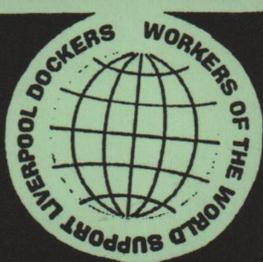


# Subversion

Issue 18

FREE!



# THE WORLD IS OUR PICKET LINE

THE Mersey Docks & Harbour Company could lose its biggest customer, if it does not reinstate 500 dockers sacked for resisting the introduction of casual labour.



Some of the 500 sacked Liverpool Dockers, demonstrating for reinstatement

In this issue:  
**Spain '36: the end  
of Anarchism?**

**The Liverpool  
Dockers**  
And much more!

# What We Stand For

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.

# In This Issue

In the past few months we have seen a resurgence of the class struggle in workplaces. Starting with the strikes in France last year, we have seen it spread to the Merseyside Dockers, Posties and the Employment Service to name but a few over here.

The articles in this issue of Subversion reflect this development. We have articles on all three of these.

The article on the Merseyside Dockers was written by a communist who lives in Liverpool and who has been active around the dispute. As he is not a member of Subversion we have to issue the standard disclaimer, whilst at the same time recommending it for its incisive brilliance!

The Employment Service strike, which has recently come to an end, provoked some discussion within our group. It is followed by some personal views of one of our members who is a claimant.

1996 is the 60th Anniversary of the Spanish Civil War. We could not resist the temptation of jumping onto the bandwagon. So we have reprinted an article from Wildcat, first published 10 years ago to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Civil War!

Two of the articles are written by people who are not members of Subversion. We would like to see more articles written by non-members in our pages. It gives others a voice, provokes discussion amongst revolutionaries and makes our magazine more interesting. If you would like to contribute an article, then drop us a line and let us know.

# HELP!!!

Subversion is broke. Each issue costs us around £200 to print and another £70 - £80 to mail out. This issue will use up all our remaining cash! We regularly get donations from readers. Now we are asking YOU to help. If you've received this through the mail, it cost us 50p, if you got it through shop or from one of us, it cost 25p. We intend to go on producing it for free distribution, but we are asking for those who can afford it to make a donation.

Make cheques etc payable to Subversion.

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

# Voices From The M27 Corridor

**Subversion Note: This article is reprinted from an anonymous publication we received.**

The following piece is a brief exploration of strategies of control and resistance around motorways. It will avoid the issues of pollution and environmental destruction usually associated with the roads battle and look at no less real struggles with more fundamental implications for the direction of class conflict.

## ROAD WARS

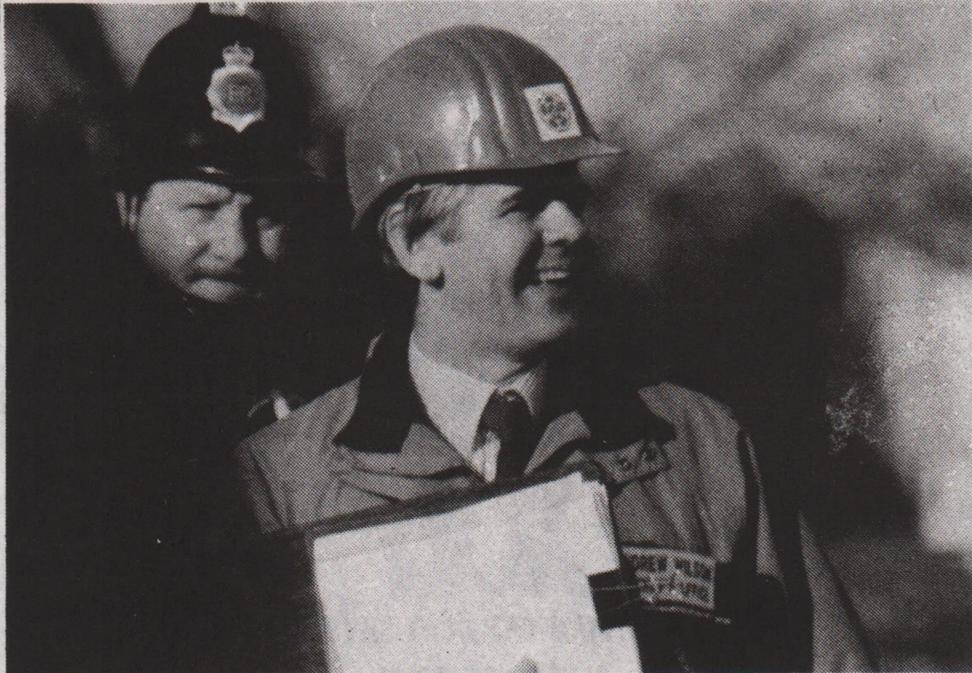
A key component in the reorganisation of space for the needs of profit and power has been the motorway, facilitating both economic development and administrative/military efficiency.

The military uses of motorways didn't end with Hitler's autobahns. Today, in the event of a 'civil emergency' or war, motorways would be reclassified as 'Essential Service Routes' (ESRs) reserved for military use only.

The M25 would become a ring of steel around London [no change there then -ed.] with checkpoints at each junction to prevent the movement of civilians into and out of the city. Other cities would face similar restrictions. The desperation to complete the M3 between Winchester and Southampton and get on with the Newbury by-pass is partly due to their need to link the military port at Marchwood with army bases to the north. Indeed, one of the arguments raised by the security services against tunnelling under Twyford Down was the risk of sabotage.

Motorways are fundamental to the cir-

ulation of commodities - the lifeblood of capitalism - whether it's goods and services, workers or consumers. Along their routes superstores appear, alongside 'business parks', industrial es-



**Andrew Wilson - Under-Sherriff of Lancashire at the M66 Eviction. A total shithead! Our time will come!**

tates and suburbs; providing new configurations of conformity and different possibilities for resistance.

**The military uses of motorways didn't end with Hitler's autobahns. Today, in the event of a 'civil emergency' or war, motorways would be reclassified as 'Essential Service Routes' (ESRs) reserved for military use**

While motorised transport and the infrastructure built for it is an example of capitalist technology, its subversion and use for purposes other than what was intended is always possible. As early as 1911 the Bonnot gang, a group of Anarchist bank robbers, were the first to use stolen cars for quick getaways. Meanwhile, motorways provide a rapid means for certain city folk to get out to the country whether it's for raves, festivals or turning over the odd stately home or golf clubhouse. Nor should we forget the mobile looters of the LA riots, loading the contents of blazing superstores and warehouses into the backs of their cars before heading back onto the freeway.

Motorways have also been used in the

extension of industrial warfare.

Recognising their economic importance, striking miners in 1984 took to driving in convoy across all three lanes of the M1 at a snail's pace to hold up the traffic. In Cleveland, USA, a partial reorganisation of space for proletarian needs was achieved during the Truckers' Strike of 1970. For thirty days truckers disrupted capitalist circulation with a mobile blockade of the roads in and around the city. The

drivers took a part in the regulation of the city's affairs by sustaining the circulation of food and medicine. A lorry driver involved in a blockade of Southampton docks in 1991 was asked how it could be organised: 'It's easy, we just use the old CB grapevine'.

It is against this backdrop - the need to restrict working class mobility to acceptable limits like going to work - that we should look at such measures as police roadblocks, tolls on motorways, satellite and video surveillance of traffic and the campaigns against tax and insurance evasion. Class conflict occurs in all sorts of situations - this is one of them.

So, even within the dominant architecture and geography of capitalism the possibility for subversion is always present, even in the 'model communities' clustered along motorway corridors. Motorways - those arteries of profit and power - can also carry the virus of class warfare.

**Let's spread it.**

# WILDCATS IN THE POST

In their drive for Quality and Customer Care Royal mail are trying to eradicate second deliveries. On the one hand Royal Mail trumpet the British postal service as the best in the world and on the other they say that in order to remain competitive the American model of a postal service must be introduced here. The post in the USA, of course, is one of the *worst* services in the world. Could it be that Royal Mail is not interested in providing a good service and would prefer to increase its profits at the expense of its customers and its workers? Surely not! Still, if Royal Mail doesn't make itself at-



may object to privatisation is because it is likely to be a means to make us work harder for less, that's if we don't get sacked, and also because it will be a means to weaken our resistance to the

plans, whims, threats and daily brutalities of our bosses. We couldn't give a toss about the job, if it was possible to pick up our wages each

week by working some sort of clock-card scam whereby we didn't even have to turn up to work each day - well, only a fool wouldn't do it.

