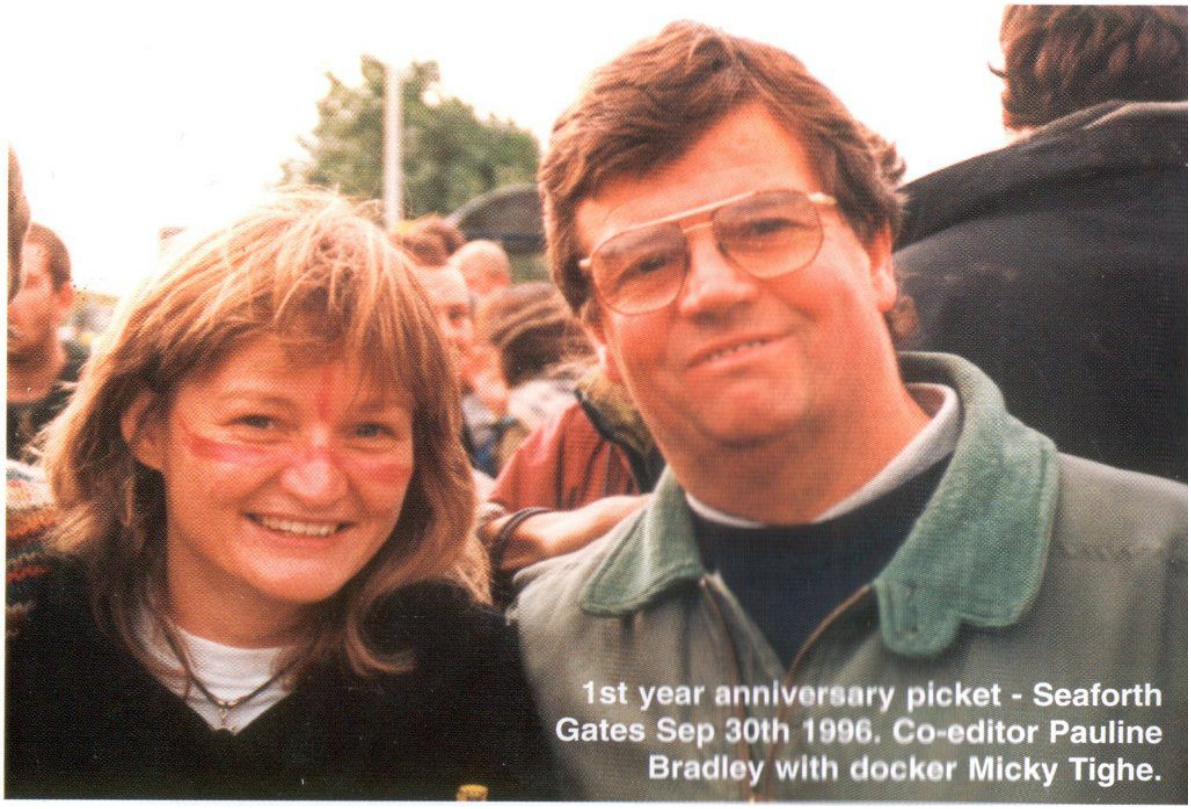
Another World is Possible

How the Liverpool Dockers Launched a Global Movement

Edited by Pauline Bradley and Chris Knight



1st year anniversary picket - Seaforth Gates Sep 30th 1996. Co-editor Pauline Bradley with docker Micky Tighe.

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Dedicated to the Liverpool dockers, Women of the Waterfront, Reclaim the Streets – and to all those who supported this epic struggle for human dignity, believing that another world is possible

Never cross a picket line

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Introductory Note

THIS PAMPHLET is not intended as a survey of what the Liverpool dockers achieved during their historic dispute. More modestly, it attempts to place on record a selection of perspectives as recalled by members of the London Support Group.

A Message of Thanks to the London Support Group

MAY WE TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY to express our sincere appreciation to all our brothers and sisters of the London Support Group. From 1995 to 1998, you dedicated your time to achieve the reinstatement of the 500 sacked Liverpool Port workers who refused to cross a picket line. Your organisational skills enabled us to address thousands of trade union and labour movement meetings. We were always aware that the LSG represented a unity of varying political ideas, which became a consolidated as an aim we all shared. The strength of your convictions and beliefs helped inspire us to continue our fight for reinstatement.

