

# Subversion

Number 19

## Building Claimants' Counter Power

## Fighting the Job Seekers Allowance



### also in this issue ....

Merseyside Dockers ..... Detroit Newspaper Strike .....

The End of Anarchism - readers reply ....

Open Letter to Class War ..... Posties Strikes

**Free!**





We meet regularly for political discussion and to organise our activities. The following is a brief description of our basic political principles:

- We are against all forms of capitalism; private, state and self-managed.
- We are for communism, which is a classless society in which all goods are distributed according to needs and desires.
- We are actively opposed to all ideologies which divide the working class, such as religion, sexism and racism.
- We are against all expressions of nationalism, including "national liberation" movements such as the IRA.
- The working class (wage labourers, the unemployed, housewives, etc.) is the revolutionary class; only its struggle can liberate humanity from scarcity, war and economic crisis.
- Trade unions are part of the capitalist system, selling our labour power to the bosses and sabotaging our struggles. We support independent working class struggle, in all areas of life under capitalism, outside the control of the trade unions and all political parties.
- We totally oppose all capitalist parties, including the Labour Party and other organisations of the capitalist left. We are against participation in fronts with these organisations.
- We are against participation in parliamentary elections; we are for the smashing of the capitalist state by the working class and the establishment of organisations of working class power.
- We are against sectarianism, and support principled co-operation among revolutionaries.
- We exist to actively participate in escalating the class war towards communism.

# Subversion 19

## Introduction

In this issue we are once again publishing a number of articles by fellow revolutionaries who are not members of Subversion. These are the articles on the JSA, the Merseyside Dockers Dispute and the Detroit Newspaper Strike. The last two of these refer to 'workplace' struggles and the role of the unions. For those not familiar with our views, we want to make our position clear. We think, based on current and historic experience, that successful resistance to any major attack on our class, and the possibility of going on the offensive against capitalism is dependent on workers going outside and against trade unionist ideology (including its 'rank and file' variations).

However, we recognise that this is an intensively **practical process** which is not assisted by simply shouting anti-union slogans. It demands, from revolutionaries in particular, an understanding of the specifics and internal dynamics of particular struggles (born wherever possible from practical involvement) as well as an understanding of the general economic, social and political background to struggle.

It is in this context that we have published these contributions. It does not follow that we agree with every detailed reference or turn of phrase used by the authors, but in the interests of open and honest debate we are not in the habit of altering others' words.

We welcome all contributions from those basically sympathetic to our politics as well as letters from anyone wishing to comment on the contents of the bulletin.

## Subversion cover disc offer

Due to space limitations, we had to leave out three articles from this issue. They are: a detailed piece on the JSA, a review of a pamphlet about Anton Pannekoek and an account from a prisoner in the USA on state executions. We will probably be printing these in the next issue of Subversion. In the meantime, if you can't wait to read them, send us a blank 3.5" disc and we will send it back to you packed with these article and other goodies off the Internet.

## Begging time again.....

Our appeal for funds in the last issue brought in donations of over £70.00, for which we are incredibly grateful. However, our finances are still in a desperate state. As we said before, it costs around £200.00 to print an issue of Subversion and another £100.00 for mailing costs and the like. So if you feel you can spare us a few bob, then please make cheques, p.o.'s payable to **Subversion** and send them to:

**Subversion, Dept 10, 1 Newton Street,  
Manchester M1 1HW**



# Three Strikes and You're Out!

## Building Claimants' Counter Power

### THE FREE RIDE IS OVER FOR BENEFIT OFFICE BULLIES

Edinburgh Claimants and The Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh have launched a new direct action policy to resist bullying benefit office officials. It's called THREE STRIKES AND YOU'RE OUT. This is how it works.

If an official harasses you or cuts your benefit report them to Edinburgh Claimants - ring 332 7547.

Officials found guilty of harassing claimants will be given a written warning.  
**STRIKE ONE!**

A second complaint against the same individual will result in a final written warning.  
**STRIKE TWO!**

Any further complaints against that official and details of their offences, along with a massive photo of them, will be transformed into a poster to be distributed throughout Edinburgh. Offending officials can also expect an angry demo against them in their own offices. **STRIKE THREE - and OUT!**

If you want to resist dole harassment  
- ring us if you are harassed - join us in the fight back - get together with your mates, accompany each other to interviews, go together and complain to the manager if you are harassed

*This is an excerpt from Edinburgh Claimants' latest leaflet, published spring 1996. At the latest conference in Sheffield on 25 May the Groundswell network of independent claimants' groups decided to implement 3 Strikes activity Britain-wide.*

### Hitting Where It Hurts

Edinburgh Claimants activists delivered a 3 Strikes first warning letter on 16th May. The target was one Alistair Mathieson, restart interviewer at Torphichen St Unemployment Benefit Office. At our anti Job Seekers Allowance demo on 9 April a claimant had told us that he had just been forced onto a Jobplan workshop by Mathieson, who threatened his benefit. This

despite the claimant's protests that he had no wish to waste his time on this useless activity. Mathieson's name was familiar, and a check on our previous Dole Harassment Exposed leaflets revealed that he had already committed at least 2 previous anti claimant offences. In the circumstances a first warning letter was the least we could do.

Our first task was to track Mathieson down - we didn't know what he looked like. The receptionist tried to mislead us, but after a few minutes we'd fingered him. Six of us strode purposefully through the staff section of the open plan office towards Mathieson's desk, where he was grilling another claimant. The Great Harrasser went ballistic. Jumping up, he dramati-

cally pointed and shouted "Don't move! Stop right there.". We explained our mission. Mathieson waved his hands wildly, yelling "Call the police! Call the police!"

At this point manager Mr. Thomson turned up. This was fortunate, because we had a warning letter for him too. (Our policy is that managers must be held responsible for harassment by their staff) Thomson fumed and raged, threatening that if we returned to deliver another letter he would punish claimants by stopping signing on. We resumed our leafletting outside, well satisfied with the impact we had made.

### Claimants' Counterpower

Hopefully this gives some idea what the 3 Strikes policy practically involves. In my opinion it should be seen as much more than an imaginative stunt or a publicity device. It should be seen as part of the process of building a Claimants' counterpower. An ambitious project, but a necessary one - not just around the benefits system, but in all areas of social life where capitalism and patriarchy reproduce relationships of oppression and exploitation.

The medium term aim is that any significant acts of harassment or benefit cuts at any benefit offices should be known about and practically resisted. The benefit office management and restart interviewers etc. should know that if they force someone onto a cheap labour scheme, cut their benefit or whatever, then there is a good chance that there will be direct action against them in their own offices. They will then be more reluctant to clamp down on claimants. The balance



# Three Strikes and You're Out!

of power will start to change. They will be more scared of us than we are of them.

The initiative is particularly important at this time with the Job Seekers Allowance starting in October 1996. The state can pass repressive new laws attacking the working class - but whether the new law can function or not depends on what happens everyday in real life, it depends on the extent of resistance. Remember the poll tax!

## Harassing the harassers

To enable the 3 Strikes policy to have a real effect the claimants' groups will need to establish a tangible presence at particular benefit offices, through regular stalls, leafleting, flyposting, stickering, demos etc.. There needs to be an address - better still a phone number - where claimants can get in touch with info about how they've been harassed. The claimants groups will need to seek out info on harassment, asking fellow claimants who are friends and/or fellow activists in different struggles if they've been hassled. We need to spread the consciousness - we don't need to worry alone, to be humiliated, to accept being treated like shit. There is something we can do about it.

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***Whether the new law can function or not depends on what happens in everyday life. Remember the Poll Tax!***

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The 3 Strikes policy is just an early step in building claimants counter power. When we deliver a warning letter to an official guilty of harassment we should also be trying to get the decision changed in the claimant's favour. This does require some knowledge of benefit rules etc.. But we shouldn't fall into the trap of becoming welfare rights professionals. The aim should always be to collectivise the struggle.

The public delivery of warning letters, reporting acts of harassment in news-sheets like Edinburgh's Dole Harassment Exposed, going in numbers to the benefit office to back up a wronged claimant, and of course the 3rd Strike and you're out flyposting and demos - these are all tactics which can help develop the consciousness and practice of claimants resistance.