Over the last couple of years Royal Mail has been trying to cut delivery staff, in the lead up to scrapping the second delivery, in a piecemeal way at various small offices around Britain. Sometimes the delivery office manager has proposed the idea (which is to make certain positions part-time and then get the full-timers to cover the part-time delivery's second delivery) only to realise just in time that it would be impossible to introduce due to the staff taking industrial action. Sometimes though they go ahead with it anyway. This is what happened at the Portobello office in Edinburgh last November. It led to a wildcat (unofficial, that is, unballotted) strike across Scotland that, by some estimates, brought out 12,000 posties. The workers won this week long action, Royal Mail negotiators admitted that they had a had "a great punch on the nose", and the plan to downgrade four jobs (out of the 24 in the office) to part-time positions was withdrawn.

Posties may have won this battle in Scotland, but the war is by no means over. Only a few weeks ago there was an unofficial strike in London over the same issue, and there is a general feeling that a national, official strike over the issue will occur this Spring. The posties union (Communications Workers Union) may want to orchestrate a

(Continued on page 5)

## Royal Mail Bosses - Sperm of the Devil

Recently there was the threat of an official strike in Royal Mail in Reading over changes in work practices. The strike was eventually called off before it happened because management backed down. However, before the little creeps lost their bottle they managed to give a jackanory to the local press. In a front page article they said that the *average take home* pay of a postie was £335 a week! Unfortunately only some simple maths tells you that (with an hourly rate only just over the proposed national minimum wage, and an overtime rate consequently not much better) a postie would have to do over 30 hours a week overtime to achieve this "average" sum.

Those nice bosses at Royal Mail also claimed that in order to get more overtime and indeed merely because they were "lazy", posties strung out their first deliveries past the 9.30am national cut-off time for first deliveries. This is a great joke because, although all deliveries are supposed to finish by 9.30am, the size and weight of deliveries now makes it impossible on most days, even when posties come into work early (and unpaid) and use their own cars for delivery, which is what far too many are forced to do these days.

After reading these nice comments, posties around Reading suddenly saw a new use for lamp-posts and old bits of rope.....

### Over the last couple of years Royal Mail has been trying to cut delivery staff, in the lead up to scrapping the second delivery

tractive to investors then privatisation (which is still high on the governments agenda) won't be the moneyspinner it is supposed to be. Indeed, the government has recently increased again the amount of money it takes from Royal Mail profits, this could be seen as a punishment for Royal Mail bosses for not winning the recent privatisation argument but it is also another lever to use against workers to justify extracting more work from them and in kicking them out.

As *wage slaves* (we don't work for them out of the goodness of our hearts, we do it to survive!) we are not interested in making any business successful, or efficient, or flexible. We want to be able to earn as much money as possible for doing as little work as we can get away with. Our bosses, of course, want us to work as hard as possible for as little as possible. The only reason we

(Continued from page 4)

strike themselves in order to quell this rash of wildcat actions. They are also worried that Royal Mail is trying to make decisions without consulting them, thereby freezing them out of their position as middle-men. The last time the union called a national strike, in 1988, it was more because Royal Mail had stopped talking to them than anything else! Of course, now, as then, there is a great deal of resentment and anger building up over various issues in Royal Mail. For delivery staff the future looks bleak. They know what has happened to sorting staff at the big offices around the country over recent years.

For the union to retain its position of authority it has to channel its members anger in ways it can control. Apart from the reason that they are hard to control, unofficial strikes are opposed by the union because if Royal Mail can prove in court that the union did not do its utmost to stop the action then it can be fined (as it has been). The threat of a fine still hangs over the union if any wayward shop steward endorses the action at their particular office. Shop stewards *opposing* such widely supported action makes them look ridiculous. (Organising a ballot takes at least a month). This tension between the Union and *its representatives* on the shop floor could lead to the emergence of some kind of unofficial shop stewards committee, especially in the cities.

### Looking both ways at once

Shop stewards, of course, are pulled in two directions, by the demands of their fellow workers and by the demands of the union, which at all costs wants to preserve its position in the hierarchy and the health of the business. It would be a step forward if any potential unofficial shop stewards committee was in fact an unofficial *workers* committee. Shop stewards in the 1970's were aware of the limits of the shop stewards movements of that time. The union was perceived as an enemy of working class action (more a friend of the bosses and the status quo, etc) but there was not the ability to go outside of it. Maybe now there will be, as has happened in various industries in other parts of Europe in the last few years. (But don't hold your breath!!)



# A VISIT TO PLANET ICC

Ever heard of the International Communist Current? Some of our readers will have, but if you haven't, don't worry, you haven't missed anything.

The I.C.C. are, on the face of it, a Left-Communist group who, on paper, defend some of the same basic class positions that groups like SUBVERSION do.

But if you look closer you will find a bizarre sect with an outlook on the world that calls to mind a person walking down the street wearing a Virtual Reality headset - oblivious of the real world around them they are intent on the images before their eyes.

It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive critique of the groups politics and practice - their megalomania, their Nostradamus-like certainty about future events, their many "brilliant" theories and perspectives which explain the world in impressive detail (but not, unfortunately, the same world that the rest of us inhabit) and not least their thoroughly undemocratic practice.

Indeed, although some of us have attended public meetings the group has held (which, if nothing else, were an opportunity to combine a couple of pints with the chance of sometimes meeting new people interested in revolutionary politics) we have never written an article about them before, nor responded in Subversion to the attacks on us in their paper, World Revolution. This is because **we didn't think most of our readers would have been interested.**

However, after the outrageous lies they printed in WR #190 we felt we had to set the record straight.

*continued on page 17*

## subversion reprints

**Mexico - the Chiapas and the Zapatistas** (By comrades in Greece)

**Ex-Yugoslavia and Macedonia** (from Greece)

**The Development of Class Struggle in Nigeria** (from COMMUNISM No 9, publication of the GCI, Belgium)

**The Hunt for Red October - 10 Days** that didn't overthrow capitalism - from WILDCAT magazine, England.

### PROLETARIAN GOB

It is with great sadness that we must report the sudden death of the writer/producer of PROLETARIAN GOB. Apparently he died in Florida, USA, earlier this year after complications arising from a penis-extension operation.

**All reprints are 50p each, including postage**

**The Best of Subversion, articles from the first 11 issues. 75p inc pap**

**Back Issues still available, no's 14, 16 and 17 25p each for postage.**

# EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STRIKES

Since the end of November 1995, a small selection of Employment Service Workers in various offices around the country, have been on indefinite strike against a miserable national pay offer and a further extension of performance related pay systems. This was before the recently announced budget cuts with their implications for jobs in the Service.

Up until February '96, the number of offices called out on strike, was being slowly increased alongside short "all out" regional strikes as part of the CPSA unions strategy of escalating action. Of course at this rate, it would have taken a further 12 months at least, to build up to anything really effective. Although the employers marginally increased the pay offer just prior to the first strikes, they haven't budged since. This is hardly surprising

**The 'Customer Service' ideology, is clearly an attempt to weaken existing or forestall the emergence of collective action by both ES workers and the unemployed -**

since the government, driven by the needs of a profit orientated economy in crisis, is determined to reduce the burden of state expenditure on profits. That means attacking the unemployed and the employed simultaneously. The connection between the two attacks is no more starkly shown than in this particular dispute.

In order to reduce the number of unemployed claimants and the amounts of benefit paid out, the state needs to force them in to any old crap, low paid job or else into the cut-throat competition of 'self-employment'. By doing this, the state also, at the same time, increases pressure on those in work to moderate their demands and do as they're told.

To be effective, the new Job seekers Allowance and associated regulations need to be strictly enforced by ES

workers at minimal cost. This means attacking basic pay and the collective action in support of general pay claims and introducing more individual incentive pay, based on targets for 'benefit disallowances', 'suspensions' and so on. Ironically, the 'states' ability to do this, is strengthened by ES workers own fears of becoming unemployed themselves!

Ludicrous as it may seem, the state has sought to develop the ideology of a "customer based service" even though the unemployed "customer" clearly has no 'choice' to go anywhere else. One small reflection of this has been the re-vamping of offices on a more 'user friendly' layout. Given the shit 'service' the unemployed get - and despite some bastards who get a kick out of humiliating the unemployed, this isn't the fault of ES workers - it's inevitable that some will occasionally lash out and not just with a few verbals! This in turn, helps promote a "hate the punters" mentality amongst some ES workers and a greater willingness to go along with their employers need to screw the unemployed even more. The unions are happy to enter into the fray at this stage, arguing for a return to screens and high level security etc, avoiding any serious confrontation over the real causes of the problem.

The 'Customer Service' ideology, is clearly an attempt to weaken existing or forestall the emergence of collective action by both ES workers and the unemployed - to get both to see their problems and the 'solutions' in individual terms, at the same time reinforcing the division between the two groups. This whole process forms a vicious downward spiral that can only benefit the employers and their state.

Such a spiral cannot be broken by Labour Party type reforms to the system or moral appeals to be nice to each other. The 'system' may not have been created by ES workers, but part of their job within the system involves

'policing' the unemployed whether they admit it or not. In normal every day circumstances, when unemployed claimant meets employed ES worker, there is a real and immediate conflict of interest which cannot be wished away by abstract appeals for class unity, however much the interests of both may be the same in the long term.