Yours fraternally,

Mickey Tighe and Nick Silvano

Some Relevant Dates

ITWF = International Transport Workers Federation
MDHC = Mersey Dock and Harbour Company

1988 Liverpool dockers stop the import of uranium from Namibia
1989 Dockers refuse to unload toxic waste imported from Canada
1989 End of National Dock Labour Scheme
1991 Reduction of Liverpool dockers to 500 from 1100
1992 Shop stewards de-recognised
1992 *400 Earth First!* demonstrators occupy docks against import of timber
1993 T&GWU agrees to 25% wage cut

~~1995~~
Sep 25 Torside dockers sacked for protesting against overtime violation
Sep 26 All remaining Torside dockers sacked
Sep 28 Torside dockers mount picket lines and Liverpool men respect this
Oct 9 Liverpool dockers try to return to work but are locked out
Oct 23 Drake International and PDP [Services} called in as strike-breakers

Establishment of *Women of the Waterfront*
Establishment of *London Support Group*

~~1996~~
Jan 29 ITWF inspectors' seminar has dockers as delegates
April 1 Launch of EMEK Party [progressive labour] in Turkey
June 3 Two Liverpool dockers based in London
June 4 Start of weekly picket of Drake International offices in London
June 22 Dockers' Support Conference, International Student House, London
July Death of Mickie Fenn, Chair of London Support Group
Aug RTS occupy London Transport HQ in support of tube strikers
Sep 28 First anniversary demonstration, 3 days of action
RTS join street protest with dockers
Support Conference on Human Rights in Turkey
Nov John Pilger begins writing articles in support of dockers
Dec "Flickering Flame" film by Ken Loach, Channel 4
Dec 14 Mass march in London
Dec 15 Billy Bragg in dockers' support gig

~~1997~~
Jan 15-20 Worldwide action by dockers and environmentalists in support

	of Liverpool
Feb 5	Pickets on Drake International London office
Mar 14	Robbie Fowler and Steve McManaman display 'Support Dockers' tee-shirts
Mar 16	London Palladium support show
April 12	March for Social Justice
April 14	Hillingdon Hospital mass picket
April 21	Magnet strikers mass picket
May 1	Labour Government elected
June 6	Dockers win vote at T&GWU Biennial Conference despite Attempted rigging
July 26	Support Conference, Liverpool
Sep 8	International Day of Solidarity Action for dockers
Sep 10	TUC meeting
Sep 27	Second anniversary demonstration
Oct 20	Dockers vote to reject MDHC offer
Nov	Flying picket on Coastal Container Line ports in Scotland and Ireland
Nov 21	'De-stock the Dock' campaign
Nov 11	'Pentonville 25 years on' meeting in West Ham
Dec 1	Mass lobby of T&GWU EC meeting in London.
Dec	Xmas Appeal

~~1998~~

Jan 29	Vote to end dispute
Feb 28	National meeting and rally, Conway Hall, London
May 10	Second March for Social Justice, London

~~1999~~

July 5	**'**Dockers' film shown on TV
June 18	Carnival Against Capitalism stops City of London
Nov 30	Seattle action against the World Trade Organisaiton

Why?

‘On September 25, 1995, dockers working for a private contractor, Torside, were ordered to work overtime for a disputed rate. They protested and were sacked on the spot. Within a day the entire work force of eighty men had been sacked. Three days later, they mounted a picket line and all 329 men employed by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, including fathers and uncles of the Torside men, refused to cross it. They, too, were summarily dismissed.

They were got rid of so quickly that within twenty-four hours their jobs were being advertised in the local press. It was the end of the bloodline. Men like Jimmy Campbell, whose father was killed on the docks, had almost forty years’ service. Shockwaves hit more than 8,500 men, women and children. ‘When my husband received his P45 after twenty-eight years’ working in the port,’ said Pat Dooley, ‘it was like someone had died in our house.’

Few of them doubted that they had walked into a trap. Because the overtime dispute was not theirs, the dockers’ refusal to cross the Torside picket line was illegal under Margaret Thatcher’ anti-trade-union laws. Mersey Docks and Harbour Company claimed that it was ‘entirely independent’ of Torside.