## A Climate of Resistance

Simultaneously with our groups operating the 3 Strikes policy we need to encourage a general climate of resistance among claimants. This already exists to a degree, as those who have been forced onto Jobplans and Restart courses know. Our groups can't begin to deal with all cases of benefit cuts and harassment, we need to spread the idea that you always go to tricky interviews with a mate, that if you are harassed or your benefit cut you go to the office with a few friends, demand to see the supervisor/manager and get it sorted out.

We definitely want claimants to report cases of harassment to the claimants groups - but we want to go further and see more and more claimants getting active in resistance, whether in the formal groups or with their friends in a more informal way. We certainly don't want to be seen as the super-activists who will zap the benefit office baddies on behalf of a mass of passive

claimants.

## Fighting Back Is Fun!

But despite this limitation the 3 strikes practice has a lot to recommend it. For a start - it's fun! Virtually all claimants we've talked to think it's a great idea. It's the sort of action which can enthuse people to participate. This is important if lots of people are to get involved. (Too much political activity is like a chore or a duty which only fanatics like me will get involved in.)

3 Strikes focuses on an important real point at which the state attacks claimants - the imposition of discipline and benefit cuts (e.g. compulsory schemes/crap jobs/ Child Support Act harassment/ fraud investigations) in Benefits Agency and Unemployment Benefit offices / Job Centres. 3 Strikes is a way in which collective direct action can be mounted to win some small - but real - victories for claimants. If the Groundswell decision to practise 3 Strikes Britain-wide becomes a widespread reality then 3 Strikes could play a part in making the Job seekers Allowance unworkable. Finally, it's not enough to struggle just to stop things getting worse, we need to be developing a strategy to challenge the ruling class's monopoly of power and wealth. 3 Strikes can be an important element in an ongoing process of struggle to build up claimants counter power.

**Claim what's yours - the world.**

## E-Mail?

**You can contact Subversion by sending a message to:  
106014.55@compuserve.com.**

An interesting source of discussion on the Internet is AUT-OP-SY set up "to provide a forum in which to explore the changing class composition and class struggle within the planetary work machine.."If you'd like to join the list, send the message "subscribe aut-op-sy" to:  
majordomo@lists.village.virginia.edu



# What's The Best Way For Claimants To Fight Back?

The potential effectiveness of 3 strikes can be illustrated by comparing it with some other usual forms of claimants groups activities.

Welfare rights advice and representation - this does have the merit of dealing with real problems and hopefully gaining real improvements, but in its traditional form is disempowering to the claimant, involving reliance on an expert. Even in the more collective form of advice-giving as practised (more in the 70's than today) by Claimants Unions, it doesn't do much to collectivise open resistance or struggle.

Conventional marches, campaigns and demos - though these can sometimes have a limited publicity value, this sort of protest and campaign activity has virtually no effect on government and ruling class attacks. This kind of activity, when inevitably it fails, can lead to demoralisation and apathy, so it's often worse than useless.

Direct action occupations of benefit offices etc against attacks such as the Job Seekers Allowance - very useful as part of a wider process, which includes 3 Strike type activity, but on their own these sort of actions, though direct in one sense, are still largely symbolic in terms of any real effect. This is because (1) they are far too short lived and temporary a dislocation of business as usual to stop the introduction or functioning of measures such as the JSA, and (2) they don't usually really focus on the points at which repressive measures are actually imposed on claimants.

There are recent examples of real effective direct action claimants resistance which has actually won victories - I would hope that 3 strikes could be seen and be developed in a similar way, but hopefully with a broader counter power perspective.

The physical opposition to the special dole snoopers squads in the mid 1980's. In cities like London, Glasgow and Edinburgh snoopers were confronted as they lurked outside benefit offices, photographed and forced to abandon their snoop watch. Their photos and names were reproduced on widely distributed leaflets and posters. They were followed everywhere, even to their flats and hotel rooms. Their cars suffered mysterious damage. Many benefit office workers refused to co-operate with the snoopers and some workers alerted claimants groups to the snoopers presence. The effective country-wide opposition to these snoopers operations was - I would imagine - an important factor in the authorities largely stopping the use of such high profile touring fraud squads.

The widespread refusal by single mothers, and by fathers, to co-operate with the Child Support Act has gone a long way towards making this oppressive Act unworkable. In early 1995 the government announced that CSA action on 300,000 CSA pending cases of lone parents on benefits had been suspended indefinitely. No action was to be taken against 50,000 lone

parents who refused to co-operate with the Child Support Agency. This seemingly largely informal practice of non-cooperation has been encouraged and helped by the groups affiliated to the Campaign Against the Child Support Act who have done invaluable work in spreading info on the tactics of non-co-operation ((how to avoid telling the CSA the father's name etc).

Written by an individual member of Edinburgh Claimants. The group can be contacted at Edinburgh Claimants / Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh, c/o Peace and Justice Centre, St Johns, Princes St., Edinburgh EH2.

## Footnote

**This article has not gone into the question of claimant - worker relationships, possibility of joint activity and so on. I do think it's important, Edinburgh claimants regularly leaflet benefit office workers to appeal for us to work together to fight the attacks the government is making on us both - but there just wasn't space to go into it properly here. But it must be said that it's important to explain to workers that 3 strikes is only aimed against the real nasty zealots. The latest Groundswell mailing suggests that 3 Strikes could be extended to include managers who abuse the benefit office workers, this seems like a good idea.**

Groundswell, c/o Claimants Action Group, East Oxford Community Centre, Princes St., Oxford. Tel. 01865 723750. New info pack for potential and existing claimants' groups available.


Campaign Against the Child Support Act, PO Box 287, London NW6 5QU.

Info on resistance to snoopers squads from Counter Information Sept. '85 and Sept. '87 (SAE & 19p stamp to CI c/o Transmission, 28 King St., Glasgow G1 5QP)



# after our last issue and .....

# Spain 1936 - The End of Anarchism?



# .... this time .... our readers respond ....

Dear Subversion

I read your article 'The End of Anarchism' when it was first published ten years ago. I thought then that it was a good article and I thought so again when I re-read it in issue no. 18 of Subversion. The article effectively warned against seeing self-managed capitalism as a solution to our problems and showed that much of what passed for the 'Spanish Revolution' had no communist content whatsoever.

However, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that there were those in Spain at the time who were committed to the same sort of communism that Subversion stands for. Indeed, it would have been strange if that were not the case, because communist initiatives have generally been present in all the major upheavals of capitalism, all the way back to the Diggers in the English Civil War in the seventeenth century, let alone in the more advanced circumstances of the Spanish Civil War three hundred years later.

When I visited Spain in 1995, I attended a public meeting in Barcelona which was addressed by an old militant of the Civil War era, Abel Paz. Some of his reminiscences were sufficiently exciting to persuade me to read his "Durruti: the People Armed" (Montreal: Black Rose, 1976) when I got back to England. In this book there are various examples given of communist initiatives, such as the armed uprising by miners around Barcelona in January 1932 which 'led to the proclamation of libertarian communism, the abolition of private property and money' (p.117). To this Paz adds the footnote: 'The destruction of the State and the abolition of classes are born from the same act: the abolition of money and property' (p.124).

Perhaps the most eye-catching of these examples is a first-hand account of one incident in which Paz participated in 1936. It

is worth letting him tell the story in his own words:

'The author took part in various actions of this kind on the morning of July 20th. The one which impressed him most was the attack on a branch bank in Calle Mallorca in Barcelona. Nobody in the bank resisted the people. However a group of women, assisted by only a few men and children had seized the building and made a bonfire in the street with the furniture. Throwing this furniture into the fire the people were full of rage but also of pleasure, as if they were the judges in a cause which had been waiting to be judged for a millenium. Among other things boxes full of bank notes were thrown into the fire and absolutely no one had the idea of putting the money in their pockets. They seemed to be saying that the world of trade, the world of salaries and exploitation were really disappearing forever.' (p.217).

Sadly, they were wrong, because such initiatives were overwhelmed by the kind of developments which your article skilfully explained. Yet, in our eagerness to debunk the myths that cling to Republican Spain, let us not forget that some working men and women of the time were inspired by communism. It is important to remember the countless occasions when such initiatives have occurred (in Spain and many other parts of the world). Were we not to do so, communism would become nothing more than a disembodied ideal, a nice idea perhaps, but remote from the real struggles of this world. I know for a fact that Subversion does not see communism like that.

