

Contents:
Manchester Social Forum
Bank & File builders movement
Northern Anarchist Network
No.7



**Manchester Social Forum and the Trade
Councils, Burnley Anarchists,
Bradford Anarchists,
Northern Voices.**

Cock O' the North



Northern Anarchism: Nowt less!

October 2004.

20p

Editorial:

The Manchester Social Movement

It is now fast becoming possible to speak of a 'Manchester Social Movement'! A branch of radical politics, almost peculiar to Greater Manchester, which is out of the ordinary in this country.

In the last year, the Manchester Social Forum has done things in our city, which this writer would not have thought possible before:

- **It has joined with the local County Association of Trade Union Councils to mobilise a series of meetings in central Manchester in support of a group of local electricians who had been locked-out for a year.**
- **It helped through these meetings and direct sponsorship to raise around £2,000 for the men in dispute at a time when their hardship money was drying up.**
- **It assisted with the production of a set of booklets that helped publicise the dispute across the county among other trade unionists.**
- **It linked up the causes of safety at work, corporate killing and city centre architecture on the same platform.**
- **It supported the Manchester electricians at their Industrial Tribunal.**

The Manchester Social Forum has been involved in other activities such as supporting asylum seekers; defending the right to protest on Market Street, Manchester; and supporting residents in Salford and beyond against land grabbing Councils and developers.

Winning With The Manchester Electricians

In June 2004, the electricians took their case to the Manchester Industrial Tribunal and won. Four of them, the Tribunal found, had been sacked for 'trade union activities' and had suffered false redundancies.

There is now a plan to take the struggle of the electricians' struggle to other sites in Manchester and to end the blacklist and, if possible the JIB travesty in which the bosses and the union Amicus seek to control the trade union activities of workers on the building sites.

In this respect it is hoped that the Manchester Social Forum; the Greater Manchester Trade Union Councils; the northern anarchists of the NAN and the 'radical journal of the North'—*Northern Voices*, will be able to again join together in a Campaign to oust corruption in the building trade. The existence of the **Northern Anarchist Network** and *Northern Voices* are important in so far as they provide a non-sectarian, unaffiliated basis to organise and publicise campaigns and actions, without the strings and baggage of the membership organisations of both the libertarian and authoritarian left or the 'verticals' and 'horizontal' as they are now called.

There are other local Social Forums in the region such as Calderdale, which also have a libertarian contingent: defending local rights for northern communities. In this respect the existence of *Northern Voices* is vital: for here is a publication which is already sold in dozens of newsagents in the North West. Towns such as Salford, Swinton, Burnley, Bury, Oldham, Hebden Bridge, Ashton, Stalybridge and Dukinfield now all have newsagents selling the journal dedicated to the spirit of liberation.

Cool O' the North

Burnley anarchists

BURNLEY ANARCHISTS is now an established group with a web-site. It meets in a pub every week and the members are considering setting up a local Social Forum in the region.

In time for September 9th, 2004, the group booked a local room and distributed a flyer advertising the Ken Loach film about the Spanish Civil War: 'Land and Freedom'. This showing clashed with the weekly meeting of the Manchester Social Forum and consequently no-one went up from Manchester. But the turn-up was passable for Burnley, especially since it was a first try. Further video shows are planned.

Jim Petty, one of the major figures of Burnley anarchism in the last half on the 20th century and a former national secretary of the Direct Action Movement, is a Burnley lad and has been involved in every issue of *Northern Voices* and is on the editorial panel. **Burnley** is one of the three main areas where *Northern Voices* sells the most copies—with at least ten sales outlets around the locality.

Anarchist activity has a long militant and successful history in Burnley, and the article by Jim Petty in *Northern Voices* **No.1** on Burnley Town Council's incompetent management of local government has been widely commented upon for its acute analysis of the growing problems in the community generally and community relations in particular.

Cool O' the North

Catch up with Burnley Anarchists:

www.burnley.org/home

Review by Helen Buchanan:

Northern Voices 3 Summer 2004. £1.20.

