

LIVERPOOL ANARCHIST

THE 1775 LIVERPOOL SAILORS' REVOLT

The American Revolutionary War had a massive impact on merchant shipping in Liverpool, particularly the slave trade. Many ships sat idle, and by late August up to 3,000 seamen were unemployed. The merchant class saw their desperation as an opportunity, and a crew for the Derby expecting to be paid 30s a month were told they would only get 20s. On August 25th, they cut down all the rigging and left it on the deck. That day nine seamen were arrested by constables, and sentenced to prison by a magistrate.

Over 2,000 seamen surrounded the prison (The Tower of Liverpool) on Water Street. Armed with clubs and handspikes, they smashed its windows, ignored the riot act and threatened to tear it down. Eight prisoners were released, and the crowd marched off, before realising that one had been left behind. They marched back, freeing the ninth and a woman who had been imprisoned for assisting them. That night, and over the following days, other ships had their rigging cut down to prevent them from sailing.

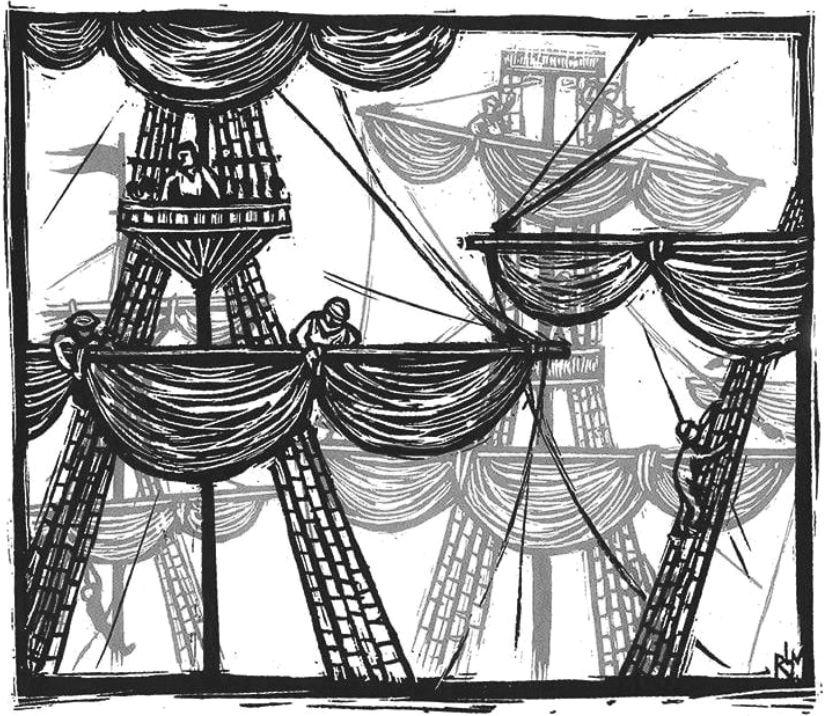
On the 26th, men, women and children marched behind a red flag to the Exchange (where the magistrates and merchants were holed up, now called the Town Hall). They demanded an increase in wages and then paraded around the town. They organised themselves through daily mass meetings at 9am and apparently two leaders were elected, Jemmy Askew and "General Gage". On the 28th pickets toured the docks and their demands were reiterated; on the 29th, a delegation met the Mayor. There are conflicting

accounts as to whether he agreed or refused to the pay rise.

The magistrates had hired over 120 men, for 10s a day, and armed them, so that they could arrest the strike leaders. Frustrated by the lack of progress since their meeting that morning, the strikers surrounded the Exchange at 9pm. The seamen were unarmed, and up until this point no one had been injured, but some of them threw rocks and broke a pane of glass. The armed men inside the Exchange let out a volley of fire, and at least two strikers were killed. They responded by stoning the Exchange, and retreating into the night.

On the 30th, in response to the killings, strikers "ransacked" the houses of several merchants. This

STRIKE!



