

LIVERPOOL ANARCHIST

Authoritarianism darkens the horizon of our not so green and pleasant land. Over the past couple of decades we have seen the development of mass surveillance programmes, the building of new mega-prisons designed for forced labour, counter-terrorism measures such as Prevent seeping into our everyday lives, more brazen over-reach and impunity of police forces, restrictive trade union laws, ever more oppressive immigration enforcement measures and the opening of detention centres. A rhetoric of “extremism,” “terrorism,” and migrant “invasions” has been used by governments and media to justify brutal and repressive policies. Ethnic minorities are subjects of permanent suspicion and discriminatory policing. More recently we have seen the demonisation and repression of peaceful and reformist movements such as Extinction Rebellion and Black Lives Matter, while pre-emptive arrests, bigger fines and longer sentences for political action become the norm.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill currently passing through the House of Lords will be a significant development of this authoritarian trend. To take one small example, a protest will face being broken up, and organisers imprisoned, for breaching arbitrary conditions over things such as loud noise, under the new law.

Many people tell themselves that if they have nothing to hide, they have nothing to fear. But if they go on strike, resist being evicted or even defend their local park from being “developed”, they could end up being singled out as trouble-makers.

Those who fear a one-party state and collapse of democracy are looking the wrong way. Representative democracy proves a useful facade behind which authoritarianism can flourish. The British state prefers to uphold and champion various rights and freedoms in the abstract, while restricting and withholding them through a thousand regulations in practice. For example, the right to assemble amounted to little when, facing a protest against the arms fair in Liverpool last



month, a dispersal order was put in place around the venue, allowing police to arrest and force away protestors. Members of Palestine Action, some with small children, were even subject to night-time house raids and arrests.

The kinds of opposition that are permitted, and even facilitated, are precisely those that are entirely powerless to bring about change. Anything that poses a real threat is quickly legislated away, as we saw in the past with sympathy strikes and flying pickets.

The reality of the state is power, not law. Civil rights are temporary concessions that the state revokes or ignores whenever it finds it necessary. But the power of rulers is limited and can be overcome by our rebellion, class power and collective action. History shows as much.

We may not be able to stop the Crime Bill from being passed into law, but we can resist its implementation in practice. If we obey increasingly authoritarian restrictions out of fear or excessive caution, we will allow them to become entrenched. An active yet intelligent resistance, widespread and normalised, on the other hand, can make of the law a dead letter. On October 29th, agency dock workers in Liverpool and Birkenhead acted beyond the law through unofficially striking over unpaid wages, and they won.

Ultimately, we can't get stuck merely defending the illusory civil rights conceded to us by the very state that oppresses us. We need to fight for genuine freedoms in our everyday lives, and for a world without exploitation. •

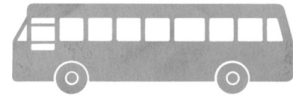
WHO'S IN THE DRIVING SEAT?

Arriva bus drivers voted to take indefinite strike action from October 30th, targeting Halloween. This was because they were offered a 2% pay "increase" (which is below inflation), despite all they went through during the pandemic. However, the day before, Arriva increased their pay offer to a pitiful 3%, and so Unite called off the strike to ballot their members, with the recommendation that they accept the offer (if they reject it, a strike will then take place). Multiple bus drivers have claimed that the original offer was 2% plus enhanced pay for Saturday morning, equivalent to around an annual 1% increase, while the current offer of 3% has no enhanced pay, meaning it might not actually even be an improved offer. Workers were told they would only be re-balloted if there was a "substantial increase", and any supposed increase is clearly marginal, so surely it would have been better to proceed with the strike, and simply to ballot their members at the same time? Instead Unite sabotaged the strike before it had even begun, giving away the workers' tactical advantage. This is why we would always encourage workers to question whether trade union representatives have their best interests at heart, and to organise at a rank-and-file level.

