

LIVERPOOL ANARCHIST

LIFE ON THE DOLE

The government is planning to cut Universal Credit (UC) by £20 a week. That might not sound like a lot, but for millions this decision will be devastating. It's one of the biggest losses in history for single claimants under 25, who will lose almost a quarter of their monthly income. Between this and the national insurance increase, the working class are being plunged into poverty, whilst those in power live in comfort.

They claim this cut is to encourage people to look for employment. But nearly 40% of UC claimants are already employed. Current wages are so low that many people cannot live off them without benefits, forcing them to work more for even lower wages. If the government doesn't want these people claiming benefits, they should make companies pay them an actual living wage.

Instead, they try to sell you the tired old story of the "dolescum". They have the gall to warn of scroungers and single mothers who just want free handouts, before they head back to their million-pound mansions built with taxpayers' money. The truth is, people claiming benefits are just trying to survive, and the government is making that as difficult as possible.

I've been on UC on-and-off since I was 18, and I cannot begin to overstate how gruelling and dehumanising the experience has been. You are expected to jobhunt for the same amount of hours as working a full time job, looking for the ever-shrinking number of openings only for your CV to be discarded without any response. They expect you to shape your life around them, and they will sanction you at any given opportunity. I once lost a month's worth of benefits because they refused to move my appointment back a single day - and when I next showed up, I was told my work coach wasn't in because she was hungover. It is a system designed to break you, to leave you exhausted and unable to protest against the horrendous treatment.

If the Tories say it's time to talk about mental



health, then let's talk about the severe toll that UC has had. Claiming disability benefits is an exhausting process. I want you to imagine laying the intimate details of your physical and mental health bare to a complete stranger, who then passes it on to a panel of people you will never meet. I want you to imagine worrying if said panel will decide you're disabled enough, suicidal enough, in enough pain to pass the test and be awarded a small amount of money to live on, or if you'll be left to die.

And they will let you die. A 2015 report, published by the government themselves, shows that between 2011 and 2014, eighty-thousand people died within six weeks of their benefits being cut off or reduced. And it's still happening. In 2019, Stephen Smith from Kensington, Liverpool, was denied benefits and forced to leave hospital to fight the decision - despite being so ill with a respiratory condition that he only weighed six stone. The DWP finally agreed to pay back nearly £4,000 - but it was too little, too late. The money that could have made his life easier was instead used to pay for his funeral. Who gave the government the right to

decide if these people deserve to live?

It can be hard to see a way out of this - and that's exactly how they've designed it. They want you to feel powerless and alone - but remember, you are not. If I've learned anything from my time in this city, it's that you are never alone. We have power together - the government knows this and they're scared that we'll realise it too. So stand up, learn your rights, and fight back.

If they leave us too poor to afford food, there will be nothing left to eat but the rich. •

UNIVERSITY STRIKE VICTORY

As of the 30th of September, the UCU's fight against the University of Liverpool's plan to cut 47 jobs in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences has come to an end with no compulsory redundancies. Over 6 months, workers went on strike for 24 days, refused non-contracted work and implemented a marking boycott. When autumn term started with the threat of a further 5 days of strike action, management finally gave in. It's this kind of willingness to take effective action, even if the disruption negatively affected students, which probably secured their victory.

Not only did the strikers have to deal with threats from management, they even had to grapple with officials from within UCU. One striker told us that "officials at UCU National seemed to come close to not approving the last round of strike action, despite the branch voting in favour of it in overwhelming numbers and following all of UCU's processes. Having had a week and a half to give the go-ahead, National UCU only signed their approval at the very last minute - risking a delay (or worse) in the branch's planned industrial action."

With local bus drivers currently balloting to strike, and a strike at the City of Liverpool College, this strike sets an important precedent. When workers stick together, they can win significant victories, especially if they don't pull their punches, are willing to take prolonged action and have a healthy distrust of the union hierarchy. It's also worth bearing in mind that, often, being organised and merely threatening unrest is all that it takes to win a dispute. •


THE HUNT BEGINS

The badger cull has begun and will continue until mid-to-late October. After this, fox hunting season will begin, and continue until around March. If you are interested in physically opposing this in the fields around Merseyside and the North West we would recommend you get involved with the Hunt Saboteurs. You can contact them at lpoolhuntsabs@hotmail.co.uk •

"Anarchism stands for complete freedom of the people, free from any control, with the elimination of all superiors and organs of authorities ... And since the most dangerous authority in the modern world is capitalism, the anarchists are at the same time socialists.

Socialism advocates that the means of production and their products belong to the society."

Liu Shifu



Welcome to the Wonderful World of
ANARCHISM

**MANCHESTER & SALFORD
ANARCHIST
BOOKFAIR 2021**

People's History Museum, Left Bank, Bridge Street, M3 3ER
Saturday 6th November 10am until 4pm
Manchester@Bookfair.org.uk | www.Bookfair.org.uk

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS IN WALTON JAIL

During the First World War, many Conscientious Objectors (COs) refused to be conscripted. Some, such as quakers, for religious reasons, while others objected due to socialist or anarchist principles. Not all "socialists" kept to their principles: the Labour Party were quick to drop their anti-war stance in the pursuit of the promise of power, taking positions in government for the first time. In contrast, 5,970 COs were sent to jail and at least 73 died due to their treatment.

