

LIVERPOOL ANARCHIST

FUCK THE TORIES... AND THEN?

Anti-Tory sentiment has been rife in Liverpool for decades, beginning during Edward Heath's government, and being set in stone by Thatcherism and its legacy. This is partly due to neo-liberal Tories overseeing the de-industrialisation of Merseyside, and battling the industrial unrest and Militant Council of the time. Thatcher and her government are said to have intentionally pursued a policy of "managed decline" in Liverpool following the Toxteth Riots. Added to this, the right-wing, pro-Tory newspaper, 'The Sun', has been boycotted in Liverpool since 1989, when its report on the Hillsborough disaster blamed and slandered the victims. This anti-Tory attitude continues today with resentment towards Tory-led "austerity measures", their reactionary politics, authoritarian legislation, and utter contempt for the working class.

This widespread hostility towards the Tories has provided a basis for popular mobilisations against the government and particularly harmful policies. We have seen "Fuck the Tories" raves and continual protests against everything from the latest police bill to "hostile environment" policies. There has been a passionate opposition to the past decade of Tory rule that goes beyond party-political rivalry.

Yet, Liverpool is also a stronghold of the Labour-left – those socialists and social-democrats who still cling to the myth of Labour as the party of the working class and a vehicle for social change. While some of the anti-Tory zeal feeds into positive activism and protest, mostly it is just the backdrop for voting Labour. Labour MPs have won every constituency in the city since 1997, and the local council has been dominated by Labour since 2010



(contested with the Liberals before then) despite rampant corruption.

Anarchists can take anti-Tory sentiment as an opportune environment to agitate and organise against the government and its attacks, but this will simply feed back into electoralism if it does not go any further. It is important to meet people where they're at, not staying aloof from the great majority of people who know nothing of anarchism; however, that does not mean dispensing with our own ideas and methods to fit into the crowd. Anti-Toryism lacks a revolutionary perspective because it opposes one faction of the ruling class and its use of state power, rather than opposing state power in itself. The problems we face and possible solutions are cast in terms of party politics. The Labour Party is the only realistic alternative to support, or at least tolerate as the "lesser evil". Politicians take full advantage of this to pave the road to power.

FINAL ISSUE!

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Anti-Tory sentiment becomes, in reality, the perfect environment for the recuperation of autonomous, grass-roots social struggle into parliamentary politics.

What's missing is a fundamental critique of political power and the capitalist economy it oversees. The state is the network of institutions and structures that control society in the interests of the ruling class. The government, whether elected or imposed, is the body that directs this state power within certain limits. The modern state is an administrator of capitalism, maintaining advantageous conditions for domestic markets, a productive labour force, stable hierarchies, and the security of capitalist property. Democratically electing a left-wing Labour government, or replacing a democratic government with a revolutionary socialist dictatorship, will achieve nothing more than the continuation of state power. Finally in the driving seat, they must continue to maintain and administrate capitalist exploitation, or else see the basis of their new-found power collapse. Historically this has sometimes brought better living and working conditions for the working class; but this has been faustian pact, with the price of undermining or suppressing independent working-class organisations and leaving behind revolutionary aspirations. The continuous fight for freedom and equality is put on hold, misdirected, or crushed altogether.

Successive British governments, Labour and Conservative, have pursued the necessary policies to maintain capitalist growth and manage its inevitable crises, through Keynesianism in the mid-twentieth-century to neo-liberalism from the eighties onward. That is the inherent role of the state and the political clique who happen to be at the top. Considered structurally in this way, the lie is given to the popular image of Labour as the party of the working-class, an illusion also broken by a cursory study of how Labour have governed. Even under the almost mythical 1945 Labour Government, they used the military to break unofficial dock strikes and imprisoned the rank-and-file organisers. Many workers also refused to join these strikes in the first place as they thought it would undermine "their" government. Abroad, Labour brutally maintained colonial regimes, imprisoning and murdering trade unionists. If a

Corbyn government had been elected, our current strike wave would also be a threat to their project, not because of their character or ideas but because of the institutions they would inherit. This is not to say that "they're all the same", but that the difference is between one form of domination and another – our fight is against the structures of domination they are competing over.

