keep their head down and union organisation out of the Maydown plant at all costs.

Who knows though, maybe this time some will learn to fight back?