228 of these spent time in Walton Jail (North Liverpool). They spent 18 hours a day locked in their basement cells, were forced to work, and were only able to receive (and send) one censored letter a month as well as one visitor for 30 minutes. On top of this, there was a "silence rule": any communication between COs was forbidden and would result in "bread and water" treatment.

Despite this, the socialist Fenner Brockway edited a twice weekly paper, the 'Walton Leader', made of around 40 pieces of toilet paper, which ran for over 100 issues. It was a group effort: the No-Conscription Fellowship smuggled in pencil lead, COs would send in articles in code through tapping on pipes and there was a one toilet paper sheet subscription fee. The paper contained cartoons, discussed the Russian Revolution and even included an account of the slaughter of Passchendaele, which the "free press" was banned from covering. The paper was circulated to all 60 COs by a sympathetic cleaner but even then it took around a week to pass around, so they started hiding it in the lavatory to be read. However, this led to queues, which puzzled the prison authorities and led to the paper being discovered. Brockway was sentenced to six days in the punishment cells, even though they lacked evidence. Here he was only allowed bread and water, and his dark cell only contained a stool, chamber pot and Bible, denying him the comfort of resting except on the hard floor.

Later on, Brockway, Percy Bartlett and three anarchists from Stockport visited the governor and

told him that they would no longer follow the silence rule. They then started talking openly, even playing games. When they were separated from the other COs, the revolt simply spread to other prisoners in Walton Jail, while around 30 COs were sent to the punishment cells for talking. After around a week, all of the COs were sent back to their basement floor. Soon the COs found shouting between cells tiresome, and so established a committee to organise a timetable with periods of talking, silence for reading, lectures, concerts and even stand up comedy. After 10 days the ringleaders were transferred to other prisons, and Brockway received 8 months solitary confinement.

Unrest from COs in several prisons, ranging from hunger strikes to refusing to work, led to improvements in conditions in early 1918, such as the right to receive books and 40 minutes of talking per day. In July 1918, 17 COs at Walton Jail were on hunger strike; some were forcibly fed, some were also transferred to hospital or simply discharged. With the war coming to an end, there was growing discontent, expressed through strikes, riots and mutinies. The government was worried that British workers might follow the example set by the Russian Revolution, and so didn't want to release principled revolutionaries, therefore they remained behind bars even after the war was won. At this point the hunger strikes threatened a scandal. And the authorities were right - many of the COs (such as the anarchist Guy Aldred) who had endured so much, fought for revolutionary change as soon as they were released and continued tirelessly until they died. •

"The only war which is worth fighting is the class war. The working class of this country have no quarrel with the working class of Germany or any other country. Socialism stands for Internationalism. If the workers of all countries united & refused to fight, there would be no war."

**Graffiti in Richmond Castle, Yorkshire,
where conscientious objectors were
imprisoned during WW1**

RESISTING THE ARMS FAIR

Liverpool's council-owned Exhibition Centre will be hosting an arms fair from the 12-13th of October. On September 11th, over 3,000 people protested in opposition. The absence of our mayor, the self-proclaimed "socialist and pacifist" Joanne Anderson, was revealing. Apparently she has sought legal advice, which conveniently stated she was powerless to cancel the event, but any councillors that have seen the evidence have had to sign non-disclosure agreements. Our rulers are happy to stand aside and let the event go ahead, so that they look reliable in the eyes of big business.

Liverpool Against the Arms Fair, who organised the march on the 11th, have led an extensive campaign of awareness raising. Locally there have been die-ins, street theatre, protests outside council meetings, stalls, and on the 2nd of October, a protest inside the Pullman Hotel (which will be accomodating arms dealers). Locally, everybody knows about the arms fair, and while not everyone agrees with the campaign, all signs suggest that the majority do. The campaign has led to Massive Attack, the National Education Union and the National Union of Students boycotting the venue. Disappointingly, Unite have not; many of their members work in the arms trade and Unite typically conflate being pro-worker with being pro-industry. However, there are limits to awareness raising, and despite tireless campaigning, it seems clear that the arms fair will go ahead.

So what is the alternative? Taking direct action to disrupt the proceedings of the council, the exhibition centre (who host regular public events) and the arms fair itself. On the 11th of



September, Palestine Action used a fire extinguisher to splatter the windows of the exhibition centre with blood-red paint. Back in June, they targeted a factory in Runcorn involved in the supply chain for the Israeli military: occupying their roof for two days, spraying the walls red, destroying property such as ventilators & cameras, and, crucially, halting production.

In London an eight-day campaign of direct action and education was organised against the DSEI arms fair in September. People blocked entrances to the venue by blockading the roads with protests and lock-ons, as well as climbing on top of military vehicles being transported to the event. Inside, several socialist workers disrupted the fair by setting off red flares in front of the Lockheed Martin stand, while speaking out against British imperialism.

Even if these tactics don't stop the arms fair, they will disrupt the industry and might stop them returning. Hopefully, wherever the fair goes, protests will follow. However, if we want to stop the profiteering from mass murder worldwide, then we will need to start talking about international revolution.

Liverpool Against the Arms Fair are calling for a gathering from 7am on the 12th of October at the Old Wall Arch on Gower Street (at the Albert Docks). •



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.

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