



Following Bill Morris's attack

DOCKERS HIT

BACK

LIVERPOOL dockers have hit back against the attack launched against them by the leader of their union, Bill Morris.

Morris, general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, has urged the dockers to cut their links with 'militant protest groups' after a violent police attack against a picket mounted by sacked dockers and their supporters.

Reported in the 'Financial Times' (1 October), Morris denounced what he called the 'unlawful action' of the pickets, deliberately ignoring that 42 people were arrested after the unprovoked police attack against a peaceful picket.

A Merseyside Port Shop Stewards Committee press release issued immediately after Morris's statement 'praised the principled courageous and peaceful support given over many weeks by the advance party Reclaim the Streets and other grassroots environmental groups.' It declared:

'The unique unity between trade unionists and

By Geoff Pilling

environmental groups will continue to be developed for the future.

'The dismissal of 500 Liverpool dockers over one year ago has devastated their families and the campaign for reinstatement will continue,' it said.

It warned of the sinister increase in the handling of toxic waste since the strike-breakers were brought into the port over the last year.

Like the rest of the trade union leadership Morris is frightened that the Liverpool struggle will get out of

control, that is out of his control.

He is clearly more than anxious about the powerful unity established last weekend between the dockers and many thousands of people fighting against the destruction of the environment by the capitalist system.

Many of the people who took part in the march and action in support of the dockers are unemployed.

The trade union leadership has proved of little use in the struggle of these millions of destitute young people many of them homeless.

In denouncing the 'unlawful action' of the pickets he underlines again the support that he and the trade union leaders give to anti-working class laws.

The great task now is to build on what was achieved last weekend. All those fighting the consequences of the crisis of capitalism must find ways of uniting in the most powerful and the widest movement possible.



Arthur Scargill joins Hillingdon strikers at the 'Reclaim the Future' Liverpool Dockers' Rally.

RECLAIM THE FUTURE

We publish below a statement by Reclaim the Streets, whose advance team worked with the Mersey Port Shop Stewards Committee to organise the events on 28-30 September in Liverpool. This was first published in 'Dockers Charter' (Special Anniversary Issue). For reports and pictures see 'Enter the Dragon' (inside pages).

RECLAIM The Future is a convergence of what is mistakenly perceived to be single-issue groups.

Anti-road and car protesters, the free party scene, peace groups and workplace struggles are all fighting for the same thing — the removal of a market system which disempowers, destroys the environment, encloses public spaces and removes freedom and responsibility from the individual.

Recognising the need for everyone to have a say in how society is run, we soon come up against those that want to keep decision-making power in the hands of capital.

To prevent us from criticising the whole system in its entirety the state uses divide-and-rule tactics. This is why people coming together unless closely managed by the state are now allowed, whether it be workers on the picket line or free party goers.

As soon as people begin to see the effects of consumer society, whether it be animal, human or ecological exploitation and destruction, they start to fight against these individual manifestations.

But everything is inter-linked, and a necessary part of the system we are challenging. When we act we must see our struggle in the context of fighting the whole system.

The dockers in particular, have branched out and shown their solidarity with other grassroots movements.

Over the years whilst still in work, the dockers have repeatedly refused to handle toxic waste. They have united internationally with

other dock workers who have struck in support and will also be enforcing an international blockade this week-end.

We are part of this solidarity with a wide range of groups. We struggle daily against the same source of oppression — the market system. Only as a grassroots movement rejecting reform and compromise, can we realise a free society based on the principles of an ecologically sound society.

The state is using its powers to stop this, under the Criminal Justice Act (1994) against striking workers as well as their expected targets in the traveller, squatter and raver communities.

Anti-secondary picketing laws were routinely used against protesters at Newbury earlier this year and conspiracy charges have been brought (as yet unsuccessful) in several cases against alleged organisers of protests and parties.

Meanwhile activists are increasingly suspicious of MI5 involvement in the surveillance of protests and that this role is to be formalised by the threatened Security Services Bill.

As politicians gear up to present the electorate with a choice between two virtually indistinguishable political parties, 'Stop the Clampdown — Reclaim the Future' is not merely an expression of mounting disillusion with mainstream politics. It represents a fundamental challenge to the political system.

The groups involved believe that environmental responsibility and quality of life are higher values than the relentless pursuit of profits and economic growth, and personal responsibility and involvement is more important than the politics of the state.

Bob Pennington

It is with deep regret that we announce the death of Bob Pennington, for many years a fighter and leader in the Trotskyist movement. A tribute to comrade Pennington will appear in next week's issue.

WHAT'S ON? WHAT'S ON? WHAT'S ON?

5 Oct. Assemble 12 noon Civic Centre Uxbridge for 'One year of the Hillingdon Hospital Strike' march at 1 pm back to Civic Centre for 2 pm Rally

6 Oct. Cable Street Commemoration: — 12 noon Altab Ali Park, Gardners Corner, 1 pm March down Cable Street to Rally 3 pm St. George's Town Hall.