We need to pursue our struggle on our own terms, by our own methods, following our own principles, which we simply cannot do within the realm of party politics. To water down our ideas and practices to the lowest-common-denominator of anti-Tory protest might gain us short-term support but at the expense of our long-term goal. It can also backfire, as we saw during the surge of Corbynism when many anarchists jumped ship or equivocated about their anti-statism in the hope of a left-wing government to find relief from Tory austerity. Allowing one political party to be held responsible for the latest development of global capitalism is a weakness of theoretical understanding that obscures the reality we face. When, in Greece, the democratic socialist party Syriza were elected on an anti-austerity platform, they were forced to make extensive cuts anyway by international financial institutions.

Miring ourselves in party politics also gets in the way of building working class solidarity, winning over our co-workers and neighbours. Casting the millions of working class people who vote for the Conservative Party as class traitors places culpability in the hands of those with no real power. The reactionary world-views that leads some to vote Tory (xenophobia and obsession with "law and order", for example) are shared by many Labour supporters, and while these clearly contradict our values, many also vote for them simply because they think they will better govern the economy. Ultimately these views and prejudices can and must be overcome by the experience of collective struggle and the emergence of a compelling alternative.

Yeah, fuck the Tories. But let's take every opportunity to push that anger and opposition further, revealing what's beneath the surface, breaking the spell of Labourism and social-democracy. We need to be the voice of revolution and the mirror of the free society we fight for. •

SEFTON'S CON-SULTATION

Back in December, we covered a campaign against a controversial plan to install a 3G artificial football pitch on a 3.5 acre field at Orrell Mount Park. Locals felt the consultation had been rushed through during lockdown, without consulting enough people, and so when planning approval was given, despite significant objections, they formed a group called Friends of Orrell Mount Park (FOOMP). They were concerned for a variety of reasons: the development would exclude most of the community, is unecological, and there is some evidence that the rubber crumb may cause cancer amongst young people. FOOMP prevented the Labour-led council from erecting fencing by taking direct action: physically blocking the road into the park then by preventing the unloading of construction site fences. In the end, Sefton Council agreed to postpone the project pending a second consultation.

Since November, FOOMP have continued their campaign. They lobbied councillors, conducted research, organised social events such as a visit from Santa Claus and a Bingo night, collected signatures for their petition, and distributed leaflets to inform the community of the proposals. They also continued with daily pickets even through the winter months, demonstrating a deep distrust of the Council. In spite of asking local councillors for details of the planned second consultation, they were not invited to meet to discuss the process and had no input into the design of the consultation.

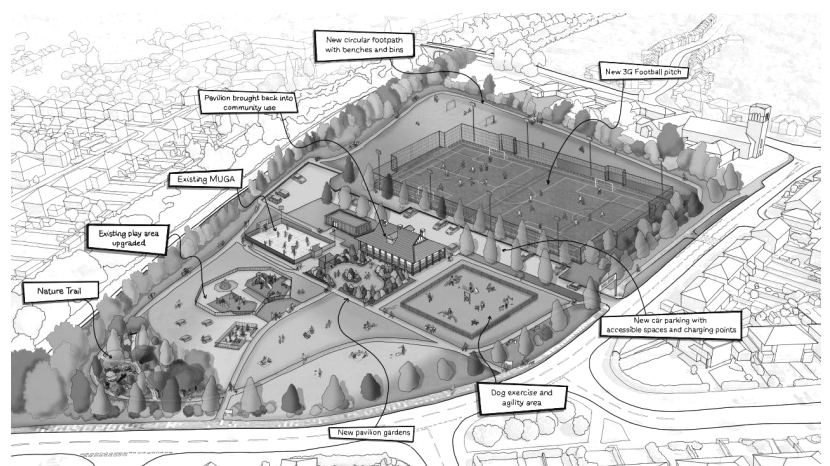
The "Orrell Mount Park Masterplan" consultation runs from May 30th to July 22nd. In addition to the controversial 3G football pitch, the Masterplan also depicts a new dog exercise area, nature trail, circular footpath, benches and bins and restoration of the pavilion. But is this all just too good to be true?

According to FOOMP, despite the front page illustration on the glossy Masterplan leaflet, the small print confirms that the majority of these additional projects don't have funding. Is the design of this "Masterplan" a way of gaining support for

the 3G pitch development, by promising additional facilities and regeneration which they know the community has for years been desperate to see, when there is actually no guarantee that any will be implemented? The consultation even admits the pavilion "is a future aspiration" and "not part of the current proposals" - then why include it?