LONDON BECOMES MORE INFLUENTIAL as the rest of Britain declines. More than half of new university graduates must go to London to work. The population of the northern cities gets smaller as the city-state of the capital gets richer.

This demographic and political change is presided over and encouraged by the Labour Party. Since 1997 Labour runs the British franchise of United States neo-conservatism. This affects everyone's lives and erodes and corrupts everything it touches. As the editorial says "the gulf grows between the gated villages of the south and the sink estates of the north."

Many of the articles in the new ***Northern Voices*** address these concerns in a thoughtful and sometimes amusing way. The central idea is that solutions don't lie in party politics (we don't have to reclaim the Labour Party!), but in stronger local communities.

The contents include: land grabs by local Labour councils (illustrated on the front cover by Ken Cookson of Stalybridge); Burnley; safety at work; the Manchester electricians, and the Menworth Hill spy station. There are also accounts of the northern Black Pudding, a Northern Cross-word and one, following George Orwell, on the decline and Americanisation of the English murder.

Labour councils are seen as "show offs" who do nothing to reduce conditions that provide a breeding ground for the far-right. Manchester Labour leader talks of Manchester as a "World Class City", with 15 4-star hotels and one 5-star. Manchester unemployment is above the national average and just as bad as it was before the Commonwealth Games. Labour's "solution" more consultants. Housing demolitions (without proper consultations) and 3,000 post offices are being considered for closure. The council has another cunning plan -- a state of the art "Destination Casino" in poverty stricken East Manchester.

Northern Voices presents a different view of what to do about the BNP than that of "Unite Against Fascism." The timid leftists want the people of Burnley to vote Labour (or anybody) to keep the BNP out. Jim Petty of ***Northern Voices*** doesn't see this as a solution. He writes: "The Labour government has spent billions on wars such as Iraq...Spending British money and British lives; while many of us in Burnley live in poverty. Voting Labour is not a solution. The Labour Party through its inaction over many years is responsible for making it possible for the BNP to come into office in Burnley."

Northern Voices has a view on modern murders. An article contrasts the old time murders who were driven by "love, lust and adultery" with the modern Dr. Harold Shipman, who seems to have been influenced by a cold desire for power (over politically and economically weak old people) and megalomania. Shipman is an expression of "the growth of managerialism and a dehumanised machine culture."

I have focussed on the more serious content and neglected the bits that are amusing or just fun. The Black Pudding is championed over, I would imagine, modern horrors such as chicken nuggets.

George Orwell would enjoy ***Northern Voices***, and I'm sure you will as well.

Cook O' the North

Northern Voices available: 'Springbank', Hebden Bridge HX7 7AA.

Bradford Anarchist Group: bradfordcalling@yahoo.com

'**Anarchist politics** are the recognition that governments, politicians, hierarchies and anything that stands in the way of people collectively managing their own lives is the root of **(the)** system—and **our** oppression. Only our self-organisation in communities, schools, homes and workplaces can provide any antidote to the destruction, misery and boredom inherent in capitalist society.

Allotment collectives, prisoner support, independent media, free parties. Every act of grassroots non-hierarchical organisation, be it to entertain or defend our communities, brings us one step closer to taking back control of our lives.....'

Reflections on the Electrician's Struggle

by Barry Woodling

AN OVERFLOWING PUBLIC MEETING of the locked-out Manchester electricians held in February with the aid of the Manchester Social Forum, began a sequence of events which got wide support in the local trade union movement. It stunned political observers locally and is still having consequences on the political scene where it has thrown the of the Socialist Workers Party onto the back foot, embarrassed the Manchester City Council, unsettled the renegade trade unionists in Amicus and given the Manchester Social Forum public credibility. **(ed. Intro)**

An interesting historical parallel comes to mind. About 100 years ago a founding Conference of the Industrial Syndicalist Education League in Manchester with delegates from trade unions and trade councils in Manchester and beyond. Syndicalists present included Tom Mann, Guy Bowman, Albert Purcell, President of Manchester & Salford Trades Council and Lorenzo Portet, a Spanish anarcho-syndicalist in exile.