9 Oct. 7.30p.m. Steering Committee for 'New Party' Re-call Conference — Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London.

12 Oct. 7.15 pm — Festival of SE Asian Food and Music, Hampden Community Centre, 150 Ossulston Street, London (nr Kings X & Euston) — ITUSC fund raiser — tickets from Keith Standing: 01372 817 778 — £10 each or £15 a couple. Children 12 & over £5, under 12 free.

16 Oct. 7pm London Support Group for the Liverpool Dockers Public Meeting Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn.

19-20 Oct. — Sat. 2-5.30 pm Open discussion on past, present and future work of defence of a united, multi-cultural Bosnia-Herzegovina.
7.30 pm - late - social evening, music, food etc.
Sun. 11am - 2.30 pm National meeting of Workers Aid for Bosnia

London Support Group for Liverpool dockers meets every Thursday, 7.30 p.m. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn.

PLEASE SEND US DETAILS OF EVENTS WHICH WE CAN INCLUDE IN THIS LISTING EACH WEEK:
Phone 0171 387 0564, Fax: 0171 387 0569
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Workers Press

Tale of two cities

ONLY a short stretch of the Lancashire coast separates the seaside resort of Blackpool from the port of Liverpool. But last week they were worlds apart.

In Blackpool the delegates to the Labour Party conference met for the last time before the coming election.

It was the most stage-managed conference in the history of that party.

Even to get a visitor's ticket meant applying months ago, sending a photograph which Labour Party headquarters forwarded to the Lancashire police, who thus had mug shots of all delegates and visitors.

What graphic expression of the real relationship between the Labour leaders and the police.

The only interest those leaders had at Blackpool last week was how to make sure that it was their snouts that would be in the trough after the next election.

The desperate concerns of the unemployed, the homeless, the elderly and the sick had no place on their agenda. They wanted to keep all such embarrassing subjects as far away from the conference as possible. Blair and company even opposed the modest proposal that old age pensions should rise in line with the rise in incomes, as Labour had previously pledged.

They vied with the Tories to present themselves as the true party of 'law and order'.

The conference was dominated by wheeling and dealing in secret meetings between the trade union bosses and Labour Party chiefs to make sure that the Great Leader Blair becomes the next prime minister. What a contrast with Liverpool!

The day the Labour Party conference opened, hundreds of supporters joined with dockers in that city to protest against the brutal sacking of 500 Merseyside port workers because they have refused to accept the slave conditions that the bosses now demand in the port.

Shoulder to shoulder, they confronted the brutal and unprovoked action of the same police force with whom Blair and company have such friendly relations.

Throughout the weekend several thousand people had marched behind the dockers in demonstration, discussions and finally on the picket line.

Many of these people had been drawn into activity against the threat which the decaying capitalist system, with its uncontrollable drive for profit, poses to the entire environment in which we live.

It was an inspiring event, the start of something new.

Yet there is no doubt that many of those who marched through the streets of Liverpool behind the dockers, who discussed the present and the future on Sunday and who mounted a joint picket with the dockers on Monday have little interest in the Labour Party. Most have contempt for the cynical antics of Blair and his fellow careerists.

But millions of ordinary people still look to the Labour Party as a solution to their mounting problems and millions will vote Labour in the coming election.

Why is this? Because as yet, they can see no alternative.

That alternative must be built, a movement that unites all those who are fighting a decaying system that threatens the lives of millions of people, in Britain and throughout the planet.

If Liverpool can be made the start of such a movement, it will indeed have been a memorable weekend.

LIVERPOOL'S Pier Head has seen many demonstrations in its time, and many bigger than the 8,000 or so supporters of the dockers and Women of the Waterfront who arrived there last Saturday.

But this march and rally on the first anniversary of the dispute was different.

The extraordinary range of the campaigns present gave it a buoyancy and an optimism rarely seen before. Something new was happening.

The many union and labour movement organisations represented by their banners included the Hillingdon strikers, Camden UNION, the Irish Seaman's Union, the electricians' union, EPIU, the railworkers' unions, RMT and ASLEF, the printworkers' union, GPMU, Haringey and Leeds Trades Councils, British Aerospace and Rolls Royce Shop Stewards' Committee and over 200 Turkish workers from the north-east London Textile branch of the TGWU and the Day-Mer workers' centre.

In pride of place was the Women of the Waterfront banner and they had a lorry decorated as a ship, named 'Dignity' — the seafarers being the dockers' singing children with multi-coloured balloons.

Then came the Merseyside dockers' own banner and behind that the banner of the London Royal Group of docks with the words made famous in the 1972 jailing of striking dockers in Pentonville — 'Arise Ye Workers'.