It is only in the abnormal circumstances of a strike, when ES workers are no longer carrying out the states function, that a small opening appears through which divisions can start to be broken down. That still won't happen if the real differences between the situation of the employed and unemployed are simply glossed over. It can only come through face to face confrontation of ideas and the building of mutual support based on an understanding of each others situations. It requires the building of common objectives and common 'demands', not just moral support for each others 'demands'.

In this process, the trade unions are a barrier. They have their own interests to pursue within the established order that require them to maintain sectionalism and parochialism within our class. This they typically 'appeal' to the employers on the basis that a contented work force will do the employers bidding more enthusiastically. They actually reinforce the division with the unemployed by pointing out to employers and the 'public', that failure to settle the strike is resulting in 'over payments' to the unemployed. A good reason, if for no other reason, where it's true, for the unemployed to support the strike in our opinion.

Since the unions really do want to get back to 'normal' working as soon as possible, they do their best to avoid any really effective action. The CPSA, under pressure from its members to extend the strikes, has decided to call a ballot whilst at the same time stopping the existing strikes! - effectively enforcing its own 'cooling down' period. We'll see if ES workers fall for that

# Solidarity, Good and Bad!

As an unemployed member of Subversion things look quite different to me. My quarrels with the other article are summarised in this article, sometimes in the form of questions.

The essential question is: what is the basis for unity among various groups of workers? It must be not merely a long-term interest in the abolition of capitalism but also a common interest in struggle here and now. This is where the structural relationship among groups of employees assumes an important role.

What I mean is most starkly manifested in the case of cops. It might be argued that a rank and file cop would a: benefit from the establishment of a communist society and b: be inclined to take industrial action for higher wages. But the nature of the job they do means that whenever any

## Employment Service Strikes

continued from previous page

one! - or decide to take control of, and extend the strike themselves through their own direct action (both within the Employment Service and to others in the public sector threatened with performance related pay).

A move outside the control of the trade unions and an opening out of the strike to other workers, employed and unemployed, would be the most positive thing that could happen. In this situation, opportunities for some real class unity might emerge.

We are not saying that understandings and links forged in such a situation between ES workers and the unemployed are going to create any permanent basis of solidarity, but they can demonstrate what might be possible within the framework of a much more widespread escalation of class struggle in the future. Even in the shorter term, a victory for ES workers won in this way, with the support of the unemployed, could be beneficial to unemployed workers by making ES workers less reliable agents of the state for a time.

class struggle breaks out, the cop is always on the other side (and indeed is very often the most immediate enemy of the workers in struggle). This means there is no realistic basis for unity between cops and ourselves. This is what I mean by the structural relationship of the jobs themselves. This is easy to see in the case of the cops, but the relationships are not always so clear cut in the case of various other professions.

So the next question is: how different are the Employment Service workers from cops? The amount of common nature they have is strongly understated by the other article, in my view.

This is something we have to think about properly, since we're talking about who's part of our class and who isn't (I'm quite sure that the cops are not part of the working class).

What the Employment Service workers have in common with the cops is essentially that merely by doing their job, i.e. regardless of their ideology or personal inclinations, they act to repress a significant part of the class.

It might be objected that all work for capitalist bosses means acting to reproduce capitalism and thereby help to oppress the working class. True enough, in the direct, active agents of oppression (an example often used here is the difference last analysis, but there's a difference between that and being between journalists who write reactionary, anti-working class bollocks and the printworkers who print it - the former are in a quite different category because they have personal control over what they are doing, using their initiative and ingenuity in their role of conscious reactionaries).

Employment Service workers are often in positions where they decide exactly what to do with this or that claimant, whether to give them a hard time at an interview, whether to make them go on a course, and the like.

My personal experience is that individual workers at a dole office vary between some who are alright and some who are total bastards, but it is conceivable that there are one or two cops (somewhere in the world) who as individuals have good motivations.

It is no wonder, given this structural antagonism that, as the other article says, there often arises a "hate the punters" mentality among these workers. This is a telling phrase, because "punter" is of course a derogatory term used by the petty bourgeoisie for us workers in our role of "customer".

The article talks about how if the strike advances and forges links with unemployed workers then the Employment Service workers might stop being reliable agents of the state for a time. Hardly a prospect to inspire feelings of solidarity among the breasts of the unemployed, is it? To me, this is like asking slaves to support higher wages for the overseers in return for them going a bit easier with the lash for a few weeks afterwards.

I believe it is a fundamental principle that solidarity among workers must be on the basis of equality. As such, I think that any offering of support to the Employment Service workers dispute must be conditional. That means, we say to them: "We will support you, but only if you undertake to cease policing our class." That means not only not implementing the Jobseekers' Allowance, but not coming down heavy on us in Restart interviews, forcing us to go to Jobclubs, etc.

One idea would be for a group of unemployed workers to produce a leaflet putting this forward, and giving it to the Employment Service workers involved in the dispute. At least it should make some of them think.

Solidarity which is not on the basis of equality is a pitiful thing: it is like kneeling and kissing the hand of a social superior in the hope of being looked on with favour. Our class should have more dignity than that.

## THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

# The End of

This year is the 60th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War, which began in July 1936 when General Franco led a fascist coup to replace the left-wing Republican government.

It was no coincidence that this happened at a time of intense class struggle in Spain. Limited concessions granted in the face of the struggle by the left wing of the ruling class - the 'Popular Front' government elected in February 1936 - had not succeeded in restoring the economic and social stability needed by capitalism. Strikes, demonstrations and political assassinations by the working class continued, as did land seizures and local insurrections in the countryside. The right wing of the ruling class

**in one sense the revolt was an immediate success: the working class and peasants sacrificed the struggle for their own needs and demands and united with liberal and radical supporters of capitalism in a fight to defend one form of capitalist domination - democracy - against another - fascism.**

recognised that strong-arm measures were needed, and acted accordingly.

Initially, across one half of Spain the right-wing coup was stalled by armed resistance from peasants and the working class, and only after three years of civil war was the fascist victory secured. But in one sense the revolt was an immediate success: the working class and peasants sacrificed the struggle for their own needs and demands and united with liberal and radical supporters of

capitalism in a fight to defend one form of capitalist domination - democracy - against another - fascism.

However, that is not the aspect of the Spanish Civil War which we want to look at here. Instead, we want to focus on another important feature: the influence of anarchist ideas during the struggle in Spain.

### ANARCHISM AND THE SPANISH 'REVOLUTION'

At the time of the Civil War, a popular idea amongst the Spanish working class and peasants was that each factory, area of land, etc., should be owned collectively by its workers, and that these 'collectives' should be linked with each other on a 'federal' basis - that is, without any superior central authority.

This basic idea had been propagated by anarchists in Spain for more than 50 years. When the Civil War began, peasants and working class people in those parts of the country which had not immediately fallen under fascist control seized the opportunity to turn anarchist ideal into reality.

Ever since then anarchists have regarded the Spanish 'Revolution' as the finest achievement in the history of the revolutionary movement - as the closest capitalism anywhere has come to being completely overthrown and replaced by a totally different form of society.

### SELF-MANAGED' CAPITALISM

The 'revolution' in the countryside has usually been seen as superior to the 'revolution' in the towns and cities. Anarchist historian and eyewitness of the collectives, Gaston Leval, describes the industrial collectives as

simply another form of capitalism, managed by the workers themselves: "Workers in each undertaking took over the factory, the works, or the workshop, the machines, raw materials, and taking advantage of the continuation of the money system and normal capitalist commercial relations, organised production on their own account, selling for their own benefit the produce of their labour."

We would add that in many cases the workers didn't actually take over production; they simply worked under the direction of 'their own' union bureaucrats with the old bosses retained as advisors.

The reactionary consequences of the working class taking sides in the fight between democracy and fascism, instead of pursuing the struggle for their own needs, was particularly evident in the way the industrial collectives operated. For the sake of the 'war effort' workers frequently chose to intensify their own exploitation - usually with the encouragement of their anarchist leaders.

In 1937, for example, the anarchist Government Minister in charge of the economy in Catalonia complained that the "state of tension and over-excitement" produced by the outbreak of the Civil War had "reduced to a dangerous degree the capacity and productivity of labour, increasing the costs of production so much that if this is not corrected rapidly and energetically we will be facing a dead-end street. For these reasons we must readjust the established work norms and increase the length of the working day."

However, although some anarchists are prepared to criticise the 'Government Anarchists' and the industrial collectives, all anarchists are

**WORKERS' AND PEASANTS' COLLECTIVES**

# Anarchism?

unanimous that the rural collectives succeeded in achieving 'genuine socialisation', or, as it was popularly termed, 'libertarian communism'.

