

LIVERPOOL ANARCHIST

Q&A WITH A UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL STRIKER

Why are you on strike?

Primarily to show solidarity with the 32 workers targeted for redundancy in the faculty of Health and Life Sciences. Hopefully to prevent those jobs from being needlessly lost. But also to make a stand against this kind of attack on education workers generally.

What kind of tactics are being used?

The union members at the university started ASOS (Action Short Of Strike) on 10/05, meaning we withdrew all labour that goes beyond our contracted work. We stop volunteering for additional responsibilities, stop covering for other staff if they're ill, stop working outside of our normal contracted working hours, etc. Given how much the university relies on this kind of voluntary labour, this should already have quite an impact.

Then on 17/05 we began three weeks of full on striking. Although there are many kinds of labour being withdrawn (and the impact of non-teaching staff striking shouldn't be underestimated or underappreciated!) one of the main reasons this period was chosen was because it coincides with the marking period for a lot of courses. During these three weeks a lot of staff spend far beyond their regular hours completing their marking loads for their courses' exams. Instead, for union staff members, none of this will get done until after the strike - and even then it'll only get done at a regular pace during contracted hours, as we return to ASOS.

The union (UCU) is currently discussing what action to take next if the university fails to accept our demands.

I remember in the 2020 strikes some students were occupying the rooms where scab lectures were taking place. Playing music to stop them and getting away with it. Despite support on the picket line, they stopped at the request of UCU.

Have you noticed any similar problems with UCU?

This is my first strike with the Liverpool UCU branch, so my insights will be a little limited. It's also very difficult to tell what things limiting our strike action are caused by Covid, and what the strike would've been like under different circumstances.

I've done one day's worth of picketing on campus, and it was mostly just hanging around Union Square with a sign. But there's some targeted picketing too - we hear from someone about some activities still going ahead on campus and we dash over to picket the entrance for it. I think I'd have felt a bit better about it if we did more - if we talked to more students as they went to their classes, talked to the people who walked by. There seemed to be a lot of reassuring each other that our actions were meaningful, but without much actual action.



A lot of the meetings at the moment are fairly large - a couple of hundred people - and it seems like it's very difficult to make any suggestions without someone raising objections to it. And some of these objections definitely seem less well-meaning than others.

Has the strike had much support? How can people help?

The students have definitely been incredible. They've set up their own twitter account supporting the strike, organised a rally, and they also speak at any events we host. The university management are really trying to frame this dispute as staff vs students, but the students are making it clear that that isn't the case - we are both united against them.

There's also been a lot of support from other unions. Even though solidarity can be difficult to show when the "picket lines" are mostly online, they've still done a great job - at one offline rally I saw members show up from SolFed, the IWW, and Acorn, and online messages of solidarity get through at a number of online events too, and plenty on Twitter.

As for how to help? People can learn about the strike: there's information about how the job redundancies are most likely illegal, and plenty about the absurd amounts of money that the management are being paid to make up restructuring projects like the one that they're proposing. Then if you can, contact the Vice Chancellors at the university and let them know what you think of their plans.

There have been some successful strikes this year, like the bus drivers in Manchester or bin workers in Thurrock. Do you think you will be joining them?

I hope so, and there's definitely a chance. The circumstances aren't exactly straightforward - I think the pandemic makes it much easier for management to give us the impression that we're isolated, and to divide us, and they've tried really hard to take advantage of that. But we do still have strength in numbers, and we are still united. We just need to remember that. •

"We are Anarchists because it is absolutely impossible to obtain justice for all in any other way than by destroying institutions founded on force and privilege. We cannot believe that improvement is possible if we still keep up the same institutions, now more rotten than in the past, or if we merely replace those whose iniquities are known by new men. These latter become in their turn what the others were, or else become barren."

Louise Michel

SIGNING SUPPORT

Worried about reporting at the Home Office? Liverpool Migrant Solidarity Network offers phone based signing support, and support in making a detention action plan. You can contact them at:

liverpoolsigning@gmail.com

07709861419 (by phone, telegram or signal)

Liverpool Migrant Solidarity Network is an independent collective of people working together to resist the hostile environment that migrants face in this city and beyond.



Police released two men in Glasgow bound for deportation after a protester climbed under their van while hundreds of people surrounded it for 8 hours.



INTERNATIONAL INSPIRATION

Across the world, working class rebellions continue to break out and spread like the wildfires of our burning planet. Perhaps they can shed some light on solving our own problems.