In that delegation were dockers sacked in 1989 for the 'crime' of defending the National Dock Labour Scheme, and among them, Denise Fenn - wife of Mickie, ex-secretary of the unofficial Port Shop Stewards' Committee, who died suddenly on 28 July this year at the age of 58.

Never before has an industrial dispute inspired support from so many individuals and groups, not traditionally associated with the organised working class.

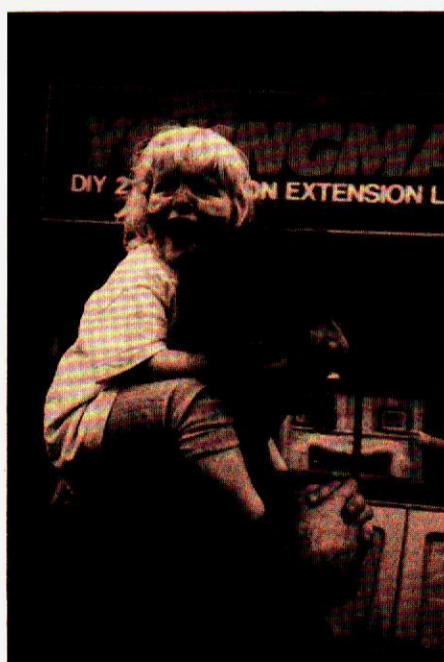
Trade unionists and socialist groups were joined by: the McLibel Campaign, ecological groups such as Eco-Trip and Earth First, Workers Aid for Bosnia convoyers, the Animal Liberation Front and hundreds of young people associated with the Job Seekers' Allowance Campaign and Reclaim the Streets.

The colourful union banners were rivalled by gaudy and imaginative creations proclaiming the future

ENTER



REPORT, INTERVIEWS AND PICTURES BY JOHN DAVIES, BRONWEN HANDYSIDE & DANIEL ROBERTSON



was going to be won for humanity. 'Scabs Out, Dockers In!' The chants lost any suggestion of ritual tokenism and in the happy, carnival atmosphere became real, achievable aims.

When the fifteen-foot dragon breathed smoke over the armour-clad cops guarding the approach to McDonald's the howl of derision that erupted represented the class testing out its strength.

From the start the drums and dancers of the Turkish and Kurdish youth had created an unusually flamboyant and noisy atmosphere. When they were joined by the

Reclaim the Streets drummers they dictated the mood of the whole march.

The drums and dancers swept to the head of the march as it moved down Castle Street and James Street. The banners of the Haringey Trades Council and Rolls Royce Shop Stewards competed as they bounced up and down to the staccato rhythm.

ON MONDAY there was a mass action at Seaforth dock. The day that Labour Party delegates were allowed into their own conference only after being vetted by Lancashire police (by agreement with Blair), the Merseyside cops set out in full riot gear to intimidate all those who turned up in support of the dockers.

Four docks shop stewards were among the 42 arrested. The police had their complete modern arsenal on display: CS gas, dogs, horses, Darth Vader riot squads.

Dockers and their wives, well used to being pushed around by the police over the last year were taken aback by the violence of the riot squad who were deployed several times when pickets tried to block the road. Armoured robocops punched, kicked and kneed the pickets with real hatred in their eyes.

Maybe the police violence arose from their discovery of a large group of Reclaim the Streets activists on the roof of the administration building and on two gantries.

The sight of the flag and the Women of the Waterfront banner 'Sack the bosses, not the workers!' fluttering from the roof of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company building inspired singing and chanting from the dockers and their supporters throughout the morning, but acts of conscious thuggery from the assembled police as the pickets attempted to make their way home.

As the action ended, the dockers negotiated the release of all the Reclaim the Streets occupiers, without charges. This clearly nettled the riot police and the atmosphere was very nasty as people dispersed.

One young supporter, peeling a pear with a pen knife was arrested for possessing an offensive weapon, put in a





Police try to escort a Blackshirt staff car through the streets at the junction of Dock Street and Cable Street (Picture from Tower Hamlets in Photographs 1914-1939)

of Tories, Liberals and the Labour Party was not only supported by Labour; it was they who suggested its extension right up to the outbreak of World War II.

This took the form of the Public Order Act of 1936 which prohibited political uniforms, outlawed paramilitary groups and introduced new clauses in law to control public processions and assemblies.

Provoke

Section 5 of the Act made it an offence for anyone to use threatening, 'abusive' or 'insulting' words to provoke a breach of the peace and was used not against the fascists but against the miners in the Harworth Colliery dispute.

Such laws were used during the 1985 print strike and after to prevent workers from even shouting 'scab' at strikebreakers.

The legislation was not extended to other parts of London, however, so Mosley's blackshirts were allowed to march through Kentish Town and Bermondsey during 1937.

The police were not even-handed in their approach to fascists' and unemployed workers' rallies.



Mukhtar Ahmed was viciously assaulted by a white gang

Even Home Secretary Sir Samuel Hoare admitted this — and he was hardly a sympathiser of the working class cause.