## ORGANISING THE RURAL COLLECTIVES

What typically happened in the peasant villages was this. Once the fascist rebellion had been quelled locally, the inhabitants of the village got together in a big meeting. Anarchist militants took the initiative in proposing what to do. Everyone was invited to pool their land, livestock and tools in the collective: 'The concept 'yours and mine' will no longer exist...Everything will belong to everyone.' Property belonging to fascist landlords and the Church was also expropriated for the collective's use. A committee was elected to supervise the running of the collective. Work was parcelled out among groups of 10 or 15 people, and co-ordinated by meetings of delegates nominated by each group.

### FREE ACCESS

A few collectives distributed their produce on the communist basis of free access - 'to each according to their needs'. A resident of Magdalena de Pulpis explained the system in his village:

"Everyone works and everyone has the right to what he needs free of charge. He simply goes to the store where provisions and all other necessities are supplied. Everything is distributed freely with only a notation of what he took."

For the first time in their lives people could help themselves to whatever they needed. And that's exactly what they did. Free access was not abused by 'greed' or 'gluttony'. Another of the collectives' eyewitnesses, Augustin Souchy, describes the situation in Muniesa:

"The bakery was open. Anyone can come for whatever bread he wants. 'Are

there not abuses of this?' 'No,' answers the old man who gives out the bread. 'Everyone takes as much as they actually need.' Wine is also distributed freely, not rationed. 'Doesn't anyone get drunk?' 'Until now there has not been a single case of drunkenness'."

(This was also partly a reflection of an anarchist puritanism which in other places led them to ban tobacco and even coffee).

### THE WAGES SYSTEM

However, distribution of goods on a communist basis (i.e. free access) was not the norm. In the vast majority of collectives the level of consumption was not governed by people's freely-chosen needs and desires, but, just as it is under capitalism, by the amount of money

Far from being abolished, as money would be in a communist revolution, during the Spanish 'Revolution' money proliferated as never before!

people had in their pockets. Only goods in abundant supply could be taken freely. Everything else had to be bought from wages paid by the collective to its members.

### THE FAMILY WAGE AND THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

The 'family wage' - which oppresses women by making them economically dependent on the male head of the household - was adopted by almost all the collectives. Each male collectivist received so much in wages per day for himself, plus a smaller amount for his wife and each child. For women in fact, the Spanish 'Revolution' could hardly have been less revolutionary. It did not challenge the family as an economic unit of society, nor the sexual

division of labour between men and women. "It is eleven o'clock in the morning. The gong sounds. Mass? It is to remind the women to prepare the midday meal." Women also remained regarded as inferior social beings, frowned on, for example, if they joined the men in the local cafe for a drink after work.

### THE PROLIFERATION OF MONEY

The equal family wage was generally not paid in the national currency, which most collectives discarded for internal use. In its place the collectives substituted other means of exchange, issuing their own local currency in the form of vouchers, tokens, rationing booklets, certificates, coupons, etc. Far from being abolished, as money would be in a communist revolution, during the Spanish 'Revolution' money proliferated as never before!

But the creation of literally hundreds of different local currencies soon caused problems. Few collectives were self-sufficient, but trade among the collectives was hampered by the lack of a universally acceptable currency. In 1937 the Aragon Federation of Peasant Collectives had to reintroduce a standard currency in the form of a uniform rationing booklet for all the Aragon Collectives. It also established its own bank - run by the Bank Workers' Union of course!

### THE EXCHANGE OF GOODS

Not all the transactions between collectives were effected by money. Central warehouses were set up where collectives exchanged their surplus produce among themselves for the goods they lacked. Under this system 'hard cash' was frequently absent. However, the relative proportions in which goods were bartered was still

# Spain 1936 continued



A joint CNT/FAI and Stalinist poster, it tells workers to remember that **"the first thing is to win the**

determined by monetary values. For example how many sacks of flour a collective could obtain in exchange for a ton of potatoes was worked out by calculating the value of both in monetary terms. Just as under capitalism, prices were "based on the cost of raw materials, the work involved, general expenses and the resources of the collectivists".

This was not a communist system of production for use and distribution according to need, but a capitalist system of rival enterprises trading their products according to their exchange value. No matter how desperately they needed them, collectives couldn't obtain the goods they required until they had produced enough to exchange for them, since they were not allowed to withdraw a sum of goods worth more than those they had deposited. This frequently led to great hardship among the less wealthy collectives.

## MARKET COMPETITION

As well as trading among themselves, collectives also had to find markets for their goods in competition with non-collectivised enterprises. A common consequence of this system has always been that goods which cannot be sold

profitably end up being stockpiled or destroyed, while elsewhere people have to do without those goods because they don't have the means to buy them. The consequences of the Spanish collectives' capitalist mode of

**This was not a communist system of production for use and distribution according to need, but a capitalist system of rival enterprises trading their products according to their exchange value.**

operation conformed to this pattern; for example:

"The warehouses owned by the SICEP (Syndicate of the Footwear Industry in Elda and Petrel) in Elda, Valencia and Barcelona, as well as the factory warehouses, were full of unsold goods, valued at some 10 million pesetas."

Such spectacles would be eradicated for ever in a communist society, where goods would not be produced to be sold for profit via the market, but to directly satisfy people's needs.

## THE END OF THE COLLECTIVES

The Spanish collectives were eventually destroyed by in-fighting among the anti-fascists and by the fascist victory itself. One can only speculate about how they might have developed had they survived the Civil War. Our guess is that their basically capitalist nature would have become even more obvious.

In the capitalist economy market competition forces every enterprise to try to produce its goods as cheaply as possible so as to undercut its rivals. The Spanish collectives, trading with each other and competing with non-collectivised enterprises, would inevitably have been subject to the same pressures.

One of the ways in which capitalist enterprises try to cut costs is by increasing the exploitation of the workforce, for example by cutting wages, or increasing the intensity of work, or lengthening working hours.

Where this happens in enterprises owned and run by an individual boss or the state, workers can identify their enemy and fight against their exploitation. This is far less likely to happen where the entire workforce itself is the collective owner and manager of the enterprise, as was the case with the Spanish collectives. The workforce has a vested interest in the profitability of the capital which it collectively owns; it identifies with and willingly organises its own exploitation. It has to, in fact, to keep itself in business.

## THE END OF ANARCHISM

Many present-day anarchists still stand for the type of self-managed capitalism established by the industrial and agricultural collectives during the Spanish Civil War. Because of this, we oppose them as resolutely as we oppose supporters of any other pro-capitalist ideology.

From the point of view of working class people's needs, self-managed capitalism is a dead-end, just as reactionary as private or state capitalism. The communist society we are fighting for can only be established by the complete destruction of ALL property, money, wages and markets - whatever their form.

*The information and quotes in this article come from*

*The Anarchist Collectives by Sam Dolgoff,*

*Collectives In The Spanish Revolution by Gaston Leval,*

*The Spanish Revolution by Stanley Payne*

*With the Peasants Of Aragon by Augustin Souchy*

# Dockers' Dispute

## Merseyside

In earlier reports I have attempted to put together some thoughts on the dockers dispute [note it is NOT a strike but a lock out - something that 9 weeks into it the SWP still had not realised] and to draw out some of the implications for any future movement.

From early on in the present dispute the dockers have been holding open mass meetings to gather support. This is a sea change in itself, but as dockers got up in front of their mates and perfect strangers to tell their story, inevitably they concentrated on the character of industrial relations post 1989 and the end of the Devlin scheme nationally. With the dispute over, the dockers went back to work as a body. There were supposed to be no recriminations, no victimisations. Officially this was the time of new more 'realistic' labour relations on the dock. The port prospered - with huge injections of public money, new traffic came, old traffic was won back, presumably from the former non registered ports, whose for breaking the dispute was short lived.

### After 1989 . . .

However the dockers knew that this truce could only be temporary. Very soon the crack down came. And it came in the form of an all out attempt to break and humiliate the men. Dockers were put to work on their hands and knees to scrub toilets and other shitty jobs of which there are no shortage on a dock. This was the dockers 'victory'. One man described in vivid and moving detail how he was moved to tears to see his mate on his hands and knees.

He went on to describe how they hugged one another in their mutual despair and out of this found a new strength for each other. No one can begin to understand this dispute unless they appreciate this change in the attitude of the dockers. In the past disputes or strikes would be run by a small group of stewards - the 'rank and file' would be told to go home, dig the garden or paper the back bedroom, while the leaders got on with the job of 'running' the dispute - which usually involved shuttling between national union officials and the personnel office until the inevitable compromise deal was struck.