There was strong support for strike action: 1,800 members of Unite across Birkenhead, Bootle, Liverpool, Manchester, Runcorn, Southport, St Helens and Winsford voted 87% in favour (with a turnout of 76%). The regional nature of the strike should maximise its effectiveness (since surrounding bus services won't be breaking the strike), although the fact that Stagecoach drivers aren't involved has the opposite effect. Will the drivers vote to accept? On social media there seems to be some outrage amongst members around the offer; however, if the members are not very engaged or confident, they may take Unite's recommendation and vote to accept.

If a strike does go ahead, as passengers it's important that we show that we are behind the strikers. Understandably some people would be frustrated, but we need to direct this at Arriva's management, not fellow workers who are just

trying to get by. If you see any Arriva buses operating in these areas and you're



certain a strike is on, it would be best to avoid boarding them, or potentially even worth verbally challenging the drivers for crossing the picket line.

Across the country, bus drivers have been balloting over local strike action. In many instances strikes have ended before they began, with workers accepting pay increases. While this may seem positive, if these offers have been below inflation, it's worth considering whether they are genuine victories or if Unite are just proclaiming them to be so (which isn't to say you can't make serious gains through simply threatening to walkout - Liverpool food tanker drivers, also in Unite, won a 17.5% pay increase on October 26th).

One reason for this wave of unrest may be the highly visible strike of Manchester bus drivers at Go Ahead earlier this year. The strike started on February 28th and lasted for 85 days, apparently the longest in the history of the Unite (which says a lot). At the height of the pandemic the workers were pressured to sign new contracts which would lay-off staff, remove their sick pay and increase their hours without increasing their pay. In response 400 drivers decided to go out on strike not for a day, week or month but until the new contracts were scrapped - an all out strike. Despite 24-hour picketing, Go Ahead were still able to run a reduced service, claiming 100 workers scabbed. So further action was taken, rallies were organised to show they had public support (crucial for morale) and unions were contacted in other countries where Go Ahead were looking for new contracts. On numerous occasions supporters blockaded scab depots by slowly walking back-and-forth in front of their entrances; when the police arrived, they would stop, but slowly walk in front of the bus down the road, typically delaying the service by over an hour. The previous year, supporters even got a victimised union rep reinstated through "slow-walking" at the depot. In the end they won a major, though defensive, victory; contracts were torn up, the two fired workers were reinstated and some minor improvements were won: a 2% pay rise over two years, a £1,500 lump sum and some vague promises to improve conditions. •

Written 31st October.

THE 1921 LIVERPOOL UNEMPLOYED PROTESTS

Following the First World War, ex-servicemen returned to Britain with high hopes, but despite promises of “homes fit for heroes”, the reality they faced was rampant unemployment and attacks on working conditions. In Liverpool, unemployment was particularly high at 60,000, and the benefits system was not designed for mass, long-term unemployment. Benefits were limited, and after they ran out you had to rely on the Board of Guardians, where you got a food voucher that was worth far less than benefits.

Since February 1921, unemployed rallies had been demanding “work or maintenance”, to no avail. Before this, unemployed agitation in Liverpool had unhelpfully targeted female and “coloured” workers, arguing they had stolen “their jobs”. Bob Tissyman, an ex-policeman who had been fired for going on strike in 1919, called for a gathering at the Exchange Flags. All the top businessmen met here, it was effectively forbidden ground to the poor. A crowd of 10,000 gathered at the Exchange on September 7th, electing a delegation of 10 to present their demands to the mayor. A Labour Councillor intervened at the rally, calling for everyone to go home, but he was heckled and roughed-up slightly by the crowd. In the end, the crowd forced the mayor to meet their delegation on the balcony of the Town Hall, but nothing was achieved.