H Division in Bethnal Green and the Shoreditch Constabulary were notorious for picking on anti-fascist protesters. MI5 shared their 'concern' and argued that should these 'disturbances' be allowed to continue, 'extremism' would thrive.

The background to this was further hunger marches following soon after the battle of Cable Street and the abdication crisis when King Edward VIII married Mrs Wallis Simpson — both were fascist sympathisers.

This was in itself symptomatic of the huge polarisation of society taking place in society in the pre-war years.

In East London over 1,000 political meetings, fascist and anti-fascist, took place between 1937 and the outbreak of war in 1939.

Cable Street showed there was a movement in the working class prepared to fight fascism and take on the state — but that movement was betrayed internationally by Stalinism and millions of workers were dragged into a war unprecedented in its barbarity.

Cable Street today

TODAY's march in Cable Street is the culmination not just of many months of hard work but of many years of patient work by the Trades Council in East London.

Following the attack on Mukhtar Ahmed and the British National Party (BNP) mobilisation on the Isle of Dogs, the Trades Council met with the TUC to plan a demonstration against racism and fascism: 30,000 took to the streets in East London to demonstrate their hatred of racism and fascism.

The Trades Council organised meetings in East London and on the Isle of Dogs to discuss the question of housing and the provision of local services.

Answers

It was never enough to argue that workers should not be taken in by the bigotry and lies of the BNP — they needed answers to the day-to-day problems all of them confronted in their community in order to arrive at a common understanding of the unity needed across ethnic lines to even begin building a movement to fight for their rights.

At a meeting in Newham with anti-fascists, the Trades Council took responsibility for organising a demonstration.

We met with the Cable Street group to discuss working together. They agreed to organise a festival.

We worked closely with every anti-racist organisation and trade unionist who agreed to fight for an event which would do justice to this 60-year commemoration.

We came into conflict over the question of whether our slogan should be to fight for socialism and whether the fight of Bosnia for its self-determination was a fight against fascist aggression and barbarity.

But we always stood for a non-

workers and the unemployed and the dockers.

It must also involve some recognition that these struggles emerge out of an international crisis of Capital and that a resolution of the profound political problems of the working class (its leadership, its perspective, its organisation and — above all — its understanding of its historic tasks) must be resolved on an international level.

One of the main reasons the dockers were able to celebrate a year-long struggle against the employers in Liverpool docks (though not the meeting of their demands) was that they turned to dockers internationally for support.

Convoy

It was in this spirit of internationalism that our Trades Council organised a 6 ton van to join the trade union convoy to Tuzla in Bosnia during the war and sent further aid and its secretary to Bosnia the following year.

The Bosnians were engaged in a three-year struggle against ethnic partition. There were those on the Cable Street Committee who refused to support the Bosnian cause with bland references to atrocities committed by all sides, 'civil war' etc.

We have asked the Bosnian workers to send a message of solidarity to the Cable Street commemoration.

We know there will be enormous

upheavals in Bosnia after the elections, which resolve nothing. We understand the enormous pressures Bosnia trade unionists like the teachers and the health workers are under: they struggled through the war without pay and now still have no pay; many of the members are unemployed and threatened with destitution.

The same future confronts the Bosnian miners who are very conscious of their own history and remember the struggle of the partisan movement against the Nazis and the Ustashi.

The violent breakup of the Yugoslav federation followed close upon the destruction of the other Stalinist states but, in a contradictory way, has brought us closer to understanding the necessity to unite workers East and West in Europe, as well as workers in the semi-colonial states of Africa, Asia the Middle East and of North, South and Central America.

To really combat racism we must fight for the international unity of the working class. Workers went from Cable Street to Spain because they understood that unity — however much Stalinism distorted that understanding.

What we are commemorating is the struggle of workers in East London and internationally not just against fascist barbarity but against the barbarism in which the whole system of international capital in general threatens to engulf us.

stage of the campaign.

We established a committee which met weekly and organised the raising of funds, flyposting, production of leaflets and posters, fighting for support in the trade union and workers movement.

There have been many along the way who have responded to that call and some who prefer to stand aside or operate independently of us.

Our agenda in contrast to the latter has been to make this part of the movement to reconstruct the fighting capacity of the working class and to bring as many workers as possible into this struggle, whatever the form of struggle in which they are engaged.

For us the question of racist attacks in the borough must be taken up with the question of the Asylum and Immigration Act, as well as the struggles of the postal and railworkers, the Hillingdon hospital workers, the education



The fight for Bosnian self-determination is a fight against fascist aggression and barbarity

UNITE THE STRUGGLES!

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- ▶ Workers fighting casualisation and anti-union laws;
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- ▶ Pensioners condemned to the meanest existence and premature death through such illnesses as hypothermia;
- ▶ The sick and disabled suffering as the National Health service is callously dismantled;
- ▶ Asylum seekers being deported to certain imprisonment or death;
- ▶ People fighting to defend the environment;
- ▶ Those fighting for their rights against state repression.