*When a hairy arsed docker stands in front of perfect strangers and is visibly moved to tears in describing his experiences, you know that something quite profound is going on.*

Another aspect of the previously sectional nature of the dock is the degree to which jobs were passed on from father to son. The dockers have received some criticism for this - one of the conditions for settling the previous dispute in 1989 was that sons of dockers should be first in line when new dockers were being hired. This was criticised in a leaflet put out by a Trotskyist grouping called the ICP in November, which went on to argue for getting rid of the existing stewards, and especially the chair, Jimmy Nolan. Now Mr Nolan makes no secret of the fact that he is an unrepentant Stalinist. And while the criticism of the ICP may be formally correct in much of what it says, it actually ignores the fact that on Merseyside at least [and I suspect in other areas of the country] it is well ac-

cepted that jobs should be passed on from father to son. This is understood almost as part of the post Second World War consensus - just as the National Health Service and Education are understood as a 'right'. We ought perhaps to research exactly what the full implications are of the break up of this consensus and the end of 'welfarism' that many of us talk about. It's not the same

**In the past disputes or strikes would be run by a small group of stewards - the 'rank and file' would be told to go home, dig the garden or paper the back bedroom, while the leaders got on with the job of 'running' the dispute**

Tactically at least, the fact that the new dockers are in many cases related to the 'Devlin' generation was supposed to make it easier to solidify a younger generation into a common struggle to improve conditions. This is part of what we might call the 'collective intelligence' that is so much a feature of this dispute, and which deserves greater recognition. For its part the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company [MDHC] had set up various front organisations so that they could 'offer' worse terms and conditions to new workers. In the event, Torside, a firm fronted by an ex-docker with his redundancy money, used the MDHC to negotiate less than full rates and reduced pension rights. For the time being the stewards accepted this deal. So we had all the ingredients for a renewed confrontation. That to some extent this present conflict has been

## Dockers continued

'organised' and prepared for by the MDHC, there can be no doubt.

It is this fact alone which illustrates starkly the changed background to this dispute. The firm charged with recruiting scab labour, Drake International, operates security and bailiff services and has a trained dock labour force in Southampton some of whom have been hired to train the scabs. Information about this firm and its global activities is needed by the dockers.

well that no docker would cross it and likely scab on his son. MDHC already had the dismissal letters typed for 500 dockers and the offer of new worse, individual contracts, some of which were hand delivered in taxis to dockers homes. [Now where did they learn that trick ?]

### Casualisation, globalisation

We come therefore to the second new aspect of this dispute - the drive towards casualisation. In the past in the 1960s and 70s, firms could offer increases in wages and improvements in

nation state can no longer isolate its labour market from the world - so we are beginning to see world cycles of class struggle.

2 Because labour is being continually expelled from the productive process each nation state is finding it harder to absorb the rising costs of welfare - as a result the old social democratic welfare state is steadily being unwound. In France, Italy and Belgium, this has already caused huge backlashes amongst a working class vainly trying to defend its position inside the state

We have only indicated the broadest themes here, this does not pretend to

be an analysis of these trends. For our purpose we are interested in what effects this is having on struggles such as the dockers. One of the consequences of the increased international contact that the dockers have had is the common realisation that portworkers internationally have all suffered the same types of attack on their wages and conditions. In conversations with dockers all over the world, the common starting date for this attack has been identified as 1989. Someone, somewhere with access to specialist shipping publications should be able to document and demonstrate this.



The 1990s are not the 1970s - Many of the more astute dockers had thought that over time, as they had done in the past, they could steadily improve all dockers terms and conditions. This is after all the kind of class struggle they were used to - it had served them well in the past. It also makes a nonsense of the ICP's criticism of Stalinist 'betrayal' of the dockers. Jimmy Nolan who is the oldest of the stewards and a survivor of the struggles of the 70s, is only able to have any influence precisely because he gives voice to the dockers own view of themselves and their struggle.

So when a dispute erupted at Torside and these workers put an illegal picket on the gate, the MDHC knew perfectly

conditions secure in the knowledge that if the 'productivity' improvements negotiated, failed to materialise, [as they often didn't - due to workers resistance] then inflation would soon let them increase prices and avoid any losses. This planned use of inflation [on the docks, the Devlin deal] to defuse the class struggle relied on each nation state being able to independently manage its monetary and fiscal policy without outside interference. In the 90s two things have happened to upset this.

1 Increases in global competition - via GATT and the rise of the so called 'tiger economies' of the Far East. Costs, principally wage costs are being equalised throughout the world. The

Locally, the MDHC has been propped up in the past at considerable cost to state funds and the Government is still a major shareholder. It is time that this investment 'paid off' in the form of quicker turn round for ships, cargo and vehicles. Shipowners and operators are quick to make international comparisons of labour costs, something which dockers need to take into account. For instance they are aiming at a lorry turn round time of 45 minutes rather than the present 3 hours. A major obstacle to the employers reducing costs is the existing organisation and outlook [or if you like the 'collective intelligence referred to earlier] of dock workers. We are no longer therefore talking of the old kind of struggle - casualisation is

the means whereby the dock company, shipowners and transport firms can drive down costs. If this means 12 hour shifts, annual hours contracts, constant 'call outs', no premium for weekend or night work, disrupted family life, stress and so on - then so be it.

Casualisation is therefore the issue which binds these workers together, even though Eric Leatherbarrow for the MDHC takes great pains to deny it on every public occasion - hence the dockers demand for reinstatement on their old terms. It also of course, explains why the dock company will almost certainly not give in. We are not talking of the old style casualisation of the notorious 'pen' of the 50s, but a modern 'social' form. With each worker isolated in his own home at the end of a telephone line.

This is very basic and goes to the heart of what we might call workers collectivity. When unions first came about in this country, they were no more than conspiracies to try and blunt or frustrate the effects of competition, worker against worker. Our rulers, realising that attempting to prevent 'combination' might easily provoke a revolutionary alternative, allowed this new institution to grow, gave it legal immunity, and eventually granted unions a place in the management of the system.

At the time of writing [early February] it is now almost four months since around 500 dockers were dismissed for refusing to cross a picket line [or for 'illegal secondary action' in the jargon of modern industrial relations] in support of almost 80 men in dispute with an 'independent' stevedoring firm called Torside. The dockers employed by MDHC have just overwhelmingly rejected [in an 'official' secret ballot organised by the TGWU for a dispute that is illegal and unofficial] an offer of 40 jobs under the new conditions and £25 000 for the rest - or about £8 million in total. The men employed by the new firms, Torside and Nelson have still to vote, but they are only being offered £1000 AND they must give up their claims for unfair dismissal. Of course the major feature of the offer is that they must immediately give up their international campaign to get Liv-

erpool boats blacked - a sure sign that it is effective.

It should be noted that the older men, some with only a year or to go risk the prospect of losing everything - lump sum, pension and so on as a consequence of this dispute. The price will be the acceptance of new, individual contracts by the younger workers and the need to work alongside approximately 200 scabs who have been recruited. We shall see if the dockers can remain united in their opposition to this kind of deal. At a mass meeting [which are regular Friday morning features of this dispute, held in the TGWU headquarters in Islington - more about this later], this latest 'offer' was overwhelmingly rejected by a show of hands, despite a vicar and a priest arguing that 'it was the best that could be obtained in the circumstances'. The result of the ballot was accurately predicted by the stewards, which is a good indication of the confidence they enjoy. We have talked at great length about the background to this dispute and only mentioned the dockers themselves in passing. This is perhaps unfair. There is much that is positive to report.

### The beginning of a new movement ?

First of all we should stress that this is an all inclusive dispute. Although 'run' by the existing shop stewards, perhaps 20 in number and we have had our criticism of the stewards movement in the past; criticisms which we still stand by, it would be utterly counter-productive to go into them now. There is no doubt that the existing stewards enjoy the confidence and overwhelming support of the mass of dockers locked out - for in a real sense they represent them. The stewards conception of struggle, their hopes and fears are exactly the same as those of the dockers themselves. It should be noted that the dispute committee is not composed solely of stewards and in any case for such a small group of workers there are far more than normally would be found in industry. Common experience in Ford's for example is for a steward to 'represent' over 100 workers. This may reflect the particular history of collective organisation on the dock, a subject

on which a library of books could be written. Other dockers on the committee are there simply because they have a history of standing up for themselves, they naturally come to the fore in such a situation. Open meetings are held weekly - and they are genuinely open, anyone may attend although not vote. There is a huge amount of self activity. This is not a dispute that can be fought in the old way.

Over 1000 meetings have been addressed around the country and abroad. Delegations appealing for practical solidarity have gone to North America, Australia and Europe. Benefits and other forms of activity have been organised. All this has so far been done not by relying on union officials or the like but by the dockers and their families and supporters. In the process many workers have been transformed, but they can tell their own story now.

### What lessons have been learned ?

Undoubtedly the dockers international

**Open meetings are held weekly - and they are genuinely open, anyone may attend although not vote. There is a huge amount of self activity. This is not a dispute that can be fought in the old way.**

campaign asking for solidarity - in reality getting Liverpool boats 'blacked' or the threat of it - has been the major factor obliging MDHC to make an offer to men they have already dismissed. Rather like attacking the tentacles of an octopus, the dockers have systematically set about cutting one by one every shipping line that works into Liverpool. So delegations have gone to the East Coast of the USA and Canada, also to Italy, Spain, Israel, Australia and New Zealand. It is worth looking in some detail at how this has been done, since once again the dockers have come in for some criticism.