The great London strike of 1768. Workers on the waterfront, textile workers, coal heavers, craftsmen, sailors, walked out to protest wage cuts, poor working conditions, and rigid discipline. They acted within a circle of slave rebellions, strikes, and riots that were taking place throughout the Atlantic world. The sailors "struck" the sails of their ships, bringing commerce to a standstill and providing a word that we still use when workers conduct collective job actions to defend their interests: the STRIKE.

was a surprisingly orderly affair. Whatever was taken was broken or torn up in the street outside. The strikers organised sentries to prevent looting, and an effort was made to ensure innocent neighbours were not targeted. The intention was revenge for yesterday's bloodshed, and so the first house targeted for "pulling down" was that of Thomas Ratcliffe of Frog Lane (now Whitechapel) who had apparently fired the first shot. While looting was generally prevented, many strikers drank wine instead of pouring it all down the drain, meaning many of them ended the day drunk.

That same day, another group of seamen collected weapons, such as cutlasses and muskets, from warehouses and gunsmiths' shops, and a cannon was brought ashore from one of the ships. Beneath a red flag, and with red ribbons in their hats, around 1,000 seamen surrounded the Exchange at 1pm. They bombarded it from Castle Street until nightfall. Four strikers were killed in the process.

That night, a messenger on behalf of the magistrates reached Manchester seeking military aid. At 3am, on the 31st, 100 cavalry were dispatched despite heavy rain. Later that morning, the strikers attended a funeral for their fallen. Meanwhile the Mayor sent a delegation to meet some strikers defending their base at the docks, offering each seaman a wage of 2s a day, so long as they were peaceful. They could not make a decision without the other strikers present, so George Hill, a London sailor, who had been left in charge, promised to convey the message, but warned them they might still be determined to pull down the Town Hall. This offer was far higher than what they were demanding, and was likely a stalling tactic. After drying their muskets in Prescot, the cavalry were surprised to meet little resistance in Liverpool. Only a small party put up some opposition at the docks, most of the strikers had dissipated.

That night and the 1st of September, the military rounded up over 40 supposed ringleaders of the strike. The Liverpool Advertiser only had this to say about the dispute: "for a few days past we have had much disturbance in town, with the sailors, on account of their wages, which is now subsided". The ringleaders were sent to Lancaster Prison, but the Mayor of Liverpool assisted them, and so only eight were successfully prosecuted, and all were

discharged once they agreed to enlist in the Navy to fight in the war. This is surprising since they could have faced execution or transportation, and is likely because the working people of Liverpool sympathised with them.

There seems to have been a concerted effort to brush the whole affair under the rug. The strike was hardly covered by local papers, and was primarily reported on in London. Nonetheless attempts to suppress the spirit or revolt in Liverpool failed, with 1776 seeing seaman repeatedly and violently resisting impressment (a form of conscription), and in 1791 the town saw a large waterfront strike across several trades. •

RUBBISH RULES

From mid-April many rubbish bins have not been collected by Sefton Council for a matter of weeks. A council spokesperson claimed this was due to 27% of staff being off on the sick. However, three employees of their bin collection service separately contacted the Champion disputing this. One driver stated "every single one of us are in." A loader explained the reason behind uncollected bins was due to a "work to rule" where staff were taking certain hours and a certain number of breaks each day, and that it was a "problem between the management and the workforce."

Presumably this work-to-rule refers to the industrial action where workers follow rules and regulations, which often have to be ignored in practice, to hinder service delivery or harm the profits of their bosses. It tends to be far less visible than strike action, but it's equally important that any anger is not directed at workers who are simply struggling to improve their lives, but at their managers and council leaders who are actually responsible.

Bin strikes have been spreading across the country, from Barrow to Cardiff. Many have won concessions, although there is a particularly bitter ongoing dispute with the Labour Council in Coventry. Work-to-rules have also been employed locally in other industries, with journalists at BBC North West voting to do one in April, and UCU members using the tactic with their disputes at the University of Liverpool this past year. •

AXE DRAX

Drax Power Station is based in Selby and is the UK's single largest carbon polluter. Despite this they receive £892.5 million from government subsidies, which comes out of our energy bills as a surcharge, and is supposed to go to genuinely green energy sources (like solar panels or wind farms). Most of the wood they burn is imported from Canada and the United States, where the corporations producing the wood are reducing biodiversity and encouraging mono-cultures. This process of irresponsible tree clearing abroad for material to be burned in the

UK, creating 13 million tonnes of CO₂ in 2020, can hardly be described as "green". It also causes air pollution, traffic and wood dust, which (due to where these companies operate) disproportionately affect working class and racially diverse communities. This includes Seaforth, where much of the biofuel used at Drax is transported from the Port of Liverpool.