A new movement must be built out of all the existing struggles — from the bottom up.

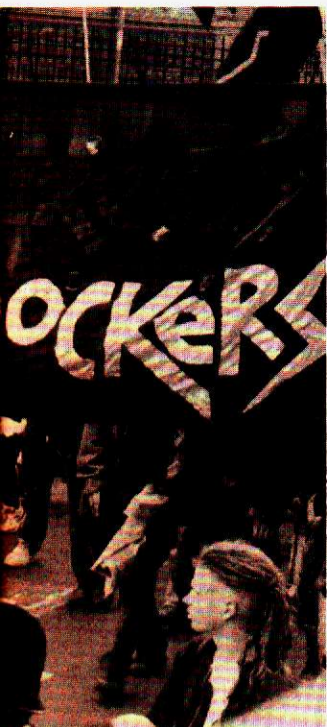
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THE DRAGON!



BILL RICHARDSON is 76 years old. He was a tool-maker, and active for decades in the Amalgamated Engineering Union. He was convenor of shop stewards at Napiers engineering factory in Acton, and also at London Transport. He was also active during the sixties in the Notting Hill People's Association.

It was not organised by any political party but by ordinary people, built from the bottom up.

It exposed Rachmanism, built up local nurseries, managed to retrieve privately-owned houses into Trusts the residents set up themselves. They also took over redundant squares in the area and turned them into children's playgrounds.

This was all done with no help from the conventional political parties. The Labour Party did nothing. The Communist Party tried unsuccessfully to take over. "I'm ex-CP and I know the tactics".

"We took a hand against the fascists in the area. We built a multi-racial organisation which functioned very well. If it had any political complexion at all it was anarchist. Instead of preaching to people we tried to organise so that people learned to help themselves.

"It was a very broad church, to say the least. The main organisers were — a member of the Communist Party, a Jehovah's witness, a devout Catholic and Hepsibah Menuhin (Yehudi's sister), and her husband.

The whole idea was first to canvass people to find out what the problems were. We used techniques to bring them together in street organisations.

We covered every house, flat, occupied room, to alert them to the dangers of Rachmanism and ask what the defence should be.

We used particular methods to break down racism. Rachman was driving out white tenants in order to shovel in larger numbers of black people. He was stacking several people in

the room - some places were occupied by different people in the day and the night. Some of the white residents were hostile - condemning the new West Indian population for the way they were forced to live, the music they played and the food they ate.

We faithfully undertook to take all the problems, all the complaints and racism and investigate it. We asked people, instead of reporting back to you in your house, can we call a meeting of the street, and report back to all of you at the same time. It took two to three years to build up a sufficiently united community to take action.

The way we took over one square to turn it into a children's playground. First we investigated to find out who had title to the land, and it turned out that it had lapsed.

A couple of middle-class people who lived in the houses around tried to lay claim but we soon put a stop to that.

We took it over, and soon kids were coming from miles around to play - unfortunately three children were killed in the streets on the way to the square.

We then demanded that the council pedestrianise the whole of the surrounding area - and they turned us down.

The women - as always - were the best activists. Fifty of them sat down in the roads day after day to stop the traffic. We went to the police, to the London City Council, to the local council, everywhere, to get agreement.

In the end I went to a local Labour councillor and asked him to help out. He was an Irishman, and a member of the building workers' union.

I told him, what we want is a dozen lorries loaded with rubble to drive into the streets and dump their loads in the middle of the night.

He went down to the local Catholic church and drafted a dozen men who were delighted to do it.

I then went to the local Tory councillor and told him that unless something was done twelve trucks would be dumping several tons of rubble.

The next day workers were out putting bollards up in the streets around the square.

I first joined the Communist Party in 1936 when I was 16 years old, at the time of the Spanish Civil War.

They used to send me out every Saturday to stand on a street corner selling the paper, but after a few weeks doing that I had had enough.

I stopped doing that and organised a jazz club, and a rambling club. We used to go out to the country every weekend and have long political discussions.

The CP leaders called me in and told me I had to recruit the members of the clubs, and I told them where to get off. That was the first time me and the Communist Party parted company.

I worry about what has happened to the trade union movement now. When I used to turn up at my union branch meeting in those days at Napiers there was standing room only.

There were 800 members of the Communist Party - we had the management up against the wall. But after the war the CP instructed its industrial members to leave the factories and go out and campaign for CP candidates in the election - this was later changed to Labour party candidates.

People were so desperate to get out of the factories - skilled workers were not allowed to leave their jobs during the war - that everybody left, and the whole CP branch collapsed.

The Communists came back to Napiers later. They sent some high-ranking members who told us to call a strike. We told them you couldn't just go to the members and tell them to go on strike.

