

LIVERPOOL ANARCHIST

ON UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Since the beginning of the pandemic, 1.4 million more people are claiming benefits according to the Office for National Statistics, a 112% increase, while job vacancies have decreased by 58%. This will only rise as the furlough scheme comes to an end, with record-breaking unemployment levels and a deep recession expected.

With this, more working class people will face the harsh realities of life on Universal Credit, a bureaucratic system of deprivation and coercion. The capitalist economy does not function to meet our needs, it solely pursues profit and growth for the benefit of the capitalist class.

Big and small companies, especially in the service sector, will be making redundancies despite the government offering hand outs and incentives to employers to keep their workforce. Where possible, we should be organising with co-workers to resist redundancies; however, many will be forced to claim Universal Credit.

With this in mind here are some things you can do:

- ◆ Take someone with you to interviews.
- ◆ You can ask for fortnightly payments; split payments for couples; and your rent to be paid directly to your landlord.
- ◆ Keep all your documents and double check your money using a benefits calculator website.
- ◆ Challenge the "claimant commitment" which forces you to spend 35 hours a week looking for work that probably isn't there. Demand something realistic.
- ◆ Appeal against decisions you know are unjust and wrong. A huge number of appeals *win*, so don't give up. Take someone without you to tribunals.

Beyond claiming our rights, we can take collective action against those who decide whether we have food on our plates and a roof



"The capitalist has no heart, but harpoon him in the pocketbook and you will draw blood."

Bill Haywood

over our heads. In Plymouth, the Benefits Solidarity group got a decision to withhold benefits reversed by going into the jobcentre together and refusing to leave until the issue was sorted. Money owed was received within the week.

In 2012 the main workfare schemes, which forced unemployed people to work without pay, were scrapped after a direct action campaign initiated by the Solidarity Federation. Rather than appealing to the government or writing letters, people picketed the companies involved in the schemes – coordinating actions across the country – which caused them to drop out, thereby undermining the scheme. Perhaps it's time to re-ignite the struggle? •

THE 1968 SPEKE AND CHILDWALL VALLEY RENT STRIKE

This is the first article in a short series covering rent strikes that took place in Merseyside from 1968-1974. Rent strikes are when tenants collectively withhold rent until certain demands are met, often having to resist threats and evictions in the meantime. Sometimes they lead to big successes, one in Glasgow 1915 led to a national rent freeze. However, a fair share have failed to make gains, like St Pancras 1960 which ended in unfulfilled promises from the newly elected labour council.

Local rent strikes didn't come out of nowhere. 1968 marked a global wave of unrest; centred around riots, wildcat strikes and worker's occupations in Paris. Liverpool saw its own strike wave with dockers in 1967 being followed by bus and haulage drivers, dustmen, market porters, female machinists and construction workers in 1968.

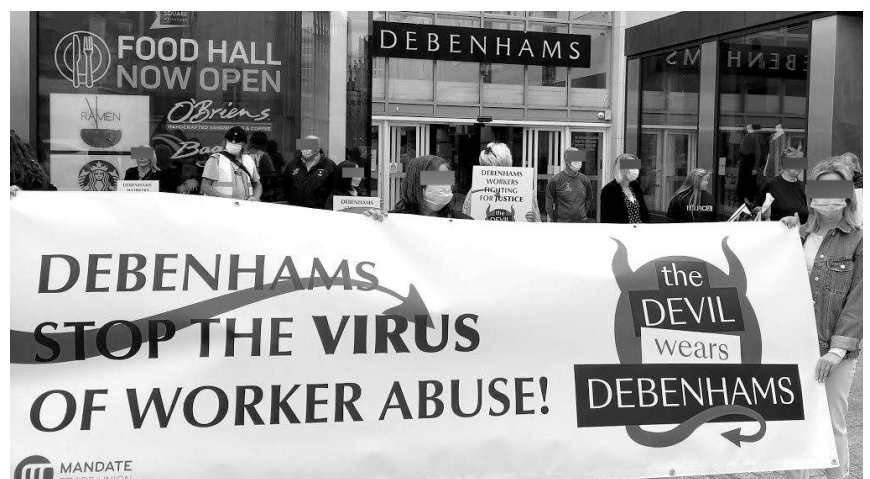
A rent increase for council tenants was scheduled for April 1st. In response a number of tenant unions were formed or revived across Liverpool in opposition, starting with Speke and Childwall Valley, areas more affected by the increase.

The first organisation that attempted to coordinate tenants across Liverpool were the Trotskyist *Liverpool Rent Action Committee*. They gave out tens of thousands of leaflets and gathered a similar number of signatures. However, after being threatened with mass evictions if rent was withheld, most local groups affiliated with the more respectable apolitical *Amalgamated Tenants Associations Coordinating Committee* (ATACC). In reality most tenants were willing to work with anyone so long as they stayed in control of their struggle, with close ties to the ATACC, communists, student radicals, trade unions and the Labour-left.

After the increase, *Liverpool Weekly News* claimed 4,000 tenants were withholding rent. Official statistics claimed it was only 2,000, however, this was likely a manipulation of the truth to demoralise the strikers. So 3-6% of council tenants withheld rent across Liverpool, apparently half being located in Speke.

The tenants used local newspapers (despite being ignored by the *Echo*), leaked information, marched and even confronted officials on the street as part of their campaign to reverse the rent increase. During a heat wave women, with children in tow, also staged a sit-in at the office of the Housing Director. The momentum behind the rent strike largely came from women. Despite some talk of a housewife's strike to get everyone on board, there was very little opposition from working class people to the strike, including the men.