On the 27th of April, the day of Drax's AGM in London, around 25 people protested against them outside the entrance of Peel Ports. As well as anarchists, members of Axe Drax, Biofuelwatch, Extinction Rebellion, Friends of the Earth and Socialist Singers were present, as well as local campaigns to save Oglet Shore (South Liverpool), Rimrose Valley (Sefton), and to stop the Simonswood Incinerator (West Lancashire). Peel Ports are a driving force behind attempts to build a road through Rimrose Valley (which would increase their profits by reducing congestion into the port). Likewise Peel has a 45% share in Liverpool Airport, whose proposed expansion is threatening Oglet Shore. Protestors sang "Hit the Road Drax", and leafletted dockworkers and drivers, who seemed supportive. As well as protesting against Drax importing biofuel through Peel Ports, they stated their opposition to P&O's mass dismissals.

Outside of Merseyside, there were protests in Hull, Leeds, London and York. York saw some

street theatre, with a mock Drax AGM, where the board members had names like Iona Powerplant, Ivor Lodadosh, Bernie Trees and Prof. Greenwash. In London a member of Axe Drax sprayed the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy with orange paint using a modified fire extinguisher before both him and the woman filming him were arrested. He publicly stated that Drax "is accelerating the climate crises, whilst



being labelled as the solution, costing taxpayers in their energy bills and is in court with the HSE for their work conditions." It is our view that direct action, targeting Drax and its supporters, is the most likely way of stopping them from receiving funding meant for genuine renewables.

If you want more information or to get involved you can email biofuelwatch@gmail.com •

"The government is in the service of the corporations, its armies poised to defend their profits around the world and its secret police ready to infiltrate and disrupt any serious resistance at home. This system cannot be reformed. It is based on the destruction of the earth and the exploitation of the people. There is no such thing as green capitalism, and marketing cutesy rainforest products will not bring back the ecosystems that capitalism must destroy to make its profits. This is why I believe that serious ecologists must be revolutionaries."

Judi Bari

ANARCHIST COMMUNISM

In workplace disputes, neighbourhood campaigns, and day-to-day resistance we can win small victories that change our lives for the better. Yet, the root causes of our problems remain unmoved. The capitalist economy and state power shape our lives entirely and determine the very nature of society. The underlying value of our struggles today is in how we develop new abilities, values, and relationships that will allow us to transform society itself from the bottom up, overturning old structures of domination, and constructing new forms of free social organisation.

Anarchist communism is based on the collective ownership of social wealth; production for human need, not profit; self-management of work and the community; and equal access to all the things that people need to live and flourish. With private property abolished, things can be organised according to use rather than ownership. No longer coerced by the threat of poverty into slaving away for a tyrannical boss, people would have the freedom to contribute to society according to their real interests and skills. Forgoing money and markets, the products and services collectively produced would be collectively distributed to ensure that everyone has their basic needs met, and provide the means for a free development of all individuals, communities, and cultures.

Hopefully it is clear that what we are speaking of here has nothing in common with the so-called “communism” of the historical USSR or any other socialist state. These countries were based on state ownership, overseen by a party-dictatorship and sprawling bureaucracy, while workers continued to be exploited and oppressed. Anarchists seek to dismantle the state and all other structures of hierarchy.

In place of state or corporate management, anarchist communism would involve people taking control over their own workplaces, democratically organising themselves through mass meetings and councils made up of temporary, recallable delegates who are given a strict mandate from those meetings. They would coordinate economic activity

across the local and regional territory, up to the international level, alongside all other related organisations, in a greatly decentralised yet vastly interconnected web of planning and feedback. This could be efficiently facilitated by internet and computer technology.