JC

Dear Subversion,

Reprinting an article from Wildcat that is at least ten years old crassly called the End of Anarchism, on the Spanish revolution, goes against everything I expected from people I regarded as intelligent, critical revolutionar-

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**Reprinting an article from Wildcat that is at least ten years old crassly called the End of Anarchism, on the Spanish revolution, goes against everything I expected from people I regarded as intelligent, critical revolutionaries.**

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ies. So Anarchism ended with the Spanish Revolution, did it? You might as well say that Marxism ended with the First World War, with the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution, with the German Revolution. Sure, Anarcho-Syndicalism was proved wanting but that doesn't mean that Anarchism, in its revolutionary and Anarchist Communist form died.

Indeed, despite Subversion seeming to be experts on Anarchism, there seems to be a general ignorance of key Anarchist theorists and thinkers. At last year's Subversion-Anarchist Communist Federation joint day school, one long-serving Subversion comrade expressed no knowledge of the Italian Camillo Berneri, one of the key critics of CNT-FAI involvement in the Republican government.

Despite your criticisms of the rural collectives, they do remain the most advanced attempts at trying to put libertarian communism into practice, and it would be churlish to say otherwise. Of course the rural collectives were limited by the fact that war was substituted for social revolution, and for that the Spanish Anarchist movement has a lot to answer for. To cite an "anarchist puritanism" as if it were general is ill-informed, certainly in the towns

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amongst the Anarchist working class there were no such attitudes. And anyway, if it was collectively decided not to use tobacco or even coffee - and these are isolated instances - so what?

Of course you are right to cite the condition of women which failed to change in any qualitative way. But to fail to mention the libertarian organisation of women *Mujeres Libres* (especially after a major article on them in *Organise!* 32 which you must have read) which grouped 27,000 women together is misleading. But perhaps this goes along with your expressed view that working class women should not, on any occasion, organise specifically against their particular oppressions?

The criticisms you make of how the rural collectives functioned are correct as far as they go. But you place their functioning in a void. You fail to relate it to the general situation where the bourgeois Republican government was allowed to exist, where Anarchists joined both the local Catalan government and the national government, where workers councils failed to take the place of union committees, where capitalism continued to function, and where the myth of anti-fascism was substituted for social revolution.

To mention the Anarchist participation in the Republican government without mentioning the revolutionary opposition from the likes of the Friends of Durruti, sections in the Libertarian Youth, the Iron Column and Berneri is remiss. And why is it the Spanish "Revolution" throughout? Despite everything, what happened in Spain was a Revolution, and in many ways went further than other Revolutions in the 20th Century. Because if you applied the same criteria, you would be talking about a Russian "Revolution" an Hungarian "Revolution" a German "Revolution" etc.

Subversion comrades, it's time to come clean. You talk about the end of Anarchism yet you take an active part in Northern Anarchist coordinations, both in the present and the past. And what are you, exactly? At various stages, depending on your fancy, you have described yourselves as libertarian communists, anti-left communists (confusing one that many might think you were against left communism rather than against the left) or anti-State communists. Your criticisms of Marx remain restrained, whilst you have in the past published an article on Bakunin, critical in the extreme, which contained many distortions of his ideas.

Hoping to hear from you,  
Yours for libertarian communism,  
NH (member of Anarchist Communist Federation)

## subversion replies

We have no major disagreements with JC's letter which acts as a necessary reminder that, contrary to the impression we may have conveyed in the original article, the working class movement in Spain in the 1930s was not entirely lacking in positive features!

The letter from NH raises some important points about the events in Spain and about Subversion's attitude towards anarchism.

In the article in Subversion 18 we acknowledged that "some anarchists are

### Spain - a Blast from the Past

Below are two extracts from a new book of essays by Nestor Makhno, the Ukrainian anarchist. They are taken from two articles, both written in 1931 and both addressed to anarchists in Spain.

#### On Unity with the Bourgeoisie and the Bolsheviks.....

It is also vital that the workers get help to establish, on the spot, organs of economic and social self-direction - free soviets - as well as armed detachments for the defense of the revolutionary social measures that they will inevitably be imposing once they have come to their senses and broken all the chains of their slavish condition. Only in this way and by such broadly social action methods will the revolutionary workers be capable of striking while the iron is hot against the attempt by a new system of exploitation to drive the revolution off course..... Obviously they (the CNT and FAI) will have to steer clear here of unity with the political parties generally and with the Bolshevik-communists in particular .....

#### On the lack of a political programme....

What has stopped anarchists (in Spain) from putting their beliefs into practice... In the first place, the absence of a specific and detailed program has prevented them from achieving unity of action, the unity that determines the expansion of the movement during a period of revolution and its influence over everything around it.

*from: The Struggle Against the State and Other Essays, by Nestor Makhno, AK Press, £7.95*

prepared to criticise the 'Government Anarchists'". We are well aware that in 1936 there were anarchist opponents of CNT-FAI participation in the Republican Government. Doubtless we would have mentioned them if that's what the article had been about. But it wasn't.

Blame it on our general ignorance of key anarchist theorists and thinkers, but what we are not aware of is any critical appraisal of the rural collectives by revolutionary anarchists, either at the time or since. What we are more accustomed to seeing is uncritical adulation of "one of the most, if not the most, extensive and profound revolutions ever seen" (see the pamphlet by Abraham Guillen, *Anarchist economics: an alternative for a world in crisis*, reviewed in Subversion 12). Frankly it really gets on our nerves that in the face of the evidence (our article was based mainly on books written by Sam Dolgoff, Gaston Leval and Augustin Souchy - all anarchists) most (?all) anarchists still think the collectives were marvellous. That's why we referred throughout to the Spanish 'Revolution' - as a signal of our questioning of the conventional anarchist point of view.

We admit that the title of the article was poorly chosen. It would have been more accurate to have called it, 'The End of Collectivist Anarchism', or 'The End of Syndicalist Anarchism'. For NH is quite correct to distinguish these variants of anarchism from Communist Anarchism (or libertarian communism). However there is a contradiction in what he writes.

On the one hand he says our criticisms of the rural collectives are "correct as far as they go". We remind readers that this criticism was that, in most places, the rural collectives exhibited all the hallmarks of capitalism, e.g. the existence of a wages system, money, operation of the law of value, production for the market, etc.

On the other hand, he says that "despite" these criticisms, the rural collectives "do remain the most advanced attempts at trying to put libertarian communism into practice".

We don't think you can have it both ways. Either the bulk of the rural collectives were advancing towards a form of self-managed capitalism, or they were advancing towards libertarian communism. They cannot have been doing both (unless you equate libertarian communism with self-managed capitalism).

We see no reason why revolutionary Communist Anarchists should wish to defend the Collectivist Anarchism which predominated among the rural collectives in Spain - unless out of a sentimental attachment to anything draped in a black-and-red flag. But that sort of knee-jerk reaction goes against everything we expect

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# Merseyside Dockers Dispute

*In my last report dated 7 May 1996, I told of the meeting to set up a National Committee to co-ordinate and extend the work of the various supporters groups around the country. The actual result of the meeting allegedly to set up such a body was inconclusive. So far as I can tell no such body exists at the moment, although it remains the dockers stated intention to set one up. (We have published an extract from this report in the box on this page, **Solidarity and the Unions**).*



## Is that all?

The hesitation and indecision around this issue illustrates a debate or argument going on within the committee and the dockers leadership. I cannot say, since I am not privy to their discussions as to what their thinking is, but perhaps it is a sign of the limits of their struggle and its form of organisation that they seem unable to confront, never mind resolve their dilemma. Whilst my purpose in writing my reports is obviously to support the dockers and their struggle, I also wish to act as a catalyst for discussion of the wider issues which their struggle raises. I am also trying to develop my own ideas and understanding of their struggle.

