

Black Eye

A Somerset Solidarity Federation Occasional. No. 5

“When I saw the picket line, that was it. No way was I crossing!”
Merseyside docker.

The Merseyside dockers, the JJ Fast Food workers, the Scottish postal workers and the French workers have shown once again that the strike remains a useful weapon against the predations of management - government ‘efficiency’ tactics, i.e. job cuts, and that working class solidarity has not been destroyed by decades of State propaganda braying that the strike is an outdated, destructive concept with no place in ‘modern society’.

**Vacancy: For
A Culture Of
Solidarity**

The fact that the postal strike was unofficial and spreading (just before the Xmas rush) meant it was even more effective in altering management attitudes. The outpouring of anger on the streets of Paris lifted the winter gloom.

What is evident is that we need to organise to combat the actions and archaic philosophies of governments and all those who seek to exploit our work and leisure time. We need to organise for removal of the roles presently surrounded by the mystique of ‘management’ and the associated paper-shuffling and ‘management-technique’ applications which simply produce more of the same sort of crap in a different form of words. The truth is that we are quite capable of managing ourselves, of deciding who does what and when, of eliminating the management waste and incompetence that goes with the fat salary and the big chair.

Building a culture of solidarity may seem a longshot given the present climate of scepticism but solidarity never really goes away. Often it seems to have been swallowed up in the maw of capitalist technocrap and become-a-capitalist-overnight diversions like the national lottery but then, suddenly, it’s in your face again and you wonder why you ever doubted its existence.

However, workers are frequently left to struggle in isolation. The state is always fearful of an outbreak and uses its laws to continually limit the areas for active solidarity in the hope that workers will tire of struggle and gradually reach an accommodation with the bosses’ desires. What it dreads most is that ‘fear of the law’ becomes an outdated attitude and that the old cry of “One for all and all for one” is taken up through the workplaces and streets.

Our aim is not to attempt to take control but to help in this process. We believe that workers should control all aspects of their struggles. We aim to make the working class and its allies aware of the necessity to take on the whole capitalist system in the certainty that breaking the chains of servitude is the only way to freedom!

Join us.

Solidarity - it get’s things done!

Open The Books!

This is one of the demands made by the 500 Liverpool dockers sacked for refusing to cross a picket line established by 80 of their comrades sacked in an earlier dispute.

"Profits of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company have risen from £8.3 million in 1989 to £336 million in 1994.

Why is such a profitable port sacking its 500 dockers? Why does such a profitable port want to use casual labour?

The company used 7 per cent of the government's shareholding to buy the port of Medway.

On whose authority?

Privatisation of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board means that the shareholders in the new company now have vast property rights on both sides of the Mersey, worth billions of pounds.

How could private shareholders "inherit" this land and property?

The company has received over £312 million from the government in waived debts and grants to force dockers out of their jobs. It was awarded £690 million in European grants and has also received City Challenge grants.

How can such huge sums be handed to a company for the enhancement of its directors and shareholders, while dockers are sacked and the people of Liverpool are deprived of social and public services?"

-from *Dockers Charter*

The dockers have received support from the USA, Holland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Japan and Sweden.

"A century after the international struggle for the legal eight-hour day, workers are being forced to work at tremendous speeds, on 12-hour shifts with cuts in wages and casual hours. Workers are 'bought' and 'sold' like rolling-stock by international employment agencies.

There is plenty of talk about the 'globalisation' of the multi-national companies. Now let's have workers' globalisation!"

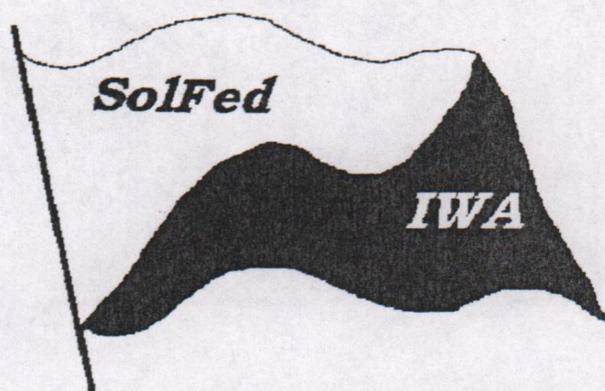
-*Dockers Charter*.