In Britain, despite widespread outrage, there has currently been no real resistance to the pathetic 1% NHS pay “rise”. An alternative to clapping can be found in Neuquén, Argentina. Democratic workers’ assemblies in around 20 hospitals rejected a 12% pay rise (in 2020 inflation was 42%), but the trade union leadership accepted it anyway. In opposition to the unions and government, Argentinian health workers and their supporters held mass meetings at hospital entrances, staged unofficial strikes (which spread to other sectors) and blocked roads to disrupt the gas, oil and tourist industries. At first the offer rose to 15%, but the strikers didn’t give in and eventually won a 53% pay rise!

In Colombia, a tax reform that would have further lined the pockets of the ruling oligarchy at the expense of the poor was met with a general strike and uprising across the country at the end of April. These events follow in the wake of a similar uprising at the end of 2019. Despite ruthless repression, the economy is being shut down by road blockades, while street fighting rages against the repressive arm of the state. People have been

organising in horizontal networks and popular assemblies, outside the control of political parties and trade union hierarchies. The struggle has succeeded in forcing the increased taxes and healthcare privatisation to be withdrawn, but these issues were simply the fuse on the powder keg. The effects of the pandemic inflamed existing unrest due to extreme inequality, political corruption, and continuous “disappearances” and murders at the hands of the state. Their struggle continues.

Hostilities between Israel and Palestine also flared up again for around two weeks in May, both sides targeting civilians, with 12 left dead in the former and 128 in the latter. The Left declared their support for a Palestinian state, with numerous rallies held in Liverpool. We support all attempts to resist war, such as the occupation of an Israeli-owned drone factory in Leicester (which firefighters refused to evict, unlike the police). But the creation or defence of a Palestinian nation state will not further the fight for liberation. There should be no better example of this than Israel itself, a state founded by a population who had been subjected to the horrors of Nazism, simply seeking a measure of security, only to enforce apartheid within their own borders. Instead we view an international general strike as the best means of ending future conflict, and ultimately of dismantling the states behind them. Working class internationalism isn’t just a pipe-dream, in Italy and South Africa, dockers refused to unload Israeli ships. A small seed to sow, but surely better than picking the rotten fruits of nationalism? •

MAY DAY RECLAIMED

On the 1st of May a rally was held outside Lime Street train station for International Workers' Day. Dissatisfied with the usual Labour Party aligned Trades Council march, this rally was organised independently by the Liverpool Solidarity Federation, with a clear anti-capitalist and anti-state message. As declared in the first speech, "It is a day to remember the sacrifice of those who struggled for the eight hour day, to celebrate the achievements of workers' movements across the world, and to keep the flame of class struggle burning." The event was brought back to its roots in the general strike of Chicago 1886 and the persecution that followed.

Around 40 people turned up to the rally – a little underwhelming – but many passers-by from the station came to have a chat and help themselves to some free food kindly provided by Food Not Bombs. Two short speeches were given by SolFed members, first on the anarchist origins of May Day, and second on workplace organising today; these were followed by a speech from Liverpool Sisterhood, who also talked about the ongoing struggle against the crime bill. The rally was a small success, perhaps something to be built upon next year.

As things wrapped up people were encouraged to join the Kill the Bill protest against increased police powers, which was gathering at the side of

St Georges Hall. This coincided with the end-point of the Trades Council march, in an attempt to maximise numbers. But their speeches dragged on, so mid-speech most of the crowd broke away to begin the protest, marching up London Road, leaving the politicians and trade union bureaucrats behind. Over 200 people marched around the city, past Smithdown Lane Police Station, finally dispersing into a crowd of shoppers in the city centre. The protest went well, although there was some confusion among onlookers since there was an anti-lockdown march on the same day, in which conspiracy theory nonsense was mixed together with Kill the Bill signs. Hopefully momentum against the crime bill can be kept up to force the government to fully withdraw their plans. •

"Direct action by organised labour finds its strongest expression in the general strike, in the stoppage of work in every branch of production by the organised resistance of the proletariat, with all the consequences arising from it. It is the most powerful weapon which the workers have at their command, and gives the most comprehensive expression to their strength as a social factor."

Rudolf Rocker



The *Liverpool Anarchist* is written by individual members of the Solidarity Federation, an anarcho-syndicalist union. We aim to publish monthly and 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.

Send in feedback, comments, and submissions to:
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