Much comment on the dispute, and some of it directed at my reports, is on

## Solidarity and the Unions

It has to be asked - what does support or solidarity mean in such circumstances? In the very first report I ever made on this dispute in November 1995 I posed this self same question. Already the major issue behind the dispute had become clear and that was casualisation. So far as can be judged all the support groups seem to see their role principally as that of raising funds, holding meetings at which dockers or Women of the Waterfront speak. Whilst these activities are important, the issue itself has hardly even begun to be confronted. Attempts have been made to picket or occupy premises used by Drake International who recruited and trained the scabs, but most of the speakers and the dockers themselves seemed to be fixated by the idea that somehow these support groups could organise strike action. Yet even Jimmy Nolan who is the most cautious of the stewards had to admit that the dockers were in no position to ask people to put themselves 'on the line' by taking a day off work to support them. He is of course absolutely right, and in previous reports I have commented on the inability of the base of the trade union movement locally to mount any real campaign in favour of the dockers. Being the hard headed realists that they are, most trade union officials know this too. As ever there are exceptions to every statement and locally workers at AC Delco in Kirkby deserve particular mention - and I am sure there are other individual plants, factories and worksites throughout the country doing likewise - but they are conspicuous by their exceptional nature.

The belief by the Left that somehow a huge movement of solidarity is being held back by 'traitors' and 'sell-outs' amongst the trade union leadership/bureaucracy is shown to be completely superstitious and plain wrong. There were enough lay, full time and ex full time officials of various trade unions attending the conference who spoke eloquently of their efforts in the past to, for instance, argue for solidarity action at the time of the miners strike in 1984 to expose that particular piece of Leftist nonsense. Even worse however is the blatant attempt by some Leftists to force 'the leaders' [Morris, or even worse Monks of the TUC] to ORDER blacking, solidarity or whatever. I have no wish to take part in building a movement capable of that sort of crap.

Now it may be true as some speakers said that there is now a changed mood amongst workers. That the generalised insecurity brought about by increasing unemployment, short term contracts, the changed balance of power at work and so on, may indeed be bringing about an increased willingness to struggle, cannot be gainsaid. But we do ourselves no favours by relying on what perhaps may be the kind of wishful thinking that was so much in evidence on Saturday. By contrast we might do far better to try and understand what has brought about the situation we are in today, so that it can give us a clue to the growth of movements in the future. It might then be possible to do some lateral thinking and find other ways for today's working class to give expression to their struggle and themselves than the usual knee jerk strike action. And also we might do better to LISTEN to workers in struggle who are grappling in practice with TODAY'S SOCIAL REALITY.



# .....the struggle continues

Firstly, let's see if we can deal with the question of the relationship of the dockers to 'their' trade union, the Transport & General Workers Union. In common with some others I have in the past adopted an attitude of hostility to the existing trade union movement - considering it as totally integrated into the system. I have seen nothing in this dispute to make me change my mind, but having such an understanding in the abstract has been of no concrete use - far more important has been the actual realisation of what its practical consequences are. In moving the resolution that the dockers had submitted to the conference, Bobby Moreton fresh back from Los Angeles, in a well argued and powerful speech, set out their thinking. He said that perhaps the fact that the dispute was unofficial and illegal, had been a source of its strength. Had Bill Morris [General Secretary of the T&G] not been afraid of 'sequestration' of union funds and property, he and the Executive might more easily have been persuaded to make the dispute official. That being the case, argued Bobby, almost certainly there would have been some rich ex-dockers on Merseyside and - NO DISPUTE AT ALL.

This is such a profound comment and a real indication of how the dockers are thinking. So, he went on, please don't amend our resolution, especially to mount a campaign to make the dispute 'official' or put 'pressure' on union leaders. Hardly had he sat down when the first speaker called, moved an amendment to do precisely that. Obviously, since he appeared to have swallowed the 'Transitional Programme' whole, we got treated to the whole argument - 'make them fight', 'expose the leadership' 'calling for this or that policy' etc. etc. Are these people deaf as well as 60 odd years out of date? How many times do we have to have our heads bashed against the trade union door before they reckon we learn a lesson?

The dockers have their relationship with the trade unions 'sorted'. For the moment they have the use of substantial trade union owned assets, and a substantial sum being regularly 'donated' to their 'hardship fund'. In return the union has no involvement in the dispute and that's the way the dockers want to keep it. Does it really need to be spelled out any more clearly? Undoubtedly some officials support the dockers and may even be helping behind the scenes, but just as likely there are as many opposed to the dockers. Either way **YOU CAN'T BUILD A STRATEGY ON THE UNIONS**. Is that so difficult to understand or am I on a different planet to the rest of the Left? It is simply a question of practicality for the dockers. Would that the Left could show such flexibility of thought. I hope for the moment that this disposes of this question.

question of the trade unions and what is the relationship of workers in struggle to them. I have had cause to deal with this question before, but it seems that my views are being [deliberately?] mis-represented or misunderstood. I am not going to name the organisations involved, they certainly know who they are, but it is the question itself that needs dealing with. Communists [for that is how I would describe myself] can have their own views and disagreements. For most of the time these are quite esoteric and confined to small groupings whose existence and importance is marginal at best.

**As time goes on MDHC will be able to drive up productivity levels without any or with very little collective resistance from the workforce.**

However there comes a time when the question assumes a practical importance as it has done in this dispute. At this time it of no use communists going around denouncing this or that policy or strategy - this only serves to INCREASE the gulf of understanding that already unfortunately exists. Whilst I for one have made no secret of my views on this question, I have been more concerned with the PROCESS through which a section of workers comes to grips with the reality around them.

So essentially after 7 months of struggle I see the dockers position as follows:

The dockers by going directly international to dock and transport workers all over the world have managed to bring sufficient pressure onto the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, so that they cannot be ignored. They are for the moment the only section of workers who have dared to challenge the prevailing offensive of the employers and their their constant demand for increased 'flexibility'. This is why the issue at the centre of the dispute - casualisation - is the one that they constantly emphasise. And just as constantly the MDHC denies that is employing 'casual labour'.

However the reality is that the dockers remain 'locked out'; and MDHC has a replacement workforce whom they have recruited and trained, and which is working alongside approximately half the original workforce. As time goes on MDHC will be able to drive up productivity levels without any or with very little collective resistance from the workforce. This after all was what the dispute was always all about - as the recent

*(Continued on page 10)*



# Merseyside Dockers continued

(Continued from page 9)

'negotiations' have revealed.

Liverpool docks were unique in the respect that it was the only port in Britain where, after the national strike of 1989, a recognised [by the employers] collective workers organisation still existed. The view has been advanced that this dispute is the 'last stand' of a dinosaur workers movement, dominated by sectional trade union organisation . . . and at the same time this is the beginning of a 'fight back', but that same trade union movement will 'betray' the workers. As ever, elements of a real situation have been used to bolster an ideological outlook, instead of the actual situation being looked at in all its complexity. Neither of the above views, however much they may contain elements of reality, can offer us a way forward.

I am of the opinion that the existing trade union movement in all its forms represents a barrier to any new movement and that ultimately it will have to be confronted and destroyed. But as I also have pointed out, such an abstract understanding is of no practical use in the concrete situation the dockers find themselves in.

Nobody who knows anything of the history of the dockers attempts at self organisation in Britain since the Second World War, can deny that dockers

**the dockers have successfully challenged the new form of work organisation casual working, short term contracts, flexibility in the form of call outs, minimum hours**

are rightly suspicious of the union that 'represents' them - the Transport and General Workers Union.