You Can Help

Solidarity actions and Funds are needed -

Cheques and postal orders made out to Merseyside Dockers Shop Stewards' Committee, send to J. Davies, Secretary/Treasurer, 19 Scorton St. Liverpool, L6 4AS.

Solidarity Federation



International Workers' Association

Culture And Community

"Common ownership or participation...community of interests." Cynics say there is no such thing, in line with Thatcher's sneer of there being no such thing as society, which she's now tried to retract. Being part of the 'let's see who we can rip-off today' class she couldn't be expected to know any better. However, there's no denying that the concept of community is under continual attack.

In Somerset, some of the communities are putting up a fight against the pressures which seek to atomise society. In the south the Somerset Community Defence Campaign holds regular meetings and continues to agitate on local issues. In the north of the county the former mining areas have a small example in the Batch Community Theatre.

The Batch Community Theatre has produced four plays to date, *Our Batch*, *Remember Me*, *Sun, Sea and Sandwiches* and the latest, *Victory Harvest* - a look at post-war Somerset after a bad harvest with squatters occupying a former army camp behind a local pub. Remember it well...

The ethos of the Batch Theatre should appeal to all those concerned with "common ownership or participation" in that the writing is a team effort with people getting together on Sundays to produce a script. To quote the director, "It's a true community theatre. You don't have to audition, and our attitude is, if you want to be in our play, great. If you can't walk or you're blind, or you have to use a wheelchair, we will devise a part for you. Nobody is a star. You just have to come along."

"Nobody is a star." The obsession with 'stars' plays into the hands of those who want to sell us more garbage under the cloak of 'culture'. The orthodox theatre has long been corrupted by its association with capitalism and reflects this in the lack of content of note and its unquestioning acceptance of the role of clown. For this the participants seek, and receive, state honours for the stress undergone while dispensing this propaganda. All in the hallowed name of 'Art'.

"It's About Giving Power To You."

Said Tony Blair to a sea of accepting faces recently. When asked later what this actually meant he waffled on about "fostering a culture of investment" in the "stakeholder" society.

This stakeholder thing is Labour's big idea with which they hope to defuse the inherent contradictions and the accompanying class struggle of the capitalist system. In the process 'stakeholding' will also create enterprises that have "social responsibility". What this means is anybody's guess but maybe bosses will be expected to wave and smile at unemployed workers they pass on their way in at nine-thirty or ten in the morning.

What's the point in voting Labour? What is the point? Anyone who participates in the electoral fraud might as well vote for the real thing and vote Tory, because that's what the reality will be once the ballot boxes have disappeared from view and the handshakes have ended.

The Labour 'activists' who have watched with increasing discomfort the transformation of a 'party of labour' (though this was always a lie) into a party representing the interests of the middle-class (this was always the truth) are now stuck with the question whether they should seriously consider Arthur Scargill's resurrection of the 'Socialist' Labour Party as a suitable home for their talents.

Arthur promises an end to unemployment, a free health service (wot, no taxes?) and goodies for all. This is to be achieved by voting socialist MPs into Parliament where, once there are enough of them and they think they have seized the reins of the state, and like the protagonists of the SPGB, they will presumably vote themselves out of office. Oh, yeah?

It would be interesting to hear from a local LP activist, or one of Arthur's merry band, just how they see socialism being achieved by parliamentary means. But then, the term 'socialism' disappeared completely from Labour Party discourse at about the same time as the Berlin Wall came down. Coincidence, or an indication of the theoretical base of the LP? Certainly many Labour councils and trade-union bureaucrats have acted like Stalinists - and still do.

New(t) Labour looks set to win the next election. The only question seems to be who will be first among the voters following the rise to glory of this bunch of power-crazed liberal suits, and the inevitable cries of "sell-out" soon after the event, to suggest, in righteous anger, just where the 'stake' should be placed?

Wanna bet?

Africa, Hockney, Hirst

Went to the smoke before the solstice festivities to view the 'Africa: the Art of a Continent' exhibition at the RA.

There was a lot to see, from tiny amulets to large funerary posts; roman-influenced mosaics and delicate wall paintings, a variety of masks and statuettes. One figure had been covered in tiny coloured beads from Czechoslovakia but most of the art(ifacts) were of a period free from western influence and gave a strong impression of the way in which art had been embedded in the culture of each tribe or group over thousands of years and had ritualistic functions within that society.