Local areas would be organised into communes in which all people and their various associations could come together to determine and prioritise the needs of the community, as well as to address municipal, residential and inter-personal matters. These communes would be self-governing yet woven together into decentralised, democratic federations.



We don't just want to change how our work is organised, but also the very nature of work itself. Having won our freedom as individuals and brought direct democracy to the workplace, we would aim to stimulate creativity and social consciousness; to enable people to voluntarily pursue work that is personally fulfilling or socially useful; and to foster an ethic of solidarity and responsibility. People would be able to perceive how their work fits into a connected process that begins and ends with the real needs of the people they live and work with.

A significant part of the effort expended today – for example in market profiteering or bureaucratic paper pushing – would no longer be necessary. Mass production of useless, wasteful, and harmful commodities could be halted. All this potential could be redirected, and therefore the work of each person massively reduced, opening up time and energy for the pursuit of knowledge, invention, and

pleasure.

Released from the power of arbitrary market forces and self-interested politicians, we could realign our perspective with long-term, global concerns, taking into account the social and environmental conditions for a free society. We would need to begin reintegrating our work and our communities into their regional ecology. Turning to renewable resources, limiting extraction and production, adapting to natural cycles of water, nutrients, carbon, etc. we could develop a sustainable society and begin healing the damaged biosphere, while mitigating the effects of now irreversible climate change.

This vision of anarchy is not an impossible utopia but a transformation of society that begins here and now with our fight against systems of exploitation and domination. By means of revolutionary class struggle we begin to develop new social relations and experiment with new forms of self-organisation that lay the foundations of anarchist communism. •



"Those who desire power can only attain their goal if they take away power from others."

Erich Mühsam

SIMONSWOOD INCINERATOR

On Saturday 30th of April, over 100 people marched in Kirkby against plans for a medical waste incinerator. The proposed site, Stopgate Lane in Simonswood, is very close to Kirkby, and is also within five miles of areas like Fazakerley, Maghull, Ormskirk and Skelmersdale.

Local residents are concerned about carbon emissions and air pollution, especially since Kirkby and Knowsley as a whole already has a 73% higher rate of lung cancer than the national average. Their slogan is "not in our town, not in any town".

During the march, there was talk of sitting in the road. However, there was some trepidation that it might reflect badly on their non-violent protest, and so it never happened. Road blockades have been peacefully used multiple times by the Stop Edmonton Incinerator campaign in North London, and can be an effective tool in opposing these kinds of projects. Likewise plans to build an astroturf in Orrell last year were only held off due to locals blocking the road.

Electoral and conciliatory approaches are particularly hampered here since the Simonswood is technically in West Lancashire, and so comes under Lancashire County Council, despite the fact that many of the areas most at risk come under the Knowsley, Liverpool and Sefton Councils.

It's no coincidence that incinerators tend to be built in places like Kirkby and Edmonton, working class, northern and racially diverse areas are targeted. A report from Unearthed found nearly half of potential new incinerators are on track to be built in the UK's 25% most deprived neighbourhoods. On the Mersey there are four incinerators in a short vicinity around Ellesmere Port, Runcorn and Widnes, the highest concentration in the country. •



ANARCHISTS AGAINST PATRIOTISM

In 1908 the Liverpool Anarchist Sunday School was set up. In the anarchist newspaper *Freedom*, Toxteth-born Jim Dick explained why he was involved in the school: 'To break down national prejudices and that patriotic piffle which is inculcated into the children in our present-day school is, to my mind, the finest propaganda we can do to ensure the solidarity of the workers of all nations.'

The First World War was only a few years away, and in this time of imperialist rivalry, the British establishment was putting a lot of effort into encouraging patriotism and militarism. From 1902, schools celebrated 'Empire Day' every May, and in 1908, the Territorial Force (better known as the Territorial Army) was established.

Volunteers in the Liverpool Anarchist School tried to break down national prejudices in different ways. For example, children were taught how to sing *The Internationale* in French, and when the hit play 'An Englishman's Home' by Major Guy du Maurier came to town, intended to encourage enlistment in the Territorial Force, William Fairbrother (who, aged 23, sadly died of pneumonia a few weeks later) gave a talk to the children explaining and critiquing it. On Empire Day, the school's pupils handed out thousands of copies of 'Our Great Empire', an anti-imperialist leaflet produced by the anarchists at *Freedom*.