There had to be a deep-seated reason for it. They called us all kinds of names, including Trotskyites, and we man-handled them out of the factory. That's when I parted company for the last time with the CP.

"I have been a fighter all my life for the rights of the working class - that's why I am coming to Liverpool to support the Liverpool dockers."



transit and then beaten up in full view of some dockers and their wives. A small Asian woman was grabbed by an OSD vehicle which had moved alongside the dispersing pickets to shout provocative obscenities, and beaten. The police violence was unable to take away a real sense of triumph however. The dockers were disgusted with the police and enthusiastic about the new support.

Despite the local TV news calling new picketers 'professional protestors', Bobby Morton, speaking on behalf of the dockers on Granada TV, said:

"We are fighting for the future, our future, our children's future. We invited Reclaim the Streets and Reclaim the Future here because we are all fighting for the future."



ALEXIS RICHTER is 29, a student of anthropology at the University of East London, and a member of the Radical Anthropology Group (RAG).

The most impressive member of the latter organisation is a scarlet thirty-foot fire-breathing dragon (see picture this page).

The dragon came into her own when the march ran into a sinister line of police, dressed to kill in riot gear, and snapping pictures of the demonstrators.

They were posted in front of the local MacDonalds - to protect the hamburgers and chips.

As older members of the march shouted rude words at the coppers, the dragon sashayed up and smothered them in a huge snort of smoke.

The bewildered officers did not know whether or how they should kill it, and all those who saw the incident laughed their socks off.

The dragon was St George, and slew the police - the real monster.

"The idea behind the dragon is creating solidarity through dance, and

through partying. The dragon itself is a symbol of power, and of female solidarity.

"If everybody joins the dragon, they become the dragon - but only if we all get together. The ideal would be if everyone joined in, for united solidarity, for the common good, a common front.

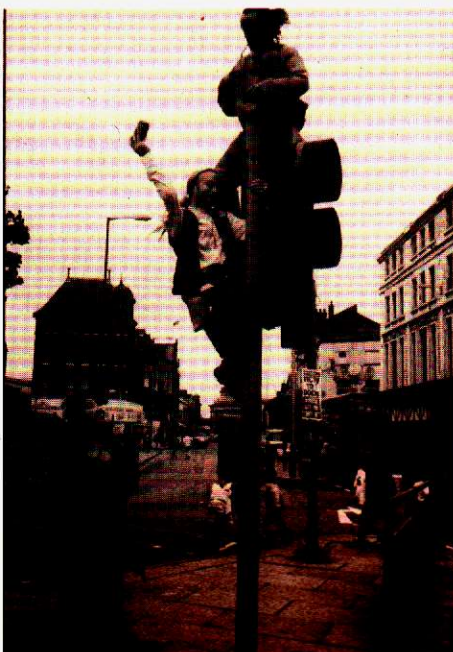
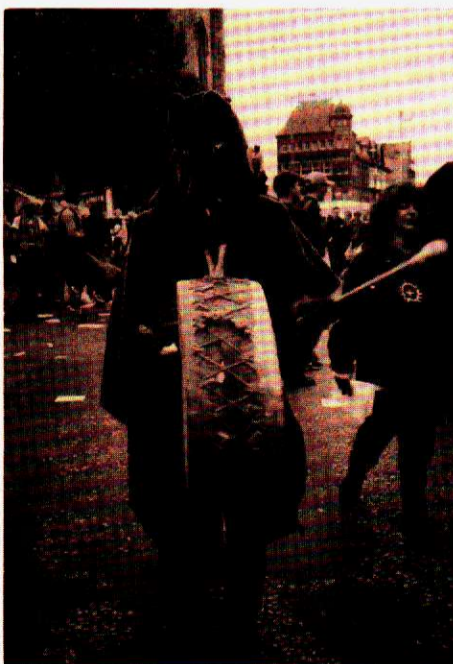
"The difference between a bad party and a good one is when people are really together, they share a bond over and above cliques. It's the same with everything.

"This is an ideal event for the dragon because people are coming together.

"It seems like the dockers are the last bastion of trade union solidarity. No wonder the government hates them.

"My background and culture is right-wing. It's slowly dawning on me what the importance of the dockers and their stand is.

My idea of the trade unions was of the big union barons, but now I see all kinds of people coming together, uniting against the multi-national corporations."



STEVE is a 36-year old council worker who has campaigned against the cuts, and a political activist in other areas for many years.

He is a member of the Haringey Solidarity Group, which started life in 1989 as the Haringey Anti-poll tax Campaign. Its members turned out in force for the anniversary of the dockers' dispute.

"I think most people in the group might loosely describe themselves as 'Libertarian Marxists'.

"We decided to come together because we had similar politics. One member of the group was Danny Burns, who wrote the anti-poll tax book.

"Our main campaign at the moment is against the Job Seekers Allowance - with a stall outside the benefits office, handing out a series of leaflets including a 'Claimants Survival Guide'.