It seemed as though much of the (borrowed?) modern art of the western 'civilised' world has been a long process of catching up with the free expression of these unschooled artisans. The only function art has today, for the most part, is as a hedge against bad times for the rich, though fuck knows how they think that will save them!

Also on display (separately) were the drawings of David Hockney who had been promoting his exhibition on the radio and bemoaning the lack of drawing tuition in art colleges. From this exhibition it would appear that Hockney never bins anything, believing in his own publicity, then years later along come the art freaks and drool over this studio detritus, stick it on the wall and embarrassed punters shuffle around wondering why someone so famed can produce work so lacking in vitality.

From the RA to the Tate to catch a glimpse of the Turner Prize hopefuls, including the eventual winner, Damien Hirst, who had sliced a cow and a calf lengthwise in 'an exploration of mortality'. Is it art or should we fart?

Well yes, of course it's art, in the sense that everything bipeds produce can be regarded as art but there seemed to be few enquiries about prices or comments on how nice it would look in the front room. The attendants were fairly nervous too, presumably in case the animal rights faction paid a call, and no-one was allowed to linger too long or touch the cases. The 'shock of the new' or the shlock?

It's a truism that the art market is based on nothing more than fashion. There are no criteria by which to judge, not a bad thing in itself. No matter how grotty or how silly the concept there will always be someone to rationalise its value in obscurantist terms designed to make the proverbial silk purse and the gold to fall into theirs.

When all's said and done crap remains crap even when gilded.

Direct Action vs Parliamentary Inaction

Recent studies claim to show that an increasing number of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 are becoming disillusioned with "traditional" politics. This age group accounts for just under a sixth (16%) of the total electorate but at the last general election less than half of them voted. This state of affairs seems to have caused much teeth-gnashing in various quarters of the social democratic world.

Peter Hain, the Labour MP for Neath, and Demos, the left-wing think tank, have both gone to the hysterical lengths of advocating the introduction of compulsory voting as a remedy. Not very subtle, you might think, and certainly ill-considered. Does anyone really think they would wish to risk the consequences of trying to enforce such a measure? Compelling those who are already disaffected with political parties and the parliamentary farce to vote against their will could only turn the whole issue into something of Poll Tax proportions. And what an opportunity that would present to those of us already bent on further discrediting the present political set-up!

Meanwhile, Activ-88, the youth wing of the political reform pressure group, Charter 88, in conjunction with the British Youth Council, has launched a nation-wide initiative going under the name of "M-Power". Using a postcard style registration from they aim to con(vince) more young people to vote. Part of the con is to label this campaign as "apolitical". But, surely, to promote the dubious benefits of the parliamentary system can only be regarded as a political act, nothing more, nothing less.

Of course, what all these worthies are frightened of is the social chaos that a growing "underclass" of young people alienated by an unequal society has the potential to create. We live in a world where every day get-rich-quick, I'm-all-right-Jack individualism and consumer fetishism are promoted in a never-ending stream of dross from the so-called free market. Now we see those at the shit end of a system that offers them everything but denies the means to achieve it turning to other methods to make their mark. It is no wonder therefore that many working class areas have become so riddled with drugs and crime that it now seems to be normality.

Now, our rulers might be able to tolerate such high levels of anti-social crime, especially as the vast majority of the victims are other working class people, but there is another worrying trend for them. Disillusionment with political parties, besides being reflected in voting figures, has also led to increasing numbers of people getting involved in campaigns of direct ac-

tion. Over the last year or so this has been highlighted by high profile campaigns like those against live animal exports and the road-building programme.

For anarcho-syndicalists this is a development that can only be applauded. It would be easy to be critical of the fact that many of the people involved in such single issues never reach revolutionary conclusions or the fact that some leading lights will deliberately try to steer their campaigns away from making links with wider issues to do with the nature of capitalism. However, the very fact that large numbers of people can begin to learn to organise and act together with others instead of handing over responsibility to professional politicians can only contribute to the building of a culture of resistance within which a revolutionary movement can thrive.