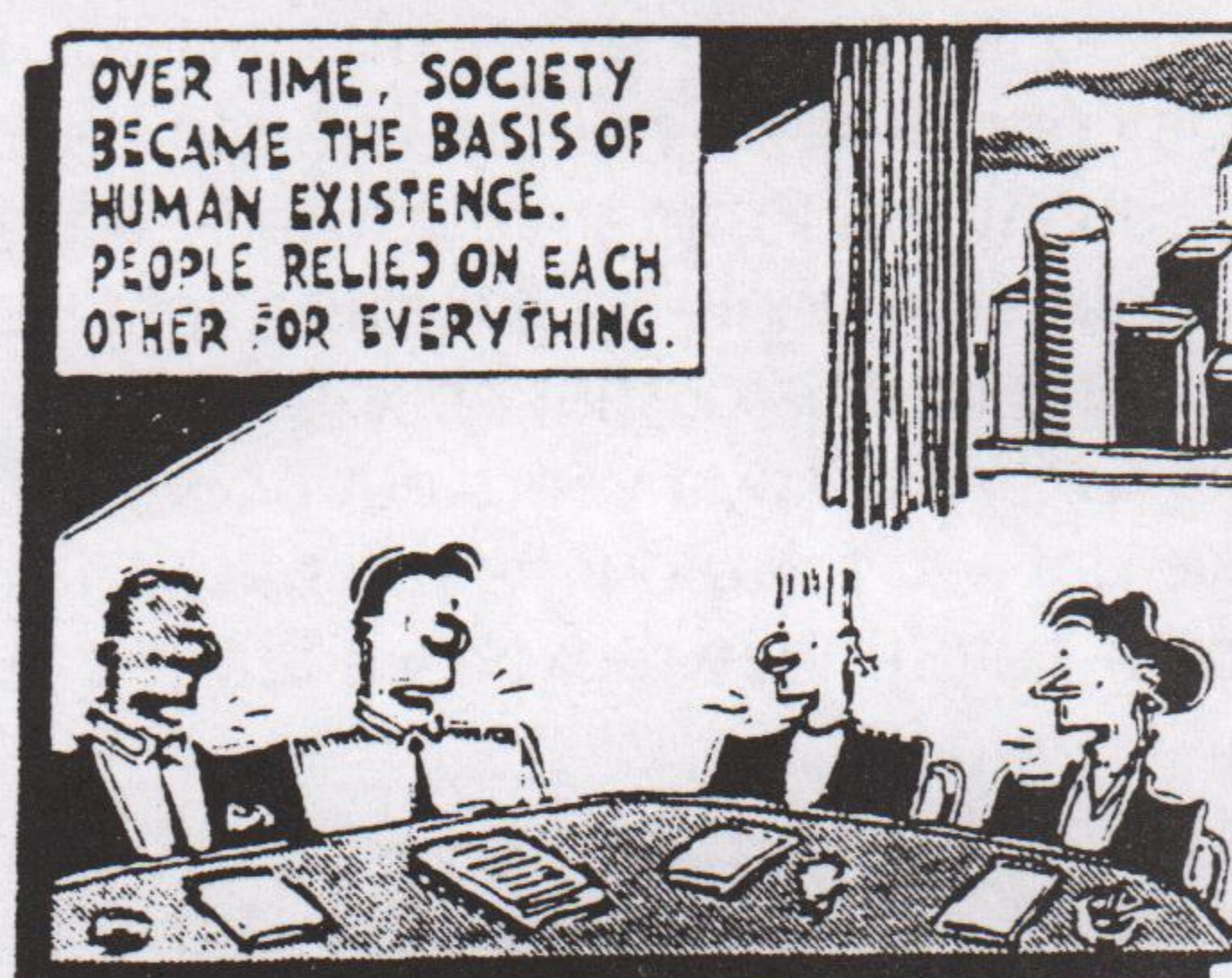
When in the 1850s unions were first able to maintain their more or less permanent existence instead of disappearing with the business cycle as had, up to then, been the case and in accordance with bourgeois economic theory,

this created a problem for the authorities. How should they deal with this new organisation? We are all aware of the history and the argument that initially at least, only skilled workers were able to keep their organisations in being, so they formed an 'aristocracy' of labour. But in the 1890s and just before the First World War, millions of workers in this country were unionised for the first time. What was the response of the State? - It was to attempt to draw all these new organisations into the management of the system, initially to keep the war going. But later, in the form of the Turner-Mond talks of 1928, this was formalised and by the late 30s the unions were already assured of a place in the economy. Keynes and his 'New Economics' simply formalised and rationalised a process that was **ALREADY UNDERWAY**.

Thus the T&G was a more than willing participant in the National Dock Labour Scheme which was the result of the dockers long fight to get rid of casual working in their industry. This was an organisation set up by the State, following Keynesian attempts to 'plan' the class struggle and use it as a motor of development for capitalism. When, in common with similar schemes in Europe and North America this mechanism began to falter in the late 60s, the T&G was its biggest defender, hankering after its role in the **MANAGEMENT** of the labour process. This it secured with the Jones Aldington agreement on the docks. But this was never going to be a permanent solution to a problem that has its roots in the **FUNDAMENTAL** antagonism between Capital and Labour, which more than anything else the Keynesian system and its Labour Party backers at the time, wished to hide. So in 1989 there was a last ditch attempt to preserve collective organisation on the docks in this country - which was defeated. Nationally the unions had no answer to the combination new technology [containerisation] and the demand for 'flexibility' that dock work has always meant.

In Liverpool, some dockers organisation managed to exist in a quasi inde-

pendent manner from the union. The MDHC realising that the union was no longer serving any useful role in the management of the workforce, decided that a more confrontational style was needed and could be afforded. Hence the mass sacking of almost 500 who refused to accept the new 'realities' of the labour market.





In getting this far, and maintaining their collective organisation, the dockers have successfully challenged the new form of work organisation with which we are all becoming familiar - casual working, short term contracts, flexibility in the form of call outs, minimum hours contracts and so on. But they have done it on the basis of their old organisation and with many of their existing views and conceptions unaltered. Thus we can say **THAT THE DOCKERS THINKING IS WAY BEHIND THEIR PRACTICAL MOVEMENT.**

So far, for instance they have not been willing to challenge the right of the T&G to 'represent' them - being content to speak the language of procedure and collective agreements - even when their employer, the MDHC, has unilaterally torn them up. Even when in the last set of negotiations the MDHC roundly abused them - calling them workshy, prone to unofficial strikes, unwilling to retrain and so on - they indignantly denied this, when in fact it is the truth. The truth is that by their actions they rejected wage labour, but they remain unwilling to recognise it - except perhaps in private and amongst people they know to be sympathetic.

Now it is no good standing on the sidelines and berating the dockers, as some have done, for not confronting the union [or even worse condemning them and their struggle out of hand as doomed from the start - à la RCP]. If you are going to be taken seriously in making this argument you must be able to show what can and should be done instead. When it comes to this practical test many of the critics are found wanting. What for instance should be the attitude when the union [as it has done] gives a substantial and regular 'donation' to the strikers hardship fund? Or, concretely, should the dockers abandon their almost full time use of the T & G building in Islington? Most importantly, when an official called Bowers, of the ILA on the East Coast of America, negotiates a deal with ACL who account for 40 per cent of the turnover in the Port of Liverpool, that says ACL will pull out of the Port unless the dockers demands are met - do you gratefully accept it or call him a liar and a bureaucrat on the make? Even now, when it looks as if he will not or perhaps cannot deliver on what

he said - do you denounce him, call him a traitor and a sell out? Or do you quietly learn your lesson, send delegates out to the West Coast and attempt to do your own work? And who knows it might even bear fruit - the West Coast and East Coast dockers organisations are talking to one another for the first time since 1934, - is this all nothing more than bureaucratic manoeuvring?

When it is looked at in this way - you soon realise, as the dockers have, that it makes no sense to antagonise the union - **IF YOU ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO OFFER A CONCRETE ALTERNATIVE THAT REALISTICALLY CHALLENGES THE UNION.**

In any case, all the ritual condemnation from the ICP and others has done, is to get the dockers backs up and force the dockers back onto the ground they know - which we have already argued is changing all around them. The realisation of what the unions are and why they must be confronted and destroyed **HAS TO COME FROM THE DOCKERS THEMSELVES.**

Nevertheless I am bound to ask the question of a movement that can organise an international rank and file conference, send pickets 6000 miles round the world and provoke possibly a new form of struggle among previously 'unorganised' and casualised lorry drivers on the Californian Coast and act as a catalyst for struggles in Europe - How is it that it cannot find its way out of the impasse currently facing it? How is it that it cannot generalise its struggle on an issue that affects millions of workers in this country and is directly preventing their own dispute from achieving success?

The old form of struggle that the dockers were used to - where because of their sectional power and collective organisation, they actually had **NO NEED TO PICKET** - has gone. In addition the things that went with the old struggle - 'rank and file' meetings, caucuses of shop stewards, 'co-ordinating committees' on which political deals could be stitched up, etc. is paralysed by its reliance on the trade union machine. Those within the support groups in this country, who orientate themselves to this trade union base, can only pass resolutions, appeal for



money, and worst of all urge national leaderships to make the dispute official.