This meant that the dockers could be sacked for ‘secondary’ picketing. But to those who knew the life of the port, was no doubt that Torside was merely a device set up to enable the principal company to disassociate itself from labour practices that echoed the discredited past.’

John Pilger, 1998. Hidden Agendas. London: Vintage, pp. 337-8

A Brief History of the London Support Group

by Pauline Bradley

THE LONDON SUPPORT GROUP for the Liverpool Dockers was formed at the beginning of the dispute at a meeting chaired by the late Mickie Fenn, a former London docker and activist who had close links with Liverpool. Over one hundred people attended the meeting in Conway Hall, including Dot Gibson, Jackie Vance, Bronwen Handyside and Bob Towers – all members of *Workers' International* (whose links with the Liverpool dockers stretched back many years). Also present were Frankie Shilling, a former London Docker and T&GWU Branch Secretary of the London Docks Branch and Bob Tennant, Secretary of the Greater London Association of Trades Union Councils. Jimmy Nolan, Chairman of the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards Committee put the case for a support Group, as did Jimmy Davies. I did not attend this meeting as at this time I had no knowledge of the dispute.

The London Support Group – not official enough for GLATUC

My understanding is that it was at this meeting that the Greater London Association of Trades Councils leadership decided not to support the London Support Group. Despite the presence of dockers leaders such as Jimmy Nolan and Jimmy Davies, they chose to interpret the whole meeting as being 'controlled' by an 'unofficial group'. This sectarianism was one of the many weaknesses of GLATUC throughout the dispute. They preferred to leave the Liverpool dockers high and dry, rather than give committed support to something they felt not to be 'official' enough. GLATUC offered no viable alternative to the LSG, though they did send their President, Pete Turner to some meetings. In the meetings I attended, Pete did not say anything. At best he was in poor health but perhaps he tried.

Party or union agendas

It is often the case – arguably always – that the wider trade union and labour movement does not give its backing to any campaign until there is a groundswell of support for it at the grass roots. It is usual for a group or party to galvanise what forces there are on the ground. With their historical links with the Liverpool and London dockers, the *Workers International* comrades were well-placed to do this. Their efforts at the beginning and throughout the dispute should have been commended and not sneered at.

Union officials can often become out of touch with the grass roots, they also can have their own party perspectives and agendas. It was unfortunate for the dockers that their own union, the T&GWU, was the same union as that of Bob Tenant (Secretary of GLATUC). As a result, Mr Tenant only ever took the

same position as that of the leadership of the T&GWU; who were actively trying to end the dispute from very early on.

London Support Group Meetings

I did not get into the dispute until March 1996, because owing to the media censorship I did not know about it. I found out about the dispute at a fringe meeting at TUC Women's Conference in March, which was addressed by Doreen McNally, and other members of *Women of the Waterfront*. The *Militant* (now the *Socialist Party*) hosted this brilliant meeting.

The great thing about the LSG was that anyone could come along and contribute, or just sit and listen. We had no formal membership list as such, but we had a mailing list and a telephone tree, which we used when we wanted to quickly convey news about events to a large amount of people. The telephone tree was Nick Craske's idea – it consisted of six chains with 16 names in each chain. The person at the top of the list would make the first calls until s/he spoke to a person – answerphone messages were left. Then the person spoken to would continue the chain. It usually worked. Nick updated the list at regular intervals.

London Support Group meetings

I've been asked to say who came to the LSG. This is difficult because there were so many people, and some people came for a while then dropped out. Those who were most consistent were Dot Gibson, Bronwen Handyside, Jackie Vance, Steve Ballard and Nick Bailey (*Workers International*), Liz Knight (ex SWP and Campaign for Human Rights in Turkey), Bob Towers (ASLEF Official and *Workers Press*), Roger Gow (London Docker, post National Dock Labour Scheme), Frankie Shilling (sacked London Docker and ex Branch chair), Hassan Irwa (Iranian comrade), Liz Leicester (Camden Unison and *Workers Press*), Tony Nicoliades (CWU and Labour Party), Francis K Krause, Rod Finlayson (T&GWU Steward at Fords Dagenham, and Communist Party), Chris Knight (*Labour Briefing*, NATFHE and Lecturer in Anthropology), Kevin Hemsley (Campaign Against the Arms Trade), Kevin Hargreaves (Labour Party), Giorgi Giandomenici (Pay Day Men's Network, linked to *Wages for Housework Campaign).*