"We came to support the dockers because this dispute is unofficial - out of the control of the bureaucrats.

"We also support their amazing determination. They have a good history on environmental issues - blocking Namibian uranium, and PCBs coming into the port of Liverpool.

"They are also very internationalist. It's a shame that the support inside this country has not matched that in other places.

"But I think the events of this weekend show that something has changed in Britain - that people are starting to sit up and take notice."





The need for a new socialist party - continuation of discussion; send us your views.

Hints and innuendos are 'not discussion'

SIMON PIRANI (WP 28 Sept) tells us that 'unfortunately Geoff Pilling fails to say what he means...'. I leave it to Geoff to answer that, but I can't have been the only one to notice that Simon Pirani certainly doesn't 'say what he means', preferring at best vague hints and innuendo.

Our agenda in Workers Press, in working for a new organisation to build a Marxist party, is discussion. I don't know what Simon Pirani's agenda is, but what he writes is, in my book, not discussion.

He says that 'if the new organisation is to go anywhere(?)', it must set its face against such grotesque 'top-down' parodies of Stalin's 'Bolshevism'. Is the implication that the Workers International and its British section the WRP have not done that?

As others must do, knowing Simon Pirani's long record in our party, I wonder why he didn't write, instead, something like the following: 'I and my comrades in the WRP, having gone through the bitter experience of the abuses of Healy and others, abuses inflicted under the cover of gross distortions of democratic centralism and Marxism, expelled Healy and his clique in 1985. We have since then been determined to continue the fight then begun, to understand the sources of such distortions and to build on the foundations of Marxism and democratic centralism.'

'We mean by centralism a coordinated and disciplined activity of members and organisations of the party based upon a strategy arrived at on the basis of Marxist theory.'

'To achieve such a relation between theory and practice requires that there is maximum opportunity for the expression of differences of opinion and for comrades to fight for minority positions.'

Simon Pirani goes on to allege that 'having identified

the fall of the Stalinist bureaucracy as a crucial turning-point, leading members (of the WRP) make a facile, one-sided analysis of its consequences'.

I suggest that it would have been better (less 'one-sided', perhaps? certainly more honest) to have written as follows:

'A long and detailed discussion was necessary in the Workers International, with sharp clashes of opinion, in order to establish our understanding that after the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, Stalinism strictly speaking no longer existed.'

'This marks a qualitative change in the relationship of class forces on the world scale. In this discussion it was necessary to fight for the dialectical method against that of superficial comparisons and purely quantitative calculations.'

'I (Simon Pirani) was one of those who at first opposed this dialectical analysis, instead insisting, for example, that Stalinism persisted 'in other forms', or that the situation following its collapse was 'complex and contradictory' - a formulation which of course would disorientate our movement, since all situations are, after all, complex and contradictory, the question is to understand the definite direction (with all its complexities and contradictions) of every major shift.'

'I (Simon Pirani) still do not accept other comrades' conclusion that the new situation is essentially 'favourable' to the working class, because this seems to me one-sided and facile.'

'Comrades do go out of their way to add that the remnants of Stalinist ideas and organisation contain dangers for the working class, but this does not reassure me, and sometimes - as in Geoff Pilling's reply to Dave Graham - they don't mention the Stalinist legacy.'

If Simon Pirani, as a well-

known member of the WRP, had written in this way, he might have encouraged his readers to say to themselves: it is very encouraging, for the prospects of the new organisation and eventually the new party, that in it will be serious comrades from the WRP, who engage in serious theoretical work and are ready to learn from their mistakes...

Even more important, he could have added: 'One of the most difficult lessons to learn, however, in the new situation, is that revolutionaries now find themselves in a position to oppose reactionary forces in the working-class movement and outside it, and now with real actions and initiatives.'

Scepticism

'For example, it must be said that it took some of us an unconscionably long time to overcome our scepticism that a revolutionary practice (and not only correct "evolutionary" words) was possible against that poisoned survival of the Stalinist bureaucracy which rules Serbia and embarked on "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia.'

'This practice was the convoys organised by Workers Aid for Bosnia, on the initiative of a leading Workers International member in Serbia.'

I should add that in South Africa the Workers International has led the fight (in particular



Work done by the WRP in Workers Aid for Bosnia was work for the reconstruction of the Fourth International.

at the 1995 'Socialist Conferences') against the leadership and policies of the remnants of Stalinism in COSATU and the South African Communist Party. These comrades were not in any way held back from this by our conclusion that the new situation is essentially favourable. On the contrary! On this basis we took the offensive.

Simon Pirani says the WRP 'has made little progress towards the goal of rebuilding the Fourth International' but 'now proclaims its (doesn't he mean "our"?) strategy to build the "new party"'. He has a selective memory. At the February 1995 Congress of the WRP I proposed the resolution for orientation to a new party. Comrade Pirani proposed the formulation that the content of this proposal was the perspective on which the Workers International was founded: reconstruction of the Fourth International in and through the reconstruction of the working-class movement as a whole.