Now I am not going to denounce anyone in this dispute who thinks that they are proceeding along the correct lines. Obviously you proceed on the basis of what you understand [and in the case of the Left in this country that does not appear to be overmuch], but so much of what I have observed and heard in this dispute is simply a reaction to what is going on rather than the result of considered thought. This is one of the reasons why so much of the Left is quite unable to have anything meaningful to say - to the extent that the SWP is still trying to promote 'mass pickets' - and this months after the stewards have explained in some detail why this

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**The old form of struggle that the dockers were used to - where because of their sectional power and collective organisation, they actually had NO NEED TO PICKET - has gone.**

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is neither possible nor desirable.

But certain realities must be faced. One of them is the daily and almost routine crossing of the dockers picket lines by lorry drivers, some of whom are known personally to the dockers.

Transport is now one of the major cycles of capital. The capitalists, in the form of management gurus and 'human relations experts' openly boast of their

*(Continued on page 17)*



## Letter from America

# Detroit Newspaper Strike

Last night (May 1st), two striking newspaper workers from Detroit came to speak at what was a modestly attended strike support meeting in Baltimore. I was involved with the ad hoc committee that put the event together.

Since this informal letter is going out to several people outside the U.S., let me review briefly some of the facts surrounding the strike, which is the most significant labor struggle going on in the States right now.

Last July, 2,000 workers organized in 6 different unions struck the two major Detroit newspapers, the Free Press and Detroit News, who far from being rivals, are instead organized in a JOA (Joint Operating Agreement) whereby both papers cooperate in various ways, the most significant being a combined Sunday edition. Both papers are owned by huge national media corporations (Knight-Ridder and Gannet, the latter publishers of "U.S.A. Today").

Besides the usual horrific concession demands (casualization, merit pay, health care cuts), which followed tremendous concessions given up during the last contract in 1989 (one striker told how his pay had been cut \$10,000 a year alone as a result of this contract!), there is the added fact that Detroit is still one of the heaviest unionized cities still in the U.S. So this naked attack on the workers was provocative and a sure sign of the puffed-up confidence of the bosses in the current climate. Furthermore, the newspaper management has imported 2,000 goons from the Vance Security firm to police the strike - a return to the era of the Pinkertons of a century ago and a brutal sign of how labor relations are steadily peddling backwards in the U.S.

Last summer through early fall, there were several mass rallies and picket lines which attempted to shut down production involving thousands of Detroit workers. The police attacked and beat dozens of workers and on at least one occasion, the Sunday papers had to be airlifted by helicopters out of the printing plant. Rocks and bottles were thrown at the police, who fired tear gas and arrested many. In an attempt to get the paper out, 6 trucks suddenly barreled through a gate just narrowly avoiding running over several strikers. During one such rally, a newspaper truck was mysteriously turned on its side and set on fire while the T.V. cameras rolled - this arson was performed by . . . the Vance Security firm as part of a disinformation campaign to create an impression that the strikers were violent. The District Attorney's office is investigating Vance for its role in this arson.

The newspapers went to court and rapidly got an injunction limiting the number of pickets which, enforced by the union apparatus, immediately ended the rallies. As one striker pointed out, the courts work real fast when it comes to issuing injunctions and awfully slow on processing National Labor Relations Board complaints (the NLRB is a government agency set up to process and arbitrate labor disputes, including unfair work practices by employers). And this is a fact well known to management, who bragged how they would appeal any unfavorable NLRB decisions "until every striker was dead."

Since then, the strike has been at a standstill. The unions have called for a boycott of the papers which has been remarkably successful - circulation has plummeted by tens of thousands, major advertisers have pulled ads and financially it is clear the papers are losing

## The End of Anarchism?

*(Continued from page 7)*

from people we regard as intelligent, critical revolutionaries.

On the issue of working class women "organising specifically against their particular oppressions": we want working class women (and men) to join revolutionary organisations. The article in *Organise!* 32 describes how *Mujeres Libres* was formed because of the sexism of men in the CNT-FAI. If the attitudes and behaviour of some members of an organisation prevent other members from playing as full a part as possible in the organisation, then in our opinion that organisation is not a revolutionary one.

At vital moments in the past, the line dividing revolutionaries from the rest has always cut straight through both Anarchism and Marxism, leaving some Anarchists and Marxists on the side of capitalism, and some on the side of the revolution. Just as Spain marked 'The End' of a particular form of anarchism, you could argue that the First World War and the 'revolutions' which followed it did indeed mark 'The End' of a particular form of Marxism, in the sense that the anti-working class nature of vast parts of the old labour movement was exposed for all to see.

Genuine revolutionaries have only ever been minority currents within most of what passes for Marxism and Anarchism. Genuine revolutionaries have usually found inspiration in bits of both. But we need to reject more than we accept of both traditions. We have said all this on several previous occasions, e.g. in *Subversion* 8, 14 and 15 and at various meetings including those of the Northern Anarchist Network.



# Report from Baltimore

money hand over fist. But since they are owned by large national companies who can afford to plough millions of dollars into operating at a loss, the boycott, while substantial, has not had the effect it could have.

Strikers themselves have started their own alternative Sunday paper as a way of overcoming the almost total media black-out and this weekly paper now has a circulation of several hundred thousand in the Detroit area. (One amusing anecdote about the advertising boycott: when strikers went to 7-11 requesting they not carry the papers, 7-11 quickly pulled the papers city-wide without an argument; an act which puzzled the strikers until several months later when they were speaking in NYC they discovered that during a newspaper strike there in 1987 (?), several 7-11's had mysteriously had their plate glass windows trashed and a few even set on fire. A sure sign that the bosses exchange such information!).

The unions also printed up bright red and white lawn signs saying "No Detroit News and Free Press Wanted Here" which are up at over 100,000 people's yards. But it is indicative of the viciousness of the newspaper owners that they have issued an informal "off the record" bounty of \$10 per sign for each one brought in. So the signs are snatched mysteriously at night (probably by the Vance goons) often with tire tracks on the lawn showing that it has been a hit and run affair. As proof, one union member attached a secret alarm to his lawn sign and when it was snatched, the alarm went off and he was able to confront the thief (a scab newspaper employee) who had half-a-dozen other stolen signs in the back of his truck!

Also, quite mysteriously, it seems that there is barely a functioning newspaper vending box in the Detroit area now - for some odd reason! And in the past, people who went ahead and tried to purchase scab papers anyway from these vending boxes have instead found fresh roadkill in the boxes and nary a paper! How awful!

The national AFL-CIO has claimed that winning the Detroit strike is a priority. Despite this rhetorical gesture, it is clear that they have not demonstrated this. So although they provided start-up money for the striker's own newspaper and have sent several key staff to Detroit, what the AFL considers as a priority is getting the vote out for Clinton in November - a commitment where they have put their money where their mouth is, to the tune of 36 million dollars. There is talk now of a National March in Detroit sometime in July (what one striker confusingly called a "National Strike Day"). There are still tremendous illusions or hopes among the strikers about the AFL and new Sweeney leadership still although any criticisms may have been muted out of diplomacy.

Clearly the experience of the strike has had a radicalizing effect. One of the speakers, a striking Teamster, told how he lives in Sterling Heights (a white suburb of Detroit, probably an area where white workers moved to 'escape' the inner city) and the local police were on the board of his softball team for local children. Since Sterling Heights was the location of the main printing plant for the Detroit papers, it was there that some of the most militant mass picketing took place last summer. Now he has had to fight these very same cops in the streets when they waded into the picket lines in Darth Vader type leather suits and helmets beating people right and left. This was not supposed to happen in "The American Dream". This was something that was supposed to happen in the black ghetto but not to white workers in the suburbs who 'played by the rules'.

But as the Detroit newspaper strike amply demonstrates, today there are no such safe areas left any more in the United States. Everything is up for grabs and no one is safe or protected from the current onslaught on wages and working conditions.

A final note about working to build this solidarity meeting: some attempt was made to interest the local unions in coming out or doing something. And

## Back Issues

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**Everything is up for grabs and no one is safe or protected from the current onslaught on wages and working conditions.**

it is indicative of both the erosion of basic solidarity and the absolute inertia of the traditional union apparatus (including the lefties and 'progressives' buried deep inside these bureaucratic structures) that there was practically no response whatsoever. A sure sign of the exhaustion of the traditional labor movement . . .

CP



# Democracy and Rights

*Subversion note: Both these letters have been shortened. The second one appeared in the Discussion Bulletin (Nov-Dec 1995. Address - P.O. Box 1564 Grand Rapids, Michigan 49501) and has been shortened to just the part dealing with Subversion.*

The two letters are being treated together for the purposes of this reply.