At that time, anarchists were the most consistent opponents of patriotism in Britain. This made them targets of a hostile press. The local paper in Liverpool, *The Daily Post and Mercury*, accused the Anarchist Sunday School of teaching rebellious songs and encouraging children to be violent.

Nevertheless, anarchists remained committed to fighting back against patriotism and imperialism. In the aftermath of the great Liverpool general transport strike of 1911, Samuel Henry Muston of Smithdown Lane wrote to *Freedom* that he had taken 'a number of "Our Great Empire" leaflets to a local military encampment, and after putting our view of the case to a crowd of soldiers, I was pleased to find they mostly agreed with us, and six of them took bundles of leaflets, promising to



distribute them in the camp.'

As everyone knows, the brave efforts of a small group of anarchists were not enough to stop thousands of people marching off to war in 1914. By this time, Jim Dick had moved to London, and was helping his partner Nellie (both pictured above) at an Anarchist Sunday School in the capital. In November, he wrote to *Freedom* that 'In spite of the struggle of many of our comrades to maintain the spirit of internationalism at the present juncture, we at least are still holding forth our ideal.'

Many years later, Nellie was interviewed by the BBC journalist Andrew Whitehead. Remembering the years of the First World War, she said 'We were internationalists. For instance, when some of the boys who we had in the Sunday school got to be fourteen, and a couple of them were very well grown, tall, they were arrested and taken before the tribunal... and at that time, people around would pin a white feather on them. If they'd see a boy like that, fifteen and tall, they'd pin a white feather on him. So they had him arrested and he spoke up and he said he had no reason to join the army because he had no fight with the workers in Germany or anywhere else.'

It was a lonely and dangerous job to oppose patriotism and militarism and there were many defeats along the way. But, looking back, anarchists could proudly say that they had given some youngsters the courage to resist the war machine. We need their inspiration today. •

"The workers have no trouble that needs to be settled by cruel war; and if the rulers have trouble, they can settle them by fighting it out among themselves. The working class wants to enjoy the fruits of their toil, the short time they journey this Earth. But we are told that kind of talk is unpatriotic, that every man ought to be willing to fight for his country. What country belongs to the wage class?"

Lucy Parsons

NO WAR BUT THE CLASS WAR

With the invasion of Ukraine the threat of generalised imperialist war has been brought forward, and we have seen a resurgence of nationalism and militarism. In response, there have appeared a number of initiatives across the world defending the internationalist perspective: "No War But the Class War!" In Liverpool, a NWBCW coalition has been formed by individuals from the Communist Workers Organisation and the Solidarity Federation, opposing imperialism abroad with class struggle at home. They have distributed a statement, alongside further information, which can be read at nwbcwliverpool.wordpress.com •

P&O DISPUTE

Last issue we covered P&O sacking 800 of its workers and the protests that took place in Liverpool as a response. At the last rally on April 6th, a regional RMT organiser implied that there would be further protests. A month later, without any further local activity, it's safe to say that the campaign has stalled in Merseyside. Nationally, initial resistance has slowly faded into tame protests and then into inactivity.

One exception to this was on April 29th, when blockades took place at ports on both sides of the European Causeway route. In Larne, Northern Ireland, around 40 people blocked traffic into one entrance for around an hour and a half. In Cairnryan, Scotland, local protesters were joined by two bus loads of supporters from Glasgow. They chanted "Nothing in, nothing out" and for two hours completely blocked traffic into the port. At the Cairnryan blockade, one "61-year-old man was charged with road traffic offences."

While this kind of activity is encouraging, the campaign has generally focused on legal action and government intervention. If blockades like this or the one we saw in Liverpool had become widespread, then combined with the occupation of ships, it might have been able to reverse the mass dismissal. Instead the greatest inconvenience P&O has suffered has been from inspections and vessels being impounded on the grounds of health and

safety. While we hope there will be more opportunities for direct action, at the very least we can continue to boycott P&O ferries. •

RAID RESISTED

On May 5th, immigration officers detained two men who worked at a restaurant in the centre of Edinburgh. By 9pm they had let them go, what happened?