We agreed. Now he wants to counterpose the two as opposites. He asks, where does the work for a new party 'leave the Fourth International?'

He doesn't answer this question himself. The answer we in the WRP will fight for is not a matter only of words, names; it is this:

We are convinced that the new party the working class needs must be international and

internationalist. Marxist analysis, and more and more the experience of workers in struggle, shows that this not only corresponds to the needs of the working class but also that those who come forward as the vanguard in these struggles strive towards this consciousness.

The collapse of Stalinism and the patent utter bankruptcy of reformism now bring before the eyes of masses of people the historic failure of those parties which have commanded the allegiance of the working class.

The definitive reckoning with that experience is neither more nor less than the necessity expressed in the programme of the Fourth International: Social-Democracy and Stalinism (the Second and the Third Internationals) have gone over to the counter-revolution; it is necessary to raise the banner of the world socialist revolution and form a party around it.

To which I would add that Simon Pirani is in my opinion blinkered if he cannot see WRP members' activity in Workers Aid for Bosnia, for example, as work for the reconstruction of the Fourth International.

Only those who engage in the reconstruction of the internationalism of the working class will rebuild the Fourth International.

Finally, Simon Pirani chooses to say that in the WRP we indulge in 'old-style democratic centralism' and 'inner-

party struggle' and that these should be 'dropped'. Again, he doesn't say what he means. I know he will reply that his space was restricted and that he offered to expand his piece. That is no excuse for writing things which he knows play to the prejudices of enemies of Marxism (perhaps 'enemies of Marxism' is also one of the concepts we should 'drop'?).

I don't know what is meant by 'old-style'.

Obviously Simon Pirani does not mean by this what some people mean, namely the complete distortion of democratic centralism under Stalin, or the unprincipled use of formal rules of democratic centralism to cover authoritarian methods, abuses and opportunist politics by Healy.

But just what does he mean? Again, why does he not say that he and his comrades in the WRP rose up against Healy's caricature of democratic centralism in 1985 and are determined to continue to fight for democratic centralism based above all on a common understanding of tasks?

How can party democracy operate without, often, a struggle between tendencies in the party?

Why then put 'inner-party struggle' in inverted commas, and why propose that it should be dropped?

Cliff Slaughter
WRP Secretary

Working towards splits in the Labour Party

IT IS inevitable that contributions towards the debate on the movement for a new workers' party will include many words on liquidationism, anarchism, and a few more 'isms.'

However what is the crucial question in all this debate? It is, quite simply, whether the organised working class will split from the parties that purport to represent it internationally.

Will there be a Labor Party in the USA? Will there be new workers' parties across the globe? Will the British Labour Party split?

History can be a prison or it can guide us to liberation. If we briefly look back at the history of the CPGB we see quite starkly that the fusion of sects that created the party was soon dominated by Stalinism.

Had the British Labour Party split into a revolutionary and reformist wing in 1918 then our history may have been quite different, indeed all the big communist

parties internationally were created as a result of seismic splits in social democracy, although of course their later decline is well charted.

Our task is therefore to create an organisation that can work through and on a split in the British Labour Party.

Anything less will only create peripheral organisations like the Socialist Labour Party (SLP).

Autocratic

The SLP's formation is a subject lesson in political life. Formed using autocratic, semi-clandestine methods, it has completely failed to subvert the British Labour Party in its working class heartlands.

The SLP may well be a London 'flavour of the month' but it is a lead balloon in the former mining areas that Scargill presumably likes to call his own. From this harsh lesson we need to look positively at two developments:

* The movement away from

Labour Party activism by local party members;

* The real possibility that Blair's government is going to try and hammer us.

There must be a turn to the Labour Party, (along with many other turns!), with the special aim of addressing one question to working class 'left' members of that party. That question is clear - 'will you campaign on Blair's anti-working class policy or will you join with those attempting to build an independent working-class socialist party?'

After the Labour Party conference we need to be calling meetings which carefully analyse the policy developments of the Labour Party and at which the arguments for the 23 November meeting can be put.

Opinions

Union members, Labour Party constituency activists, local voters will have a million and one opinions on current issue - in the clearest and

sharpest way we need to cut through the myriad of opinions about what Blair might or might not do and push the points home:

* Do you want publicly-owned, democratically-run health, education and local authority services?

* Do you want the £4.26 per hour minimum wage?

* Do you want jobs, homes?

* Do you want a society free from fear, accessible to all with cultural facilities that everyone may enjoy?

* Do you want an economy under workers' control and not prey to the speculators of the derivatives market?

* Do you want a workers' international policy, not a British foreign policy?

* Real aid, real work alongside our brothers and sisters in Europe and the world?

This is the debate we need now in our movement, our communities and amongst our people.

John Rees,
Shirebrook

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