Dear Subversion,

Thanks for sending me the 4 issues of your magazine. My friends and I here in Los Angeles have enjoyed and been inspired by your refreshing approach to political issues. I was very interested in your discussion concerning animal "rights" and the whole notion of "rights" in general. In your "Bambi Lib!" article in Subversion 16 you equate the concept of Rights with supersititious beliefs such as God or the Tooth Fairy. Of course the notion of Human Rights is merely an abstraction, as are the concepts of liberty, justice or freedom, and will remain such unless they are brought down to earth. As you say, people must realize that "rights" are never handed to them, but must be fought for. You seem to object to the use of the word "Rights" and substitute the words "freedoms" or "gain". How is this, in and of itself, any advance over the use of the idea of rights, especially given the powerful (I think) symbolic effect already established within the concept of Human Rights? What I'm asking is do you feel there is really an adequate word/phrase to substitute for the concept of "Rights"? My comrades and I haven't been able as yet to come up with one.

S. (Los Angeles Workers' Voice)

*The letter below is a response to "The Revolutionary Alternative to Left-Wing Politics" - Subversion 16.*

Subversion - an excellent critique of the left, that vanguard of bureaucratization. However your interpretation of democracy and the reasons for leftism's development are crude. It is as though E.P. Thompson and Christopher Hill had never existed. You need to do a real in depth study of social history rather than reduce a highly complex development down to rhetoric about con jobs. In other words, you still remain in the left, you haven't broken with that reductionist, conspiratorial, and hyperbolic frame of mind that characterises leftism. And please do your homework before you start telling us what to believe.

Blaming working people for accepting "bourgeois democracy" also smacks of leftist elitism. The fact is, democracy originally meant direct democracy and this was how the working population saw it and was what they strived for. The fact that they were defeated and elite democracy replaced the original concept is not really their fault. Condemning the notion of "the people" is also anachronistic. Modern classes were not fully formed in 1789. There was no real industrial bourgeoisie and the few manufactureres in their tiny factories were originally master craftsmen. Politically, on one side, stood the financial or mercantilist bourgeoisie tied to the ancien regime and on the other, the artisans, peasants, professionals and nascent industrialists, i.e., the people. Hence, the concept was not fraudulent, but was an accurate description of reality. So too with populist movements in the US. "People" meant the farmers, artisans and industrial workers who faced a common enemy in the railroad barons and banking interests.

Larry Gambone (U.S.A.)

## subversion replies



The first letter asks if a better word than "rights" exists. The point made by our original article ("Horse sense" - Sub. 16) is not just about a choice of words: the concept itself gives a quite false view of reality. "Rights" (human or otherwise) implies a "legal" relationship which, whether or not it exists in actual laws enforced by governments, nonetheless exists in some "virtual reality" world outside of real social relationships. The fact that it doesn't merely express a desired end but purports to be an already existing reality (i.e. we are said to "have" rights whether or not real laws conform with the fact) shows the imaginary, indeed "paranormal" nature of these "rights".

We don't believe such a distorted view can be useful to the working class in its struggle for its interests. Far better to simply say: "the reality of our present existence is thus and so, but our interests are such, such and such - let's fight for them!"



# MODERN MORALITY



As to the second letter, we reject its argument on the following counts: "Elitism" - this implies a separation between us as revolutionaries and the working class, something we have never accepted. We are simply a part of the class. If we say workers have been duped in various ways, this means us too - were any of us born with revolutionary consciousness? To us it's a patent fact that working class people have been conned time after time after time by all manner of ruling class factions, in the past as in the present day, in every country in the world. It's absurd to say that anyone who points this out is being elitist.

As to the points about class formation: it's true that the transformation of the world in the image of capitalism has gone a long way since bourgeois democracy came into the world, but it's also continuing today, and that doesn't mean capitalist class differences don't yet exist! Even at the time of the French Revolution there was enough of a difference between Bourgeois and Proletarian for the revolutionary government to pass a law banning workers' associations because they "divided the people" or somesuch phrase. That means that "democracy" (whether "direct" or not) was fraudulent because it ignored class division and class power. And

what class did the "financial and mercantilist bourgeoisie" belong to? They were bourgeois and anti-working class - not because they were "tied to the ancien regime" but because of their own class nature. And if the nascent industrialists were not yet so obviously inimical to the developing working class, so what? Their class nature meant their ultimate alignment with the rest of the bourgeoisie was certain.

This is even more obvious in the case of the 19th century U.S. - "Railroad barons and banking interests" are clearly part of the capitalist class, which means their economic (and thus social and political) power consists of their dispossession and exploitation of the working class. Recognition of this class antagonism is crucial for any resistance, and this can only be undermined by wooly concepts like "the people".

If we compare all this with the Russian Revolution and subsequent developments, there are interesting parallels. The reactionary nature of Bolshevik ideology was certainly not obvious to the working class and peasantry in Russia at the time of the Revolution. But we have no hesitation in saying that it was nonetheless reactionary.

Cde Gambone's method of argument

is actually quite reminiscent of the Trotskyist approach: The comment about elite democracy winning out in the end and its implication that this is where the whole problem stems from (i.e. that there was nothing wrong with the original form of bourgeois democracy) recalls the well-known Trot idea that everything wrong with the Soviet Union stemmed from Stalin's takeover and that the original ideas of Leninism had nothing to do with this!

The final, point here, and one that we particularly stress, is that our vantage point at the end of a whole period of history that has followed these events gives us the benefit of hindsight (which of course is no benefit unless we use it). What might have been understandable mistakes (or it might be better to describe them as inevitable historic limitations or compromises) from people living at the time of say, the French Revolution or the Russian Revolution, are certainly NOT understandable when repeated TODAY. There is an echo of this failure to recognise the issue of class lying behind the facade of "democracy" to be found among people who often appear in the pages of the Discussion Bulletin. And this is the understanding of class struggle as the motor of historical change, rather than the strategy of just "spreading the word" and gradually recruiting more people - what can be summarised as "Winning the democratic argument".

The S.P.G.B and assorted syndicalists among others, for all that they proclaim class as the fundamental division in society, do not in our view base their strategy for revolution upon an escalation of real social struggle (without which there will be no mass change in consciousness). Arguments of socialists must be an integral part of such struggle, but are only a part of the whole - they will never amount to much in a social vacuum.

The point we're making is that abstract ideas of "democracy" can be just as big a problem today as they ever were.



# Open Letter to Class War

The letter below was given to Class War after issue 69 appeared, in the expectation that they would print it in their paper. They later told us verbally that it was "not the type of thing they put in their paper" or somesuch phrase. This was disappointing, not to say rather pathetic, but we are printing it ourselves instead in the hope that it still might provoke useful debate.

**Dear Comrades,**

SUBVERSION has always had good relations with Class War, particularly Manchester Class War with whom we have had joint public meetings on occasion. We see the CW members we know as fellow working-class revolutionaries. However, when we read your paper we notice that from time to time the most appalling reactionary shite appears in it.

We think it's about time we took you up on some of these things, and hopefully we can get a useful debate going.

The item that prompted us to write this letter was the review of "The Battle of Algiers" in CW 69, in which you indicate support (to some degree at least) for the FLN (National Liberation Front).

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**Class War has a body of opinion within it that is sympathetic to such "oppositional capitalist" movements, in particular the Irish Republicans. It goes without saying that the IRA are just another nasty bunch of "alternative rulers"**

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This organisation, after it came to power in Algeria, created a brutal capitalist regime in no way better than the

French colonial one it replaced. Three decades later the experience of living under it has driven huge numbers of people into the arms of Islamic Fascism in their desperation for an alternative (which in turn will be just as bad, of course).

Some might object that the review said the FLN were "cool" rather than using the words "we support them". But many people think Nazi uniforms were "cool". You wouldn't print that, would you? Saying something is "cool" is just a somewhat mealy-mouthed way of saying you support them.

You also say that the FLN "didn't have all the answers". On the contrary, we think they DID have all the answers -

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## Want to meet Subversion?

We occasionally have public meetings in the Manchester area. For details, write to our address: Subversion, 1 Newton Street, Manchester M1 1HW.