It has been alleged, once again by the ICP, in yet another of their attempts to 'parachute' themselves into this dispute that,

*(Continued on page 14)*

# Merseyside Dockers

(Continued from page 13)

'the stewards were not building an international movement of the working class, but touting the labour of the Liverpool dockers around the boardrooms of the world, while building links with other union bureaucrats equally eager to establish such relations with big business on a global scale. Their banner expresses this corporatist perspective very succinctly. It carries the slogan, Liverpool dockers the best in Europe.'

[from 'Liverpool dock dispute in danger' - a leaflet given out by the ICP 19 January 1996]

Now I have no particular reason to 'have a go' at the ICP, but since the rest of the 'Left' has utterly failed to have anything to say at all beyond the usual stupidities about 'mass pickets' and so on, the ICP have been the only grouping with a coherent 'line' - which is that the existing trade union movement and especially the shop stewards

**It is clear that to some extent for instance the TGWU is involved in recruiting the scab labour**

must immediately be replaced if the dockers are to win.

This is an interesting and, for Trotskyists, unorthodox view. In many ways the ICP are symptomatic of the crisis that is working its way through contemporary 'Left' politics, which is why I am using the example. In the 1970s I and several others came to be similarly critical of the unions and shop stewards, BUT however radical this critique might seem, it means nothing without a fundamental rethinking of the process through which a new movement might emerge, and the vitally changed content of such a movement.

Internationalism . . . in practice

Let us deal with process first. The ICP go on in their leaflet to say,

'the fundamental lesson of this experience is that genuine internationalism cannot be organised by the existing trade unions. the role of the stewards throughout has been to direct that action into bureaucratic channels, effectively stifling it and using it not to strengthen the working class, but to build relations with transnational companies.' [op. cit.]

Nobody least of all the dockers would disagree with the first sentence. It is clear that to some extent for instance the TGWU is involved in recruiting the scab labour from the south. Photographs of the scabs have been matched to union members in other regions. So whoever ends up working on the dock, the TGWU gets to represent them. Internationally, all the delegates have come back with stories of union attempts to sabotage and obstruct them. As to the last sentence, if is true it is a serious allegation indeed - however the dockers who have seen this leaflet have dismissed it as laughable nonsense. What then, can have caused the ICP to risk what little credibility they have by repeating it?

Firstly in the concrete situation the dockers and the stewards found themselves in, they had no option but to go through the existing union channels, such as they were, to get the solidarity they needed. No-one who knows anything of the history of this particular section of workers can be in any doubt that they fully expect the TGWU and its officials to try to sabotage the dispute - but since the union fears sequestration of its funds and assets above all else, the union has limited its efforts to behind the scenes manoeuvring in international organisations such the ITWF, the full story of this has yet to come out. Publicly it wants 'negotiations', this is after all what unions are for - to negotiate the sale of wage labour, so that the process of producing surplus value [and paying union dues] can go on as before. This is why the dockers have organised so much themselves, without relying on full time officials and so on.

So far as international contacts are concerned, all the political groupings have proved singularly ineffective. Anyone with direct contacts in any of the cities visited by the dockers would

have been of more practical use than all the 'international organisation' that have gathered round this dispute. In reality the various dockers delegations have had to 'find their own way'.

Sometimes this has meant dealing with union officials in union offices miles away from a dock, sometimes it has meant mounting their own picket on a dock as in the USA. [This incidentally gives the lie to much of the impression in this country that American workers are not class conscious - picket lines are respected more there than perhaps they are at the moment in this country.] On other occasions, as in Italy, they have had to negotiate with 'worker bosses', since with the Eurocommunism and the Historic Compromise of the CP [now PDS],

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docks in Italy are now 'cooperatively owned', but on other occasions they were face to face with other dockers in the hold of a ship. This is hardly the picture painted by the ICP, and in all this the dockers managed to obtain most of their objectives. This shows a skill and political maturity in action way beyond the 'corporatist' label that has been applied.

But of course nothing comes about in a 'pure' fashion, at least not pure enough for the ICP. They are of course quite correct to criticise the slogan, 'Liverpool dockers the best in Europe' but such a slogan is only a reflection of the dockers own view of themselves and their struggle - not a slogan that a group of stewards has forced on them. It is in any case being used ironically since that is the description used by the dock bosses only three weeks before the dispute broke out. If it is to be criticised, and it should be, it should be done in such a way that the majority of workers understand it and as an aid to help them break from it. As I have said in earlier reports, the contradiction of going all over the world asking for solidarity action from other dockers and port workers, whilst at the same time proclaiming yourself 'the best in Europe' has not been lost on some of the more astute dockers - but they are the only ones who can overcome it - and they can only do that in practice.

Trade Unions again

As to the longer term question of the trade unions, the fact is that 500 dockers in one port do not have the social weight to fight the trade unions locally or nationally. Unions will not be overcome and ultimately destroyed by sections of workers struggling in isolation from one another. For the docks dispute, dockers have gone outside union channels and by preferring to rely on their own efforts, have provided a model and an inspiration for the future. But as they will tell you, to have gone all out against the union would have isolated them even more than at present. It would certainly have made the job of organising their international conference on February 17th much more difficult.

One of the features of this dispute,

which will be denied by the 'Left', but is nevertheless a fact and must be accounted for, has been the inability of the dockers to persuade the existing 'movement' - of shop stewards, combine committees and so on, to mount any kind of effective solidarity action.

Now we have argued that this is merely a reflection of how securely tied the shop stewards and other 'rank and file' type organisations are to the existing union apparatus. Tied that is



It's the cuts lads... one copper to two scabs

because they lack any independent basis other than the union apparatus itself. Until a movement independent of the unions arises and in the process either transforms or destroys this form of organisation, then it makes no sense to talk of the shop stewards 'betraying' the workers.

We are coming close now to the content of any new movement, and to show that we are not talking of some far off distant future, I want to illustrate the above with a story. Around Christmas time, a strong rumour went round that the TGWU was planning to evict the dispute committee from the TGWU building in Islington.

Now the dockers are in almost permanent session in this building, and it has proved a valuable resource as an organising centre for all their activity. It has a conference room capable of seating over 500, a staffed canteen and several offices equipped with phones, faxes and so on. To lose it would have been a severe blow, but plans were being made to find an alternative. However, it was argued by some that should an attempt be made to shift

them, then the building should be occupied and held against the union. In this writer's opinion this might have totally transformed the situation - locally it would have polarised opinion in the city amongst workers, something which up to now the dockers have been unwilling to do [by for instance inciting violence against scabs, or attempting more than a token occupation of the dock]. It is clear that most dockers see the building as 'theirs', a view I would guess, shared by most workers

and union members on Merseyside. The stage might have been set for just the kind of confrontation which might have shaken the union to its foundations - and probably this is why the union chose not to move against the dockers.

The point of the foregoing is to

show that it is often the dynamics of the situation itself which determines the content of any movement, and not any preconceived plan of action by a 'leadership' however wise or omnipotent.

### Class composition

One of the major questions to which I have been trying to find an answer, is, does this dispute contain any clues towards the new kind of struggle and movement of the future? I have already drawn attention to the differences between today and the 1970s and 80s, but a more detailed understanding is required. Although this is not the place to attempt such an analysis, I should like to draw attention to some features which I think are important.

First of all the changed nature of dockwork itself needs to be recognised. Many readers will imagine that it is largely unskilled and repetitive. This would be a mistake - dock work is varied and dangerous. Safe working prac-

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# Merseyside Docks Dispute

*(Continued from page 15)*

tices must be learned, and applied. Modern cargo handling is technically sophisticated and employs information technology to monitor and control the process. The old kind of casual working could never have provided the kind of labour which dock employers now need. In addition much of the old distinction between mental and manual labour has gone. Dock work like many other forms of work today, now demands the active intellectual engagement of the worker - hence the talk of empowerment, and team working and so on. We are seeing the creation of a new kind of worker in Western society, much changed from the one that gave birth to the mass movements of the 1970s.

It may for instance surprise readers to know that there is at least one PhD working on the dock, in addition many dockers wives and partners hold white collar and supervisory jobs in other industries and services. But of course this should come as no surprise, how many of us know or work alongside people who are not interested in promotion or in joining management, even though they undoubtedly have the technical ability and education? It is only in moments such as this dispute that we are able to catch a glimpse of what we have called this new class composition. Sooner or later this new kind of worker will have to find a way of tackling the effects of casualisation and globalisation that we have identified.