In revolutionary syndicalism, direct action (acting for ourselves instead of relying on representation by union officials or politicians pleading on our behalf) is of central importance and goes hand-in-hand with direct democracy (collective decision-making and full control of all actions, negotiations and policy-making by the whole membership). For us, though, there is no way that direct actions can be disconnected from politics. Capitalism, in all its forms, relies on representation, whereby a largely apolitical working class has no say in the decisions which affect our daily lives.

The complete opposite of this is a society that is organised from the bottom up where everyone has the opportunity to be involved in a direct way in decision-making. Such self-management of society is impossible without there first being the widespread practice of direct action and direct democracy. In other words, to advocate direct action is to advocate the rejection of parliaments and politicians (but not politics). What could be more political, or revolutionary?

-from *Transport Worker*, bulletin of the Transport Workers' Network of the Solidarity Federation.

Disorderly Scenes

As the Tory candidate, a Mrs. Tate, turned up late at an election meeting at Radstock in 1935 she was greeted by an unruly section of the crowd who proceeded to boo and sing the Red Flag.

This candidate had earlier opined that if miners received a pay rise of 2 shillings (10p) per week then they would all suffer as collieries struggled to survive.

Interesting that some lies never change.

“Money...It's A Crime”

“War. Murder. Rape. Mugging. Car Theft. Fraud. Destruction of the environment...to name but a few, crimes that is. Which you place at the top of your list depends on where you are in the system. The thing is no-one knows what to do about it, it's what they call ‘a fact of life’”.

Oh yeah? Bollocks to that! Birth and death are facts of life, anything anti-social in between is there because some slimy git created the conditions for it to thrive. We are not born with an in-built desire to rip-off or batter the weakest person on the street, though some tame scientists, searching for an elusive gene enabling ‘criminality’ would have us believe that's the case. How the politicians would love it to be so, eh? What's a crime anyway? When someone rips off a few baubles from Sarah Fairgruesome, Dukess of Pork, is that a crime, or the liberation of natural resources? You don't have to think twice, do you? Obvious. What's the dictionary definition? “An act or omission prohibited and punished by law”. Geddit? No, load of old cobblers.

“You're avoiding the issue”.

Well. It's a ‘fact of life’, innit? No, crime is a commodity which sells very well and serves the system in raising the fear threshold in our communities, which, in turn, makes people look to those who have created the conditions for crime to flourish to solve the problem. Crazy. What would the cops do for a living without crime? And where would defunct politicians, retread chief constables and former state-paid terrorists go but to so-called ‘security’ firms which depend on a substantial rate of crime in order to peddle their wares. No, crime is a bonanza for some, make no mistake.

“OK smartarse, what's your answer?”

What're you asking me for? I didn't create the system. I'll tell you this though, listenening to the idiots that claim to have an answer that is generated within the present political system reminds me of a certain gent called Canute. His approach wasn't too bright, either.

“OK., OK. What about all these young kids creating mayhem on the streets, what should we do, give ‘em a bag of sweets?”

Bored aren't they for the most part. They can be a flaming nuisance and sometimes more than that but there is no provision for them within the system, nothing like the amount of resources provided that will generate really interesting things for them to do. It's no good talking about them attending ‘yoof centres’ or taking up basket weaving. Many of ‘em have too much energy and too high an opinion of themselves for that. At the moment they're looked on by those who run the system as nothing more than future consumers of capitalist trash and until they are able to perform that role they're supposed to remain invisible and unheard, like most of their parents and grandparent did along the lines of, “Someday, all this wage-slavery will be yours.” You shouldn't be surprised when they take a look at what's offered, give the two-fingered salute and go off to ‘show their displeasure’ at such parental madness. This is not to lessen the impact of what they get up to but to state a fact (of capitalist life).

There's not much that can be done by way of solving the problem of crime while a criminal economic system remains in place, fuelling crime and then cynically exploiting the political and financial consequences for the benefit of an elite who are largely untouched by it.

No-one can say what form crime will take in a free society but as most crime is linked directly to the economic system it seems likely that thieves will stop stealing objects when there's nowhere to sell them and no economic reason to steal. Fraud, which consists of moving objects representing money-slavery either manually or electronically from one location to another, will disappear as soon as capitalism disappears. Other crimes we will learn how to deal with and eliminate from society but no-one is pretending to have all the answers here, other than lying politicians of course and only idiots believe them.

The state cannot eliminate crime because it's an integral part of the state system.