Others were Tekin Kartal, Cemal Gizli, Keenan, Erkan (Turkish/Kurdish Comrades), Dave Chanter and Cristina Roe (Labour Party), Tony Santamera (RMT Official), Ed Hall (Unison and fantastic banner maker!), Joseph Odusanya (Nigerian Activist), Peter Gates (Building Worker/Activist), Andrew Young (*Workers Power*), Kim Hendry (Labour Party – she went on to join the TUC Academy), Alan Thornett and Roland Rance (*Socialist Outlook*), Brian Casey (CWU), Massimo de Angelis (NATFHE), Les Lavidow (AUT), Nick

Craske and Owen James to name but a few. And of course myself, I'm Unison and Labour Party, ex-SWP.

Of course all these people did not turn up all the time, and some came to many actions but no meetings. However, many individuals and people from campaigns came as they'd heard about us and they wanted support for their campaign, which they always got. These included the Magnet Strikers, Reclaim the Streets, Homeless Campaigners and Incapacity Action. Even Lee Hurst came about the *London Palladium Dirty Three and a half Dozen Show*, which he was the brains behind – he had been a close friend of Mickie Fenn.

The British "Left" Stayed Away

One common thread was that to its shame, the left generally stayed away, perhaps because they knew that no single political faction could control our diverse group. Mark Steel and Dave Renton from the SWP, contributed time and effort to the dockers cause. But the SWP in general stayed away from the LSG. A memory I have is that even when Camden SWP had double-booked the room with us, they kindly let us have our meeting but chose not to join us, preferring to sit downstairs in the pub talking to themselves. The SWP did however travel from London to Liverpool several times to attend organising conferences with the dockers to tell them how to run their dispute! The SWP apparently believe they are the 'vanguard', so have the right to give the dockers the benefit of their wisdom. They did collect money, for which the dockers were very grateful. But they refrained from involving themselves in the day to day running of the dispute.

A valuable lesson I learned through this dispute is that disputes will produce their own leaders. Supporters should foster friendly, trusting relationships with them, where tactics can be discussed in safety; and that the class *must* come before the party.

Secondly, *Workers' Power* comrades were active to begin with, but dropped out after a while. They had proposed a resolution saying the dockers should criticise and break with the T&GWU leadership. With hindsight this position was entirely understandable, but neither the dockers nor the LSG were ready for it at the time. Consequently, their resolution failed. *Workers' Power* came back into the dispute when the Australian dockers were attacked: they have comrades in Australia.

The Socialist Party

The *Militant*, later the *Socialist Party*, were not active at LSG meetings – with the notable exception of Simon Donovan who was very active at the beginning. In Liverpool, by contrast, the *Militant* comrades played a central role in the

dispute. I understand that a split occurred over this issue, which is a great shame.

News Line

The WRP/*News Line*, were never supportive of the dockers in London; instead they gave support to the Hillingdon strikers. This consisted of the *News Line* chaperoning the Hillingdon strikers to places and keeping them separate from other workers. *News Line* tended to be critical of the positions taken by the dockers and the LSG, using this as a stick to beat their old WRP comrades with. A very acrimonious split had taken place in the WRP in 1972 which led to *Workers Press*/ *Workers International* being formed.

Others

Workers' Liberty turned up sometimes. I cannot recall any significant contribution from them. *Workers Fight* had a big fight! This was internal and about the lack of activity of some of their comrades, which led to a split. Consequently they didn't get involved in the LSG.

I hassled comrades from *Socialist Outlook/IS* to get involved. Eventually they came along but their agenda was confined to building the Euro-marches 1997. They were impressed with the numbers of people on demos we'd organised. When the Euro-marches were over, they stopped contributing to the LSG. *Labour Briefing* allowed articles by Chris and Liz Knight to go in their magazine. Apart from this they organised a raffle and donated two tickets for the World Cup.