This change has not come about without causing us problems. One of the major difficulties the dockers have had is in getting lorry drivers to respect their 'token' picket lines. Although they are correct to argue that it is impossible to

'stop the dock' as many on the Left argue, nevertheless it is a fact that many lorry drivers whilst personally sympathetic are obliged to drive through. Lorry drivers were a section of workers who in past were able to exercise some collective power - modern technology and the rapid financial concentration of the industry into something called 'logistics' - with tachographs, mobile phones, radio tracking and so on have robbed them of their former strength. Many of them are now 'casualised' or worse, driven to hire themselves as self employed day drivers. We need to be able to address this.

The old forms of organisation and methods of struggle will not work. At the very beginning of this dispute one of the committee said that they needed to make this struggle as much social as economic. This was a very profound comment for it recognised some of the factors we have talked about in this article.

So far however the dockers and their supporters have not been able to translate that wish into concrete practice. There are for instance in existence support groups around the country which have yet to make their voice heard. The women's organisation - Women of the Waterfront has still to fully find its feet. But its very existence marks an important break with the old kind of struggle.

In the short term the dockers are organising an international conference to discuss the themes of casualisation and globalisation and what should be workers response to it. Delegates will come from those ports that the dockers have visited, if they reflect the new kind of worker now in struggle in Liverpool, we may find some answers to the questions outlined here.

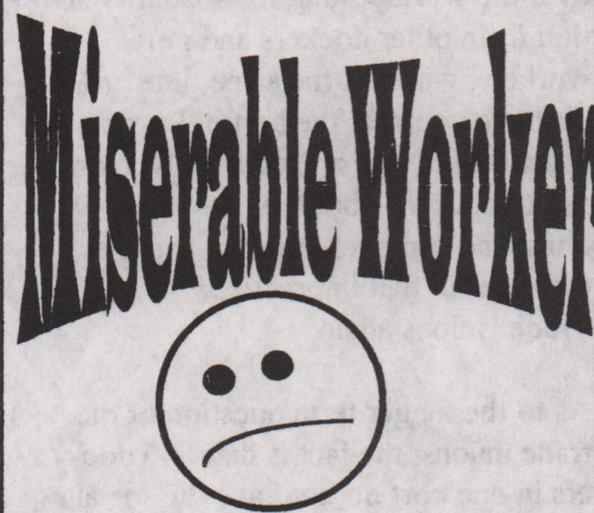
**I hope to produce a report of proceedings at the conference which I shall circulate to all those who have already expressed an interest. If anyone else wants it or more copies of this article - send a 10' x 8' sized SAE to,**

**Dave Graham, PO Box 37,  
Liverpool, L36 9FZ**

**In the meantime the dockers committee can be contacted as follows:-**

**Jimmy Davies, Liverpool Dock Stewards Committee, Transport House, Islington, Liverpool,**

**L3 8EQ**



The idea behind **Miserable Worker** was to produce a series of shortish leaflets expounding basic communist propaganda.

Readers are encouraged to use it. You are welcome to reprint it or photocopy it.

We would welcome your suggestions for other "issues".

You do not have to credit Subversion if you reuse it.

# Escape from Planet ICC

Continued from Page 5

## A LIE TOO FAR

In an article on page 4 entitled "Revolutionary Milieu must defend itself" they describe a visit to their last meeting by a Subversion member (the author of this article) and a friend who had never been to one of their meetings and was interested in finding out their views.

The article describes this visit as a deliberate attempt to sabotage their meeting by the new person, aided and abetted by Subversion!

Here's a sample of the article's argument:

[The new person]... "*wandered around the meeting room, then sat with his back to the praesidium [this is what they call the table with the 2 I.C.C. members behind it!] of the meeting and put his feet up on another chair. This disruptive performance soon took on spoken form. After asking a question on the situation in Bosnia, he responded that he didn't "give a shit about people dying" and that it was "only a few bombs".*

### What actually happened:

The two of us arrived at the meeting. I sat down towards the back, and my friend looked at the bookstalls ("*wandered around the meeting room*") and then sat at the side of the room, sideways on to the head table (the "praesidium"). In his first contribution to the meeting he commented that he believed Bosnia was not important to the ruling class, that it was they who didn't give a shit about people dying. The I.C.C.



speaker then said how outrageous this was to disregard people dying etc. Whereupon my friend clarified his remarks, making clear he was saying that it was the ruling class who thought like that. The I.C.C. heard what he said. Their article is simply lying.

Later on in their article they say how the new person kept interrupting them, and then relate with outrage how Subversion and the Communist Workers' Organisation (a Left-Communist organisation who had a member present in the audience) both took the side of "the disrupter".

Let's be clear about another thing. At no time were there more than five people in the room (two I.C.C., one CWO., myself from Subversion and my "disruptive" friend). Yet the I.C.C. conducted the meeting with the "iron discipline" they revel in.

By "disruption" they mean trying to adopt a conversational approach more in keeping with a meeting of that size. Not to mention putting your feet up on a chair.

If you'd heard the way they carried on - this is our meeting, we are in control, you'll talk when we say so etc., you wouldn't have believed your ears. Although I've been to a fair number of their meetings over the years, this was the worst I've ever seen them, and frankly it was the last straw.

After denouncing their behaviour as Stalinist, I told them that they were little more than a religious sect and it

would be the last time they'd see any of us at their meetings. My friend and I then walked out, and carried on drinking downstairs.

### And the moral to this sordid tale?

Theory and Practice go together. The I.C.C.'s "theory" isolates them from reality. One of their most notorious ideas is the way they see almost everyone apart from themselves as part of a great conspiracy against the working class and its finest flower (themselves). They are currently raving with paranoia about how "parasitic" groups are trying to destroy them. They will probably see this article as part and parcel of this.

The account of this meeting shows a practice that conforms to this. A person who has never encountered them before and is genuinely interested in hearing what they've got to say attends one of their meetings and... they can't handle it! Within seconds they've decided he's a disrupter and a saboteur and a petty-bourgeois element.

You may happen to meet an I.C.C. member. Some of them are decent, likable people. Some of them are nasty shits. But whatever the individual is like, he or she functions as a cog in a machine. And it's a machine from hell!

When the I.C.C. first came into existence many year ago it was regarded by many revolutionaries as a positive development which held much potential. But it's been downhill all the way.

**Analysis of the I.C.C. has moved out of the realm of polemic and into the realm of psychopathology.**

# LETTERS FROM AMERICA

*These two letters were sent to us by readers in the USA. The first comes from a member of a group called Los Angeles Workers Voice. The second from a prisoner.*

Dear comrades,

Our tiny marxist group in LA continues to discuss your ideas/goals. We have had much more time to do this over the recent period as the ongoing class motions/struggle have been in a funk.

We engaged in this summer/fall fights against the LA County social service cuts, but this ended up in a stinging defeat for workers: US\$400 million cuts/probably up to 25 privatizations of health clinics this year & next year/3,200 sackings already & worker patients told to get more "outpatient care" for serious maladies, etc. Even though the labour union hacks and some lefts (and the open bourgeois papers/media) say the establishment and their state through the federal loans/reimbursements "saved" the workers! Some "victory"! Many more workers now know better and the battles will begin anew in a few months.

For now, one can say that if a communist fraction even maintains semi-regular ties to groups of militant workers (and keep from getting pushed out of industry), this is a significant achievement!...

...I think I agree with you in your previous debates favouring revolutionary work amongst ordinary soldiers, sailors and airmen. There is a whole history of important soldier and sailor revolts this century in the imperialists' armed forces. When I was much younger in the late 60s and early 70s, I myself participated in anti-war and anti-militarist active duty and reservist groups who carried out important actions against the filthy US war on the Vietnamese. Hundreds of

other stronger, more powerful anti-war actions took place at other military stations and bases all over the world and in the war zone itself. I know the agitation of marxists and revolutionary anarchists in these actions made a big difference and helped raise the consciousness of the GIs in struggle.

Many soldiers and sailors (drafted or economic hardship-enlistments) who are not in the officer corps can be won to taking up anti-capitalist politics and militant struggle, especially in a crisis situation. It is folly to mechanically compare them to "coppers" and "flatfoots", etc. as the coppers are a bourgeois elite handpicked ideologically reactionary group of janissaries/thugs who actually get their "kicks" out of defending the rich and brutalising workers, especially militants, and poor people.

"NC"

## From a prisoner in Texas

Dear Folks at Subversion,  
Greetings from the rectum of the beast. Wanted to express my thanks and high opinion of the crack work I see at Subversion. It is exactly the kind of cutting edge, up to date political analysis I am looking for! Not only am I in agreement with the political outlook, I also find the insight penetrating and nonrigid and all encompassing - which is exactly what we need in order to be effective. I hope you will continue to send me "Subversion" as I think it's fuckin' great. I really split my rib cage laughing at the cartoon "Keep it FLUFFY" with the great subverted mediated experience held there in placard form for the surveillance pigs' benefit! Haw! Haw! The symbolic implications of that cartoon leave quite a bit of food for thought for the contemplative anarchist! Can we spoonfeed them headfixing drivel and lies with their own technology?