By the end of May, the council had gone from threatening evictions to negotiations with the ATACC, leading to promises to make repairs. After tenants withheld rent for six months, the council reduced the rent increase by 12.5 pennies. Even back then this was a small win, but a win nonetheless. Various smaller victories had been won for individuals along the way. More significantly the struggle had led to the formation of tenants unions across the city, represented by the ATACC, and politicised ordinary people. This led to the struggle for tenants moving from being centred in the suburbs of Speke and Childwall Valley to the inner-city slums in the following year. •



With Debenhams liquidating in Ireland, workers call for a boycott and hold 24 hour pickets to prevent the removal of stock, demanding "fairer" redundancies.



Anarchist CNT-FAI militants in the social revolution of Spain 1936.

SOCIAL REVOLUTION

Throughout our life we will elect multiple governments, work for various bosses, and spend our money on an enormous range of things. We may even donate to charity, sign petitions, or join a demonstration. So why does nothing ever seem to change? For us, the problem lies in the capitalist system itself, based on class ownership, production for profit, and the exploitation of workers. The problem is that most of us have no power over our lives, which we spend competing with each other for the basic necessities to survive. To change this system it will be necessary to create a new kind of society based on common ownership, in which each person and community has an equal influence over the things that affect them.

We can't vote away state power, nor buy our way out of an economy. Instead, we seek to transform the fundamentals of society by means of revolutionary struggle. This involves on the one hand the negative task of dismantling the structures of power that constrain us, and abolishing the institutions of capitalist property and wage labour. On the other hand, we face the positive task of developing new ways of meeting our needs and organising society without hierarchy or exploitation.

It will take a general strike and insurrection of the working class to overthrow the state and take possession of economic wealth. But such a revolution does not come out of nowhere and is

only the climactic moment of a long and gradual process of social change. That process begins here and now in the class struggle, and our struggle against domination in all its forms.

Whether in the workplace or neighbourhood, through women's liberation or environmental defence, it is the *means* by which we organise and take action that conditions the *future* we strive to build. We use direct action – outside of and against all authority – to win partial victories and build up confidence, knowledge, and skills. We organise ourselves without leaders in horizontal networks, that secure local autonomy while forming international connections. We support and defend one another through every difficulty, nurturing a sense of solidarity and interdependence. In so doing we begin to develop the elements of a free society, which will flourish once our oppressors are cut down.

The state of affairs we find ourselves in today is not permanent; our rulers are not gods. Since the 17th century, capitalism has emerged and transformed the world through the actions of human beings: we can do the same. At present, inequality is at extreme levels; the capitalist economy is stumbling from crisis to crisis and destroying the ecological basis of life as it does so. Across the world, entrenched systems are destabilising, while more and more people rise up in revolt. In such conditions, revolutionary change is not only possible but urgent. For now, Britain appears to remain unmoved, but this can change in the blink of an eye. •

EARTH FIRST!

Earth First is a non-hierarchical and anti-capitalist organisation that uses direct action to challenge environmental destruction. Recently they have been active in defending woodlands against the HS2 railway expansion, but over the years they have been involved in all sorts of acts of sabotage. Their gathering won't be happening this year for obvious reasons. Yet capitalism, a broken system that sees the earth's resources as infinite, hurtles onwards towards our mutual destruction, for humanity and nature alike.

Due to this Earth First has called for two days of action on the 21st and 22nd of August against sites of environmental destruction and the organisations responsible for them, either

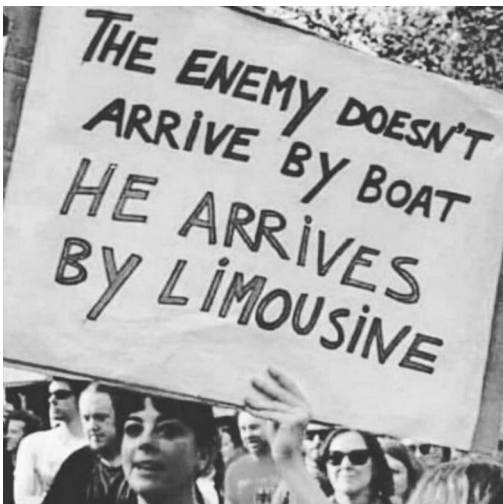
directly or through funding. If you're interested and looking for any inspiration, the latest online issue of the Nerve magazine is all about environmentalism in Merseyside. There is no shortage of local problems: from the airport to Rimrose Valley. If you take any action, however big or small, and want it publicised, you could send details over to Earth First, but make sure to check your digital security and privacy first! •

CLEANERS ON STRIKE

PCS members employed by ISS to clean HMRC offices on Merseyside began a month long strike action on the 3rd of August, continuing their long-running dispute over pay and conditions. •

LOCAL GROUPS

- ♦ **FOOD NOT BOMBS** on facebook @LiverpoolFoodNotBombs
- ♦ **HUNT SABOTEURS** at lpoolhuntsabs@hotmail.co.uk or facebook @LiverpoolHuntSabs
- ♦ **LOUDER THAN PROUD** [queer collective] at louderthanproud@protonmail.com
- ♦ **MERSEYSIDE ANIMAL RIGHTS CAMPAIGNS** on facebook @MARcampaigns
- ♦ **MERSEYSIDE ANTI-FASCIST NETWORK** on facebook @MerseyAFN
- ♦ **SOLIDARITY FEDERATION** [anarcho-syndicalist initiative] at liverpoolsolfed@gmail.com



We aim to publish the *Liverpool Anarchist* monthly, and welcome all submissions in accord with our basic ideas:

- ♦ **Anti-State**
- ♦ **Communist**
- ♦ **Against all Oppression**

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