We can eliminate it by recognising the need to directly control our own communities. We may have to patrol our own streets for a while on a rota basis with a genuine mandate from the local community on dealing with any anti-social behaviour. This will not be like the mis-named “community-policing” as the police force is in place to protect the interests of the local and national elite. The law and its minions have little concern with ‘justice’ in the sense of ensuring that no-one is oppressed, hungry or homeless. Capitalism is not a just system, though its supporters claim it's the only system possible, which is why it is essential that it is removed and replaced with a system that does ensure justice for all. This requires a social revolution.

Romanism

That life and soul of the party 'Mother' Teresa poked her nose into the debate on divorce in Ireland as did the Pope. An example of the ignorance of chastity parading as knowledge.

The church hierarchy has not always been able to enforce chastity/celebrity, one young seminarian travelling twice to Spain at the end of the last century found "...young and pretty women and even children, who seemed to belong to the house. I questioned the Father Prior as to the priests' morals. 'They are all married,' he replied, laughing."

Teresa stated in a recently published book that poverty "is a wonderful gift". The starving of India will no doubt concur. She also proclaimed that each night you should examine your conscience and "if you have stolen something then try to give it back." It was revealed that Teresa had received \$1.25 million from one of Amerika's numerous financial sharks plus the use of his private jet in order to swan about grasping the claws of such as Thatcher and had written to the judge appealing for clemency for this criminal when he came up before the judge for sentencing and received ten years.

A state attorney responded to this appeal by asking if she should not consider returning the funds considering that the money had been stolen from small investors. That was three years' ago and no word has come from la Madre or el Papa. Now, you might say that the starving of India need the money far more than the small investors and claim that Teresa has spent it on their behalf, but as the books are not open to review we'll never know. All that was asked was that she act according to her stated principles.

The Romanist church-state has a history second to none in deception and oppression and while it's comforting to think that belief in sky-gods, alongside belief in politicians, continues to decline, the continued hold on the attitudes of millions by the fanatics of this organisation is a threat to social progress.

Romanists (and like G. Coulton we should differentiate between the mainly kept-in-the-dark, rank and file, 'Catholics' from the ideological 'Romanist' stormtroopers) regard the Vatican as the perfect state and something to be defended at any cost, whose interests override all questions of justice and ethical behaviour that might possibly occur to someone perusing its methodology.

The assistance given to the barbarous slaughter by the nazis and their quislings in the former Yugoslavia

during WW11 and the escape routes provided on the collapse of nazism are well known. The Vatican exchanged ambassadors with Japan in 1942 when it seemed likely that the eastern fascists were on a path to victory, scuttling back to the western allies when it became clear which way the wind from the east was really blowing.

The hierarchy received a set-back recently when the Romanist-supported authoritarian, Walesa, lost his privileged position in Poland to a former Stalinist. It will be interesting to see the dances performed by the Polish church in the coming months in order to accommodate this change of fortune and how the new 'atheist' president responds. In truth it won't be, because each will accept the other as vital to the 'nation's wellbeing' i.e. business as usual.

The hierarchy lost the vote in Ireland despite the interventions of the 'living saint' and the only person on earth claiming to be infallible who has not been placed 'out of harms way'. How much this had to do with the revelations (no pun intended) of the sexual frolicking of the fathers and bishops is unclear.

So 'modernism' places a foot forward, although sensible adherents to the faith in Ireland and elsewhere have been ignoring the reactionary strictures of Romanists for some time on questions of contraception, abortion and marriage breakdown. How long it will take to put an end to acceptance of the nonsensical idea that "Truth resides in Rome" remains to be seen but the Vatican ideologues will not abandon their struggle for hearts, minds and the accompanying income too easily. They know their sky-god will not provide!

It has been stated that 'intellectuals' as well as disgruntled and reactionary anglican clerics, who regard women as inferior beings, are turning to the Romanist faith in these time of uncertainty. This is not too surprising, intellectuals are often the least able to deal with such situations. Having little connection with life as lived by the majority of the population and no sympathy with class conflict, most of them (not all) will support anything which offers stability and the opportunity for them to continue to be recognised as superior.

Eliminate
All
Hierarchies!

Give the authoritarians a black eye by sending us cartoons, articles, ideas. One day you'll wish you had!

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