The council are trying to argue that replacing grass with plastic is better for year-round pitch quality, dismissing health, environmental and financial concerns and claiming that the 3G pitch will have an "affordable pricing policy" (despite FOOMP claiming it will cost £100 for groups to hire for an hour). Likewise the council claims that JC23, who will run the pitch, are a not-for-profit social enterprise but, as FOOMP have rightly pointed out "this does not mean that it doesn't make money for its directors."

FOOMP also feel that FMG, as a body funded by Sports England, is not an independent body for overseeing this consultation. All of the material the council has produced and distributed is biased towards gaining community support for the overall Masterplan and there is no mention of FOOMP's concerns. It seems clear that its purpose is to sway the local community's opinion of the development by gleaning positive feedback on the overall aspirational Masterplan, which it is feared would allow them to push ahead with the 3G development since, in the words of the council, 'the decision to proceed with the proposed 3G pitch development will be subject to the outcome of the consultation'. FOOMP even feel the questionnaire has been deliberately designed to manipulate the respondent into giving them the data they want. We would recommend that all people who use the park, have used the park or intend to use the park in the future vote against the development. The



consultation is available here:

www.sefton.gov.uk/orrellmount

There are a number of similar local campaigns such as Save Oglet Shore (South Liverpool), Rimrose Valley (Sefton) and Stop the Simonswood Incinerator (West Lancashire) and we would encourage these groups to support FOOMP. There are also a number of lessons that can be drawn from the Save Orrell Mount Park campaign.

Firstly, without direct action, the pitch would have already been built. Tactics will vary according to each campaign, and can be risky, but we won't be able to save the environment if we aren't willing to fight for it. Many anti-fracking groups "slow-walked" in front of vehicles or set up camps which would need to be evicted before work could take place; recently protesters in Staffordshire spent 47 days in underground tunnels to protect ancient woodlands that would otherwise be cut down; and there have been countless incidents of sabotage done by persons unknown in the black of night.

Secondly, consultations are not necessarily neutral, are easily skewed in the favour of developers (who already have huge resources at their disposal) and can also be ignored by local authorities or the government. FOOMP are very aware of this, not least because the council already has planning permission. Another example is the recent consultation on the mayoral system in Liverpool, which has led to the least popular of the three options being implemented by the Labour-led Council. As anarchists we are very sceptical about how democratic elections and referendums from above actually are, and believe genuine or direct democracy must come from below.

Finally, the continued activity of FOOMP helped to ensure that when the consultation began they were ready to oppose it. If their campaign is successful, and they could secure funding, they might want to restore the Pavilion and run it voluntarily as a community hub. This could be used to support other environmental campaigns, for social events to bring the community together, or even to set up community cupboards or food co-ops. Many anarchists are impressed by communities which can resist evictions or immigration raids, or that historically in Merseyside organised mass rent strikes and beat the Poll Tax, but the reality is that none of this is possible without neighbourhood organising. •

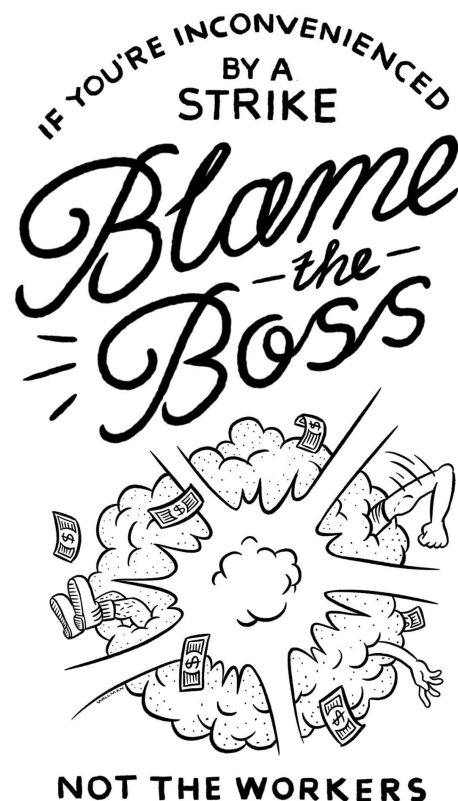
FINAL ISSUE

After 24 issues, having begun in October 2019, this will be the final release of Liverpool Anarchist. The newsletter is wrapping up due to people moving away from Liverpool. As it stands, no one has chosen to take over the publication, but it is a possibility for the future. Regardless, the anarchist movement in the city and surrounding areas will continue and hopefully pick up as more people seek genuine solutions to the many crises biting into our lives and futures.