Edinburgh Anti-Raids Network had previously set up a phonetree, WhatsApp group and social media accounts to alert people to potential immigration raids. At around 17.45 they did a call out, and by 19:30 the crowd surrounding the two immigration vans had grown to around 200. Legal observers advised the protesters not to talk to the cops and to wear masks, while they were also given bust cards and people wrote numbers for protest-specific legal advice on their arms. People also distributed food, water and masks to the crowd. Police were present but claimed "they did not have the power to disperse the crowds". By 9pm the detainees were de-arrested and the immigration officers fled the scene with police protection, leaving their own vans behind!

This successful use of direct action, while not stifled by bureaucracy, was only possible because of prior organisation. Liverpool has its own Anti-Raids Network which you can contact at:

liverpoolantiraid@protonmail.com •

POLICE BILL PASSED

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act passed into law on the 28th of April. This legislation includes an extension of police powers to suppress protests, pickets, and all other forms of action that are considered disruptive. Convictions, including prison sentences, can be expected for breaching arbitrary conditions, causing “public nuisance”, blocking roads, and forming “unauthorised encampments”. We can’t detail all the measures and their effects here – suffice to say that the legal groundwork has been laid for a crackdown on demonstrations and direct action.

However, we don’t need to accept this without resistance. As we saw with the failed immigration raid in Edinburgh this month, legal powers can be made unenforceable when there is enough opposition. An increase of repressive policing needs to be met by an escalation of resistance. This would involve extending our efforts beyond small activist bubbles and building a real basis of class power in our workplaces and neighbourhoods. It would require a serious push to protect ourselves from the law, for example through police monitoring and developing a basic security culture, as well as normalising such practices as putting on a mask to hide your identity at demonstrations and intervening when you witness police intimidation and harassment on the street.

The Act is partly a deterrent, intended to have a

chilling effect on dissent in all its forms. It’s important we don’t let ourselves be overcome by a climate of fear and paranoia in which we would rather keep our heads down. The police powers that this law extends were already highly restrictive of protests, but selectively applied depending on the situation at hand, rarely being fully exercised. When we stick together and stand up for ourselves we can make a dead letter of the law and take back our freedoms in spite of the police officer’s baton.

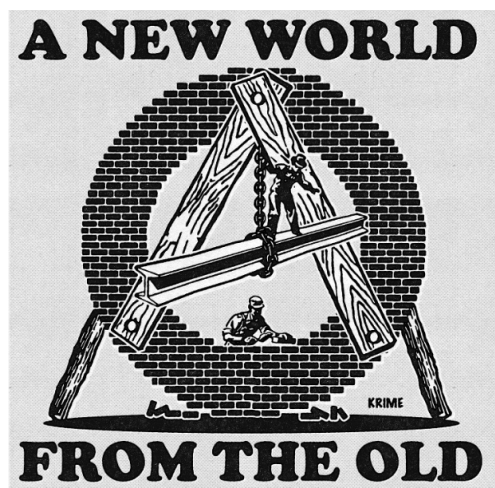
Bizziewatch are a new group in Liverpool, announcing “We will be closely monitoring the bizzies, conducting research, building community defence against the violence of the state, running training sessions e.g. on stop and search, and patrolling the streets!” You can follow the group and get in touch:

twitter.com/bizziewatch

contact@bizzie.watch •

ANARCHIST BOOKFAIR

On May 14th, from 11am till 5pm, the Liverpool Anarchist Bookfair will be taking place at the Black-e. There should be talks on Anarcho-Syndicalism, opposing capitalist wars, and the Spanish Revolution, as well as workshops on creative protests and knowing your rights as a protester. Alongside booksellers and other local groups, Liverpool Anarchist news will have a stall at the event. •



The *Liverpool Anarchist* is a monthly publication and we welcome all contributions in accord with our basic ideas. We advocate working class direct action to improve our lives here and now while building a revolutionary movement to do away with capitalism, the state, and all other hierarchies. The editors are members, but publish independently, of the Solidarity Federation.

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