Members of Subversion are active in both the Manchester Class Struggle Group and the Manchester Anti-JSA Group. The Anti-JSA Group meets every fortnight in the Vine pub, Kennedy Street, off Fountain St, near Manchester Town Hall. Meetings are alternate Wednesdays, e.g. 17th July, 31st July, 14th August, 28th August and so on. For more information, write to Dept 99, 1 Newton St, Manchester M1 1HW.

If you like Subversion, then why not try:

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the answers to how to crush the working class in the interest of capitalism! That was their aim all along.

The FLN are in their class nature the same as every other "national liberation movement", that is, bourgeois. All such movements oppose the existing rulers merely in order to step into their shoes. Class War has a body of opinion within it that is sympathetic to such "oppositional capitalist" movements, in particular the Irish Republicans. It goes without saying (given what we've just said above) that we think the IRA are a nasty bunch of "alternative rulers" just like all other "national liberationists" round the world and that once in power they would create a brutal capitalist state the same as every other one. That is the nature of capitalism.

Some people say that they are "fighting the British State" or that "the Government opposes/fears them" as a reason to support them.

But exactly that argument was used during the Cold War by the supporters of the U.S.S.R. and other State Capitalist regimes as a reason for us to support them (or "defend" them, as the Trots would say).

But genuine revolutionaries don't support something just because this or that government or faction is in conflict with them. It's what they offer the working-class that's important. All capitalist factions (no matter how much they fight each other) have one thing in common: They offer only slavery, misery and war to our class. These issues are vital for revolutionaries - they can't be ignored for the sake of "unity" or whatever. Supporting independent action by the working-class for its own, independent class interest is a universe away from going around supporting counter-revolutionary bastards. Or even calling them "cool"

Yours in comradeship,

SUBVERSION

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# Trouble at Royal Mail

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action has to be taken within 28 days or another ballot has to be taken. Also there has to be 7 days notice of the commencement of industrial action. So, in order for further industrial action to be legal at least one day has to be called within the 28 day period.

It is likely that Royal Mail will try to introduce teamworking anyway, which will result in unofficial walkouts. Ever mindful of their huge salaries and the massive funds of the union our union bosses will try to make sure their arses are covered as best as possible in the event of any undisciplined action taken by us lowly pawns.

At the time of writing this your correspondent is pretty much in the dark about what is going on in the talks (read: "stitch-up") between our glorious union leaders and their chums at Royal Mail headquarters, *and* what has been happening across the country amongst posties (this is partly due to the reticence of all you radical types out there - you know who you are! - who refuse to take a wage of £4.27 an hour and infiltrate the ranks of the discontented staff at Royal Mail).

I can only give you a bit of rumour and innuendo from Scotland at this stage. It seems that Royal Mail want to avenge themselves on the successful wildcat (unofficial) strikers of late last year by provoking them into unofficial action that will not be supported by the Union. This kind of strategy could serve the current Union big wigs (in fact, Alan Johnson does seem to have all his own hair, although his face does put a lot of people in mind of a bull-dog chewing a wasp) in their efforts to thwart the rise of the left in the union hierarchy and also the waywardness of Scottish posties in general. The union has warned repeatedly that any unofficial action will be come down on very hard by the union and that any offices who take unofficial action or any reps. that support it will find themselves extremely isolated. Union headquarters are constantly engaged in a test of strength with both actual workers (in the cities) and the challengers to the

# Dockers continued

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'Just in Time' production schedules, and we marvel at how easily goods are shipped round the world, overcoming barriers of language and culture. But this success also shows a weakness. Docks without inland communications, and principally road communications, are simply useless pieces of real estate. As the action of the truck drivers in the greater Los Angeles area has shown, disrupting this flow is one of the main weapons workers have. Many of those engaged in the anti-roads struggle have demonstrated how easily road transport communications are disrupted, and this point has not been lost on some dockers.

If the docks dispute is to move forward at all, this is the major question that has to be addressed. A way has to be found of overcoming the present atomised and fractured nature of road transport. We have to realise that the industry is organised in the way it is as a RESPONSE to the class struggle that took place within it. It does not take a genius to realise that one of the driving forces behind the 'privatisation' of the railways lies in the attempt to get round a very strong, sectionally organised group of workers, who have demonstrated their power and willingness to use

their sectional strength.

To do all this a movement will have to break out of its sectional limitations, will have to overcome many of its ingrained habits and attitudes. I have tried to be as objective as I can in assessing how far and how much the dockers have done. Perhaps now after 7 months, we must realise that there is only so far such a movement can go. Perhaps given the point from where we started, much has already been, but also given the point from where we started, perhaps this is as far as this movement can go?

DG May 1996

## STOP PRESS

As a result of picketing by dockers upwards of 100 scabs have been sacked or are facing the chop, these are in two smaller companies 50% owned by MDHC.

Dockers in Vancouver have stopped loading grain ships to Liverpool.

Drake International have been forced by picketing to move their offices from the centre of London to Wembley.

throne who exploit workers' disgruntledness (consciously or unconsciously) in their efforts to take over the union. [The exact same sentence above would apply if the Union bosses were currently "left wing" rather than, as they are at present, "right wing".]

Anyway, we promise more detail in the next issue, until then, as ever:

**SUBVERSION** says:

**ALL OUT UNTIL WE DESTROY THE ENTIRE MONEY SYSTEM!!**

[see the last SUBVERSION for further background to the current troubles]

## Subversion Pamphlets

**Ireland - Nationalism and Imperialism, the myths exploded.**

**Labouring in Vain, why Labour never was a socialist party.**

**Both 50p Inc. postage.**

## Manchester Bombing

**Lack of space prevents us from going into this attack on working class people by the IRA. Suffice it to say that it reveals a typical level of callous disregard for the lives of working class people in Manchester, typical of those who seek to replace one ruling class by themselves. We have written about them before. If you want to know our more detailed views, write and we'll send you photocopies of the relevant articles and a copy of our pamphlet, advertised on this page.**



# Trouble At Royal Mail

You may have noticed that those troublesome, layabout, good-for-nothing postal workers have recently been taking the odd day off. The series of ("successful") one-day strikes {two so far, and no more in the pipeline as this is written} are mainly over Royal Mail's burning desire to introduce "teamworking" (which the bosses now refer to as a "new way of working") and a system of "one hundred per cent continuous improvement".

They also want us, in return for an hour and a half reduction in hours over a week, to be available to work an extra fifteen minutes at the end of each duty for nothing, i.e. one and a half hours a week! They also want to give us "job security until the year 2000", which is a massive three and a half years! And since only a small percentage of Royal Mail employees are on short-term contracts this can only mean that around the turn of this miserable century they want to put us all on contracts. In return for this "new way of working" they say they will increase basic pay but these words come from the rabid dogs who have been busy for ages trying to reduce the total wage bill - even on their own figures 20% will be worse off!

"Teamworking" means that delivery personnel will have to work in small teams, arranging our own holidays and covering each others duties when anyone is on holiday or sick. It is not certain that we will be paid overtime for covering each others duties. Allied to this is the concept of "one hundred per cent continuous improvement" which means that we have to clear the office completely of mail everyday and continuously improve our performance (productivity has risen 60% over the last few years, but with **no** increase in staff). If we fail at any point then we will lose the bonus that Royal Mail has decided will be the carrot that ensures we are obedient and fast-working don-



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keys. Teamworking will turn us against each other because we will learn to rely on their bonus (a paltry **maximum** of £130 per month) and if anyone fails then they will be to blame for the whole office losing its bonus. It is also possible that overtime money (if there is any!) for covering sick or holiday absences will come out of the bonus! (The practice of teamworking in the US postal service, by-the-way, has been abandoned due to its failure to work, but they have had a different system to

the one in Britain for a very long time now.)

The introduction of these plans by Royal Mail will probably mean that Postman Pat, who had the cushiest round in the entire country, will resort to taking an overdose of paracetamols.

Before the result of the strike ballot Royal Mail managers had been secretly instructed to introduce teamworking **immediately** if the result had been no to industrial action. And they are the ones who go on and on and on about negotiations and more importantly, that they want our views and our participation. Do you think maybe they are just a bunch of slimy, untrustworthy cheats?

Finally, a little bit about the tight red tape of union law these days (but don't feel sorry for the union bosses!!). All industrial action, in order to be legal, has to be the result of a ballot. Once the ballot results are in then industrial

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