The Conference was characterised by the syndicalist emphasis on direct action, opposition to trade union leaderships and bureaucracy, and on the need to unite the trade union movement through industrial unions. Anarcho-syndicalist militants advocated anti-statist, anti-parliamentary ideas which embraced direct action and revolutionary industrial unions.

Guy Bowman co-edited the '*Industrial Syndicalist*' newspaper with Tom Mann, and worked closely with the **Industrial Syndicalist Education League**. Bowman had studied the French anarcho-syndicalist movement and the work of Fernand Pelloutier focussing on the revolutionary potential of the Trade Councils as centres of revolutionary organisation, initiative and education.

Bowman saw in Trades Councils 'the only ground on which the general problems of labour may be discussed, without the narrowness of view which in the individual unions is apt to permit only the immediate selfish interest of each craft to be discussed.' He thought that Trades Councils might serve as an industrial council: the model for the new form of social administration and that this would assist the unity of workers' organisations which had been diffuse and fragmented.

Self-reliance and independence would be encouraged to confront the dehumanising effects of capitalism.

Though the Trade Councils have dramatically changed over the last Century and are a shadow of their former selves and their history has not come up to the vision of Bowman; the role of the Greater Manchester County Association of Trade Union Councils (GMCATucs) in organising the support meetings this year for the Manchester electricians together with the Manchester Social Forum could be a small step in lighting that flame of a previous era. This local challenge by the trade councils and the Manchester Social Forum to the dead hand of the trade union bureaucracy, and the Labour Party, is a valuable development.

Those early struggles of the working class syndicalists pre-1914 provide an inspiration to today's radicals and demonstrate that another world is possible, if direct action and grassroots organisation is contrasted to the sham of parliamentary politics. Indeed, as Tom Mann shrewdly observed in July 1912: 'Political action is of no use whatever.'

In many respects our huge solidarity meetings for the electricians in February and later in March and May, was reminiscent of past working class radicalism and reinforced Mann's message. As disillusionment with party politics grows the Social Forum movement will have an important role to play as a mechanism for facilitating, informing, co-ordinating and networking social, community and political protest.

Cock of the North

Spanish trade unions by B. Bamford

SINCE EARLY SEPTEMBER there has been a fascinating stream of emails on the Burnley website: www.burnley.org.home.

Steve of Sol Fed has been in fine fettle describing the history of the Spanish anarchist/syndicalist trade unions as follows:

'After the death of Franco the CNT re-emerged (it had been illegal). Some wanted limited co-operation with the Spanish state so a split occurred—(leaving the) CNT/AIT and (the) CNT/U. When the question came up of the rights to historical patrimony of the CNT name and property, i.e. returning what was taken from (the CNT) when Franco seized power, the CNT/U wanted it and the Spanish state used their existence to refuse to hand anything over. Finally the CNT/AIT got the rights to the buildings and the name ('CNT'). So there remains some suspicion on both sides, although the two organisations have worked together in disputes (like at the Cadiz dockyard).'

Steve continues: 'The CNT/AIT are in the same International as the Solidarity Federation. Thinking about it there is nothing to stop the Northern Anarchist Network from approaching both (the CNT and the CGT), it is just that the CNT would probably ask the Solidarity Federation for our opinion etc....'

Nothing much wrong with any of this except the it doesn't make clear that the anarchists had to use the Spanish Courts to get their money back. Spanish anarchist suing other anarchists; a strange sight indeed. But then the Spanish movement has always been much more pragmatic than the British movement which may explain why even today they are more successful.

I myself was a member of the CNT/AIT in the 1980s, but never joined the Solidarity Fed. after I returned from Spain in 1988. I was observer for the Direct Action Movement (SFs predecessor), at the CNT Congresso-V in 1979, when the breakaway first occurred. In view of my involvement with Spanish anarchism since 1963, this was a sad event. It was as if the Spanish anarchists were going through a male menopause in public. The problem, looking back, may have been the strong influence of the old Spanish exiles from France and elsewhere, who tried to impose a certain old fashioned model on the post Franco CNT, and this was resisted by some of those who stayed in Spain to resist the regime.