What the groups did do

Throughout the dispute, comrades from the *Workers Press* went through their own internal struggle with other people in their organisation who chose not to get involved. They disbanded *Workers Press*, but remained in *Workers International.* Some got involved in something called "The Movement for Socialism", but others in the LSG didn't. The group was small anyway, before these machinations! Comrades from *Workers International* can explain this better than I can. I cannot fault their energy or commitment to the dockers.

Leftism

The 'Left' missed out on a rare opportunity because of their own distress patterns and misplaced vanguardism which led them into sectarianism, and the need to 'lead' and 'tell' the dockers what to do, rather than listen to, learn from and respect them. Of course all contributions, no matter how small, were welcomed. However, the left needed to learn to build trust with the dockers, to

listen to them – and the dockers in turn would listen. Sadly some leftists turned their back on these workers in struggle to pursue their own party political ends.

I often hear left parties asking themselves ‘How can we get young people/environmentalists etc involved?’ Well, if they’d joined the LSG without their own agendas, they’d have met many *Reclaim The Streets*/environmental activists, and so wouldn’t have had to worry now about their own decline.

Organisation and disorganisation

The first LSG meeting I attended was in the *Queen’s Head* pub. There were over 30 people there, including the Turkish Comrades who put huge efforts into the dispute. The LSG agreed to meet fortnightly. The venue was changed to the *Lucas Arms*, then to Conway Hall. I felt the group was lilting along and for my part I tried to bring some order and consistency into it. I realised I couldn’t do this on my own:

- Because I was not in a party or group with people to back me up, and
- I am female and was somewhat unknown politically.

This meant I was not readily heard (there is still a huge amount of sexism on the left). So I talked to my comrade Kevin Hargreaves who then started attending the LSG. Soon the group was meeting weekly, minutes were produced and we managed to get some effective work done.

Closing down Drake International Office and ‘Don’t say "scab"‘

We organised regular pickets of Canada Pacific’s offices, because this Shipping Line was using Liverpool Docks. We also arranged pickets of Drake International who were an employment agency supplying the scabs to Liverpool. Chris Knight came dressed in his Wolf outfit and comrades came with drums. When the Turkish/Kurdish comrades turned up, we all shouted loudly.

Soon the police began to arrive, just as we arrived. They tried to be ‘objective’, saying things like ‘There’s strong feelings on both sides’. They asked us not to shout the word ‘scab’ in our protest – we were shouting, ‘Drake International is a scab firm!’. We ignored this request of course! One day we turned up to picket and found the office completely empty. . . they had scarpered! We considered that a victory. They also had an office in Brighton, which the Sussex group picketed, getting good local coverage.

June Demo and International Revolutionary Karaoke on Wheels!

We spent several weeks organising people and coaches to a big demo in Liverpool in June 1996. The Hillingdon Strikers went there too. The Hillingdon Strikers often worked with the Liverpool Dockers, who always gave them £1 each (£500) after every mass meeting, despite the fact that they too were suffering extreme hardship. We organised seven coaches from London! Five coaches were filled with Turkish and Kurdish comrades, who put our labour movement to shame.

I travelled on one of the coaches and the atmosphere was electric! We sang revolutionary songs practically all the way there and back, with chants in between of 'Long Live International Solidarity!' etc. Comrades loved my songs from the 1984-85 Miners' strike. The Turkish comrades loved Bronwen's rendition *of Eric Bogle's 'The Band Played Waltzing Matilda'* about a young man who was crippled whilst fighting against…. Turkish soldiers in Gallipoli in 1916!

I'm always moved when I hear comrade Kenan sing. He speaks with a painful, deep stammer, from being tortured by the Turkish police; but he sings beautifully in his native Kurdish language. Comrades taunted each other to go to the front of the bus and use the microphone, no one got away with not singing. We had a revolutionary International Karaoke on wheels!

When we arrived in Liverpool, the Turkish/Kurdish comrades began circle dancing to the drum they bought. Crowds stood in awe as the marchers gathered. A magic circle was weaved for the rest of the mesmerising day to begin.

Death of Mickie Fenn

In July 1996, Mickie Fenn, a sacked Tilbury Docker, sadly died. He'd been a socialist and a fighter all his life; he travelled and campaigned for the Liverpool dockers' cause. He had helped lead the successful fight to free the Pentonville Five – the five dockers who were imprisoned in 1972 for 'secondary picketing'.