Very Insurrectionally,  
KG  
P.S. Keep it Spikey!

P.P.S Loved the "Is OJ Innocent?" deal. I didn't watch one episode of his trial but am mighty glad it's done with. No doubt a diversionary tactic by the capitalist media in order to preclude concern over true issues!

Remember, a boss is a lot like a diaper. Always on your ass and usually full of shit!

## Collective Action Notes

A publication from the USA. #The latest issue has articles on:  
*A Transitional Period - but to where*  
*The Role of Immigrant Labour*  
*A commentary on the Million Man March.*

They have also recently published a pamphlet containing three articles by Anton Pannekoek, the Dutch Council Communist. (It costs £3.00)

For more information write to :  
COLLECTIVE ACTION NOTES  
PO Box 22962, Balto., MD21203,  
USA

If you like Subversion, then why not try:

**Organise!** publication of the ACF, c/o 84b Whitechapel High St., London E1 7QX

**Aufheben**, c/o Prior House, Tilbury Place, Brighton BN2 2GY  
**Communist Headache**, PO Box 446, Sheffield S1 1NY

## Want to meet Subversion and other like minded folk in Manchester?

We are part of the **Manchester Class Struggle Group.**

The MCSG meets every fortnight. The venue is uncertain at the moment. If you want to come along, then drop us a line.

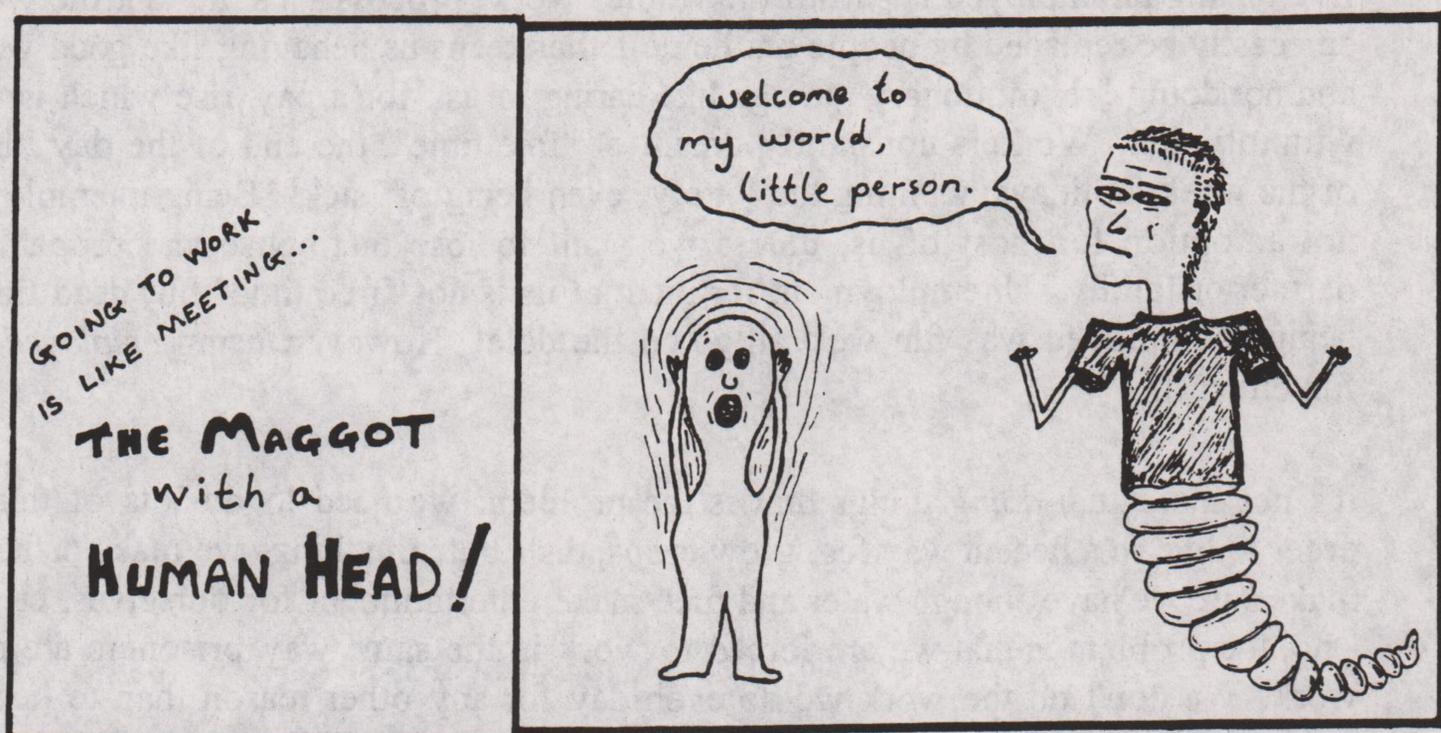
*We have lost our dignity*

That is what we all are - grateful and cowering dogs. We have given away most the dignity we could have because it is the only way to survive in this world. We crawl around like crippled sheep to keep our wages coming in, we do what we are told. We even agree with it all and try to join in with it. Why else do workers vote at election times unless it is to choose which people should have the right to tell us what to do! We have really sunk low when we actually put a cross against the names of the gangsters we'd prefer to hold power over us - we should have more dignity!

Democracy is just a game to get us believing we have a real choice and to get us to think we have a real say in society. The only time the we can hear our own voices above the constant babble of politicians, union leaders, newspapers and the television is when we take industrial action. You can tell how scared all our "elders and betters" are when we take our own initiative (eg. by working to rule, or going on strike, etc) because their response to us is nothing short of *rabid*. They must be worried that we might decide that we could do without them altogether - what would they do if we stopped doing all the work for them and they couldn't make money out of us?

For a start we can all stop voting, we can all stop going along with their lies (ie. this is how it always is and will always be) we can start getting off our knees.

Do we want to be miserable for ever? Are we really prepared, like faithful dogs with psychotic owners, to put up with all their whims and their threats for the rest of our days?



*This is the first of a short series of bulletins/leaflets which will be appearing 3 or 4 times a year. The next Miserable Worker will concentrate on ways we can try to defend ourselves at work and how we can cause trouble for our bosses just for the sheer hell of it!!*

# Miserable worker

Spring 1996  
No 1

**IF YOU'RE NOT MISERABLE THEN YOU MUST BE MAD!!**

This bulletin has been produced by a bunch of miserable workers centred around Manchester. It is not important who we are, it is enough to know that we have been pretty miserable for a long time now! and that we have discovered that our condition is common in the working class across the entire planet. Of course we don't just mean people with "jobs" are miserable - housewives, schoolchildren, students and the unemployed are also miserable.

The main reason we reckon for everyone being so miserable is *work*. If we're not actually at work, where we get told what to do, told off, paid too little, treated like dirt or like donkeys, then we are recovering from work, worrying about work, getting ready for work and trying our best to enjoy ourselves as much as possible in the few hours we have before we have to go back to that stinking hell-hole.

Most things we do are related to work. We don't have "children" we have "future workers", they go to school so that they can learn how to follow orders, which, as we know, is an essential trait for us workers! They may get to go to universities, but it only means that they will be able to give orders to other workers (this may seem like a better option than being on the bottom rung, but these concerned and caring people still have to take orders from people *above* them, and they have to mix with people who tend to have some serious personality defects!)

Even being unemployed is part of the whole "work" process - it's the fact the workers can easily be replaced by people on the dole that keeps us behaving like good workers and not doing "revolutionary" things like daring to ask for a pay rise which is in line with inflation. Workers constantly dream of "free time", the end of the day, the end of the week, holidays, winning the lottery, even being off sick! Being unemployed is not an option for most of us, unless we want to lose our house and probably our partner or family. Unemployment for most of us is not "free time" but dead time. If being unemployed was fun we'd all go on the dole! However, being *employed* is no fun either.....

It's not the actual *doing* things that is the problem, we need to do lots of things in order to live in a decent way (eg. grow crops, distribute the things we make or harvest, make sure we have enough water and fuel, make entertainment for ourselves, etc. etc.) - no, the problem is that we are forced to work in the same way prisoners are put to work. We don't do the work we do everyday for any other reason than to keep our bosses in the lap of luxury and ourselves out of the gutter. We have to do what they tell us everyday because otherwise they will boot us out and we'll lose our wages and get put on the breadline. We are slaves to our wages, and therefore also to our bosses. In old style slavery if you refused to work for your boss you were killed, these days they twist the knife a bit more! - workers have their contracts of employment terminated and they are relegated to the margins of society. But even in unemployment you have to behave properly - that is, like a grateful and cowering dog - to continue receiving the few quid that keep you going.