Throughout our run we have sought to shine a light on the social struggle and industrial unrest that is usually hidden or misrepresented, to clearly explain anarchist theory, and to uncover some of Merseyside's radical history from which to draw inspiration and important lessons.

We intend to write a retrospective evaluation of the newsletter, looking at both the theoretical framing and practical organisation of the project, such as our development from an umbrella anarchist newsletter to having a consistent, anarcho-syndicalist editorial line.

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the paper, whether that be through writing articles, distributing copies, or providing feedback. Goodbye and good luck! •



THE LIVERPOOL ANARCHIST GROUP

The following history of anarchists in Liverpool in the early 1980s is based on oral interviews, writings from the Kate Sharpley Library and contemporary news articles. Like most history it should not be seen as the final word, and due to who we interviewed and our own politics, it has a clear bias towards class struggle anarchism.

The Liverpool Anarchist Group (LAG) started in April 1982, after a member of the Direct Action Movement (DAM) placed an advert at the News from Nowhere bookshop. LAG initially met at the News from Nowhere bookshop and in people's homes, before meeting at the Mitre, and then the Philharmonic. Membership was informal: if you regularly attended you were considered a member, and there were no subs, with whip-arounds to cover costs.

As a broad church, people joined LAG from a variety of perspectives, although many had not previously been involved in lefty/student politics. There were of course anarcho-syndicalists from DAM, but there were also people coming from the non-violent, direct action wing of the peace movement after being involved in groups like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Animal rights activists, including Hunt Saboteurs, had a strong presence, and in St Helens the anarchist group was involved in the Animal Liberation Front. One interviewee remembered people who had been involved in the libertarian Marxist group (and paper) Big Flame, while another remembered people with "strange ideas" about paganism and witchcraft. This eclectic mix of perspectives was reflected in their varied activity, but would eventually lead to tensions and a splinter group.

The LAGs first activity was leafleting a CND march in Preston. LAG also protested the Youth Training Scheme's military links by picketing the Army Careers Offices. They took part in the first Stop the City protests in September 1983, which were intended to disrupt the financial and military system. Around 1,500 from across the country

travelled down to London to take part, where many (including members of LAG) were arrested for taking direct action such as blockades, attacking fur shops, glueing building locks and jamming telephone lines. The LAG also took up the cause of Katsuhisa Omori (an Ainu indigenous rights activist), who had been convicted of a bombing which caused two deaths, but which many believed was a politically motivated frame-up by the Japanese state due to flimsy evidence. The LAG regularly leafleted to highlight his case, and two members delivered a letter about it to the Japanese Consulate in the Wirral.

One particularly important affair for the development of class struggle anarchism within the LAG was the Messenger Dispute in Warrington.



The media baron, Eddy Shah, had sacked 8 printers in July 1983 for going on strike at Stockport. They subsequently started picketing the printworks at Warrington, but secondary picketing had recently been made illegal. The peak of this dispute was the Battle of Winwick Quay on September 29th. A mass picket of over 4,000 workers was brutally attacked by police and private security, numbering around 2,000. The police had riot gear and attack dogs, and used tactics they had developed in the 1981 inner city riots. Despite this the picketers fought through the night, using bricks, bottles, stones and barricades to defend themselves. The leadership of their union played something of a contradictory role, having been fined for openly defying the law, but simultaneously opposing the use of self-defence and arguably sabotaging the dispute. Their defeat proved that the restrictive new trade union laws could be enforced, and was a training ground for police who used similar tactics to attack miners during the Battle of Orgreave in 1984. The pickets

were primarily attended by supporters, many of whom were bussed in by the trade union movement. Some members of the LAG regularly attended these pickets, fought with the police, and were present (and some injured) at the Battle of Winwick Quay. The whole affair acted as a catalyst for the development of a new anarchist group with decidedly class struggle politics: the Liverpool Direct Action Group (LDAG).