The deputation went on to become the Liverpool Unemployed Workers Committee Movement (LUWCM) and agitated primarily to improve the benefits system. All of the committee, except a Baptist minister, were unemployed, and held a variety of political views ranging from Catholicism to Communism. They organised another protest where 20,000 people blocked Lord Street and slowly walked around the city centre for 2 hours, disrupting traffic, trams and shop entrances, hoping the expense would pressure the authorities into giving in. So far the police had not interfered, but

some committee members were concerned it was only a matter of time. However, Tissyman insisted there would be no trouble since the police were sympathetic and the protests were peaceful.

On September 12th, the largest gathering so far took place at St Georges Plateau. The committee were giving speeches but were concerned that the crowd was losing interest and that the movement was stalling. So, without consulting anybody, Tissyman suggested the crowd occupy the Walker Art Gallery, which was open to the public, until the council agreed to let them use St Georges Hall for their mass meetings. Around 200 people went into the gallery, although 50 left immediately. Without provocation, mounted police cleared the crowd outside and the occupiers were locked in the



gallery. Inside, police brutally batoned them, including gallery workers, breaking Tissyman's arm and bashing his head in. A 23 year-old, David Davids, died weeks after being struck on the head by police. Around 150 protesters were arrested, the committee was rounded up, and a highly visible court case followed. Some of the protestors used the opportunity to spread their ideas, or simply to make jokes. One of the defendants was continuously late; one time he claimed he couldn't afford a ticket and so had to walk 5 miles, the next day he said he'd had to pawn his clock to pay for supper and lost track of the time. The press insisted that Russians were funding the movement, so the syndicalist George Garrett was asked if he was being paid by a government to cause trouble - he responded yes, “the British government, I'm on the dole”. In the end they were all effectively released without punishment.

During the trial, a second committee had sprung up (and later another two back-up committees). The second committee registered 8,000 of the unemployed, and organised them locally, with ex-army officers being elected to act as leaders for the marches, not to encourage but to prevent conflict. Following the trial, both committees organised three weeks of almost daily "slow-walks" of around 8,000-10,000 in the city. Due to their military-style discipline on these marches the police did not dare to attack them again: protesters would stop-and-start on command to ensure maximum disruption, had been instructed not to fight police but to disarm officers if they attacked, and selected men followed plain-clothed detectives within the march. At a mass gathering outside of the Toxteth Board of Guardians, they forced the board to agree to pay the unemployed the same amount as they received before their benefits had expired (in fact an increased rate for women, although still less than men). Following this, due to the disruptive "slow-walks" the Conservative leader of the city council illegally and against the wishes of the government managed to get all three boards in Liverpool to agree to pay the same rates after insurance-based benefits expired (half in vouchers, half in cash); however, the increase for women won in Toxteth was reversed. While women participated in the marches and the committee, the movement was overwhelmingly male dominated.

Following this huge victory, the numbers attending protests dwindled to an average of 1,000; many were satisfied with the increase, and the rate of unemployment had decreased. However, throughout 1921 and 1922 the LUWCM managed to

secure further victories through direct action. Another slow-walk forced the council to let them use Pudsey Street Stadium for mass meetings. There were also attempts to force the unemployed to work for free (like Workfare in the 2010s), in response to which the LUWCM organised a strike of these unemployed workers (despite legal threats), putting an end to these schemes. •

BYSTANDER INTERVENTION TRAINING

Due to the increased reports of homophobic and transphobic harassment in Liverpool, Kill the Bill have organised this workshop (lasting 2 hours) for the 6th of November at DoES Liverpool, (The Tapestry, Kempston Street). The workshop will explore ways to stop or de-escalate situations of harassment and violence, specifically focusing on queer people but applicable to a variety of situations. These interventions don't need to involve the police or criminal justice system: since these institutions don't exist to keep us safe, we have to rely on each other. The workshop is free, but spaces are limited, so you have to get a ticket through the following link:

<https://bit.ly/2ZDCYaU>

Kill the Bill are hoping to run two further sessions, one online (possibly on December 8th) and another in person. For more details follow them on social media or send them an email at:

ktbliverpool@protonmail.com



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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