As new, younger members joined the LAG from working class backgrounds, dissatisfaction grew. One of them told us that he felt that the majority of the LAG were from “lower middle class” rather than working class backgrounds*. He felt some of them were “middle class people flirting with anarchism before moving onto careers.” He had a sense that most of their politics were irrelevant to his lived experience, and that the trendy punk scene fed into “lifestyle anarchism”. Another member of the LAG who joined the LDAG, seemed less sectarian about it, but felt that groups should be more focused, and that there were some right-wing sentiments within the LAG. He also stated that the LAG had become something of a talking-shop, and a recruiting ground for the Hunt Sabs. These disaffected and primarily working class members went on to form the LDAG in 1984. The LDAG were very focused on supporting strikers, as well as anti-fascist action. One member recalls attending pickets at Phillips Rubber in Manchester, another remembered demonstrations in support of the Militant Council not implementing cuts, but their main focus was on the great 1984-1985 Miners’ Strike.

Members of the LDAG attended demonstrations and pickets, as well as spraypainting, flyposting their own posters and leafleting in support of the miners. The union’s strike fund was eventually exhausted, and their dependents were denied welfare payments. The LDAG joined miners in raising money to survive (and stay out on strike) through door-knocking on council estates and collecting on Church Street in the city centre, as well as independently organising benefit concerts and jumble sales. Some members also got involved in local miners’ support groups. One member of the LDAG also delivered supplies and toys to miners at Christmas time.

Anarchist activity also existed outside of these groups. Three issues of a local anarchist paper were

produced, initially called 'Renegade', and then 'Agitator'. The DAM’s paper, 'Direct Action', was also distributed. At the time the humorous 'Class War' paper was sold in Liverpool and one of its founders, Ian Bone, spoke in the city prior to its release. While Class War had members in Liverpool, their presence was never particularly notable.

At the time anarchism was growing partly as a side effect of the popular punk scene, especially due to anarcho-punk bands such as Crass, Poison Girls and Chumbawamba. LAG actually recruited members through leafleting a Crass gig in May 1982. In 1984 Crass also raised funds for the Miners’ Strike at a gig in the Lark Lane Community Centre. There was also a local cultural and musical initiative called “The Black and Red”, which held regular gigs at the same venue in 1984, and then the Mitre, but came to an end in 1985. They ran benefits for various causes such as the “Merseyside Peace Bus”, News from Nowhere, the LDAG and Parkside Miners.

For a period of time the general LAG and the class struggle focused LDAG co-existed, with some overlap in membership. Over time the LAG fizzled out, and in November 1984, with only really LDAG members still involved, they called it a day. One interviewee felt that the LAG had never really developed beyond being a discussion group. Another broad anarchist group with the same name was formed later in the 1980s which helped to run the Mutual Aid Centre (a squatted social centre) and published 32 issues of the ‘Merseyside Anarchist’ newsletter, which continued until 1991. From their inception the LDAG had links with DAM (a national anarcho-syndicalist group), but were separate, even if their similar names sometimes caused confusion. However, more and more members of the LDAG joined DAM until it became a branch of the latter. They continued to be active under this banner for the rest of the decade. The DAM eventually went on to change its name to the Solidarity Federation, which still has a presence in Liverpool, although there is no continuity to the 1980s group.

* While we respect this interviewees' views, we feel the need to note that as editors we view working class politics as having less to do with people's backgrounds and upbringing, and more to do with whether they are workers/tenants/claimants or bosses/landlords. •

CARE WORK FOR PROFIT

Centralisation, bureaucracy, and profit are the three heads of the chimera that make up the health and social care sector. The state monitors the sector to maintain certain standards but this coupled with a profit motive means that industry places a great deal upon its workforce for a pittance of a wage. The sector is, consequently, facing an understaffing crisis.

The care industry in the United Kingdom is primarily run by private companies for profit. The problem with using this economic model is that it does not incentivise proper care for vulnerable people. A free-market apologist would argue that each customer is a free agent and thus incentivises the market to find the best solutions for them. However vulnerable people who are the “customers” of the care and support industries are frequently referred to services rather than choosing them for themselves, or do not have the capacity to make such choices. Companies that provide care often do so at the expense of their workers and residents by cutting corners to reduce costs; this has led to several issues that have only gotten worse the more the economy is liberalised.

One of the issues currently facing the industry is employee retention. There are a lot of vacancies and not enough people entering the industry, as such most recruitment (approximately 67% according to Skills for Care) comes from other parts of the sector. This is hardly surprising when one considers how stressful the work is and how little pay it receives, with basic rates barely above minimum wage for long arduous hours. As an agency worker I have encountered several homes that were grossly understaffed; it has not been uncommon for agency workers to make up half of the workforce, sometimes more. One might think this has led to a seller’s market for the labour force where we can make higher demands for rights and wages but the opposite is true. Employees in the care industry frequently find themselves overworked as the demands on staff increase with no adequate recompense.

The state controls quality inspections of the care sector through the CQC, but failed inspections are



Around 100 nurses and social care staff employed by St Monica's care homes are on strike in the South West. They are resisting a reduction in hours and wages. Anarchists and syndicalists have joined them on the picket line.

often blamed on staff even when the issues are systemic, often a result of underfunding and understaffing. One issue that can arise is the lack of adequate training. Training for many care workers is frequently impractical and kept to the bare minimum, for example online courses that cover complex topics with only shallow depth. The interest of employers is not to have fully trained staff who know the law and know all the basics necessary to provide a high standard of care, it is to cover themselves from potential litigation. Courses often feel like little more than ticking boxes. In my first job in care, I never used a practice doll for CPR training and I didn't learn how to use a hoist, yet if this issue was brought to the attention of CQC I would be liable since I had filled in a tick-box on the internet. If you want to be as fully clued up as you can be in this demanding sector it is sometimes necessary to educate yourself outside of the online training with no compensation.

Productivity has become a serious issue as well with staff spending less face-to-face time with service users. The care sector is an increasingly bureaucratic industry, with each service user having daily records that staff must attend to. In more demanding workplaces this paperwork can be overwhelming, for example notes that need to be filled in every half hour, which can be incredibly distracting for service users with challenging behaviour. Good record-keeping is necessary to understanding people's needs, tracking changes and identifying issues. However, simply piling on more paperwork is not a solution to deteriorating

standards of care seen in the profit-driven private sector and underfunded public sector services.

There is a myth that needs to be dispelled amongst care and support workers: that their own interests run counter to the interests of service users. This just isn't true - low wages, poor working conditions, inadequate training and equipment, understaffing and low morale all have a negative effect on the wellbeing of service users. The negative effect on service users of cost cutting, mismanagement, and institutional neglect also has a knock on effect on us workers. The causes of these bad practices are quite often poor management far too engaged in the bureaucracy of the industry than understanding the day to day needs of their clients. The tranches of management get more and more disconnected from the everyday realities of frontline care the higher up and more centralised they are. The decisions on policies and practices are simply statistics and cherry-picked stories to them, until months down the line when they see an increase in incident reports or incomplete paperwork.

Many workers in the sector understandably believe that there is simply nothing to be done, that any actions taken against management would only negatively impact the wellbeing of the clients. This comes from a limited outlook on industrial action, that an all-out strike is the only recourse, leaving service users without care. This need not be the case though, if we recognise the industry for what it is, a business (the labels of charity and non-profit are mostly for tax purposes and don't change the day-to-day functions of the company). The increasing conglomeration of care services into

giant corporations may in fact be a weakness. All of the worst policies and practices from upper management we've had to endure didn't materialise out of nowhere, upper management is not some spectre haunting the company email, they have offices that can be targeted by pickets, phone blockades and occupations. There are also plenty of actions that could take place within the workplace such as work-to-rule and boycotting unnecessary paperwork.

We don't have to sit back and take minimum wage, minimum staffing, minimum training and minimum consultation on new practices. We can stand up for ourselves and our clients, we can say no to the bureaucrats and profiteers, we can do what's best for each other. •

"We cannot build until the working class gets rid of its illusions, its acceptance of bosses and faith in leaders. Our policy consists in educating it, in stimulating its class instinct, and teaching methods of struggle. It is a hard and long task but our way of refusing to attempt the futile task of patching up a rotten world, but of striving to build a new one, is not only constructive but it is also the only way out."

Marie-Louise Berneri



The *Liverpool Anarchist* is a monthly publication, although this is our last issue. 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.

Send in feedback and comments to:
liverpoolanarchist@tuta.io

Our back issues will remain online at:
liverpoolanarchist.wordpress.com

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