At his funeral over 300 people attended in a celebration of his life. They walked behind the banners of the London and Merseyside dockworkers, and his coffin was draped with the 1972 dockers banner with its famous slogan '*Arise Ye Workers!'* Mickie's wife, Denise, and family, requested that instead of flowers, people should send donations to the Liverpool Dockers.

Change of Venue – Again and again

I was happy with the Conway Hall venue, as the room was wheelchair accessible and Conway Hall is a central and credible venue for left groups. However comrades from the *Workers Press* wanted to move to a pub near Kings Cross so that Frankie Shilling could attend sometimes, when he finished work at the T&GWU Office. Frankie has an organic link with the Liverpool Dockers, and the group eventually decided to move to his local, the *Kings Head* pub.

I must be honest; I had misgivings, not the least because the room was up a steep flight of stairs in the middle of London's seedy red light area. This is not a safe area for women and totally out of bounds to disabled people. It was nothing personal about Frankie – at that point I had never met him. However I was unhappy at what I regarded as a kind of Orwellian attitude coming from the *Workers Press* comrades, that is, we're all equal but some are more equal than others! I don't dispute Frankie's major contribution, him being an ex-London Docker and ex-Branch Chair brought valuable information and experience to the group.

Kings Head

I dug my heels in about not wanting to move, and only conceded when I was promised that there were loads of venues in the area of the *Kings Head* pub, which had wheelchair access, and we could move once we were in the pub. This turned out to be untrue, and though several of us tried on many occasions to find such a venue, it didn't materialise. I realised then that I had been told this story to shut me up – for what were considered to be sound political reasons.

Procedural and political wrangles

We kept our meetings at the *Kings Head* for several months, going on for a year at least. We pulled together and worked very hard to get the campaign moving. Meetings were always more profound and real when one or more of the dockers or *Women of the Waterfront* attended.

We could have spent weeks arguing a point, or one person or group might try to steer things in a direction while others were totally against this. For example, should we have Tony Benn speaking at our Christmas march? A sizeable number of people with histories outside the Labour Party were against this; those on the Left of the Labour Party were for it. This argument went on and on for weeks, and time we could have spent doing more practical things for the dockers was used up. When the Dockers attended, they put us straight – Tony Benn is speaking, end of story. The dockers' word was always final.

The room again

We moved again about a year later when the pub double booked the room several times, preventing us from meeting. To add insult to injury, they double booked with the Masons! Myself, Kevin and Tony from *Incapacity Action* pushed to meet in an accessible venue. We did move to Somerstown Community Centre. I thought this was much more appropriate. It was accessible, in the heart of a working class community. The Centre understood and supported our aims, and because there was no alcohol on sale, it meant we could have a more serious meeting without disruption for drinks, toilet and alcohol induced intimidation. Some comrades weren't happy, and though we offered to pay Frankie's taxi fare, he sadly attended there once, but not again.

Our Delegate to Liverpool

Dot Gibson worked tirelessly on the *Dockers' Charter*, and travelled between Liverpool and London on an almost weekly basis. She asked after a while if we would pay her train fare. The LSG agreed to do this if she would become our delegate, which she agreed to do. However at times it seemed she only reported what she wanted us to know, and she would often embellish her report with a lengthy theoretical analysis of a *Workers' Press* kind, that she wanted us to hear. Valuable time was taken up sometimes on this. I think it helps the class if comrades have the discipline of a workplace in their experience – and not just the experience of being in a revolutionary organisation.

Link with Reclaim the Streets and Environmental Groups

After one year in dispute, the dockers needed to mark the anniversary with something big which would catch the media headlines. This turned out to be the three days of action with *Reclaim the Streets*: a demo on the Saturday, workshops and chill out on the Sunday, mass action including occupation of the docks on the Monday, and an International Dock strike.

There are many stories around about how and when the trade union movement internationally linked with environmental campaigners. I'm overjoyed that in the Battle of Seattle 'Teamsters Love Turtles' shirts were worn, and the International Longshore and Warehouse Workers Union – who'd supported the Liverpool Dockers solidly – broke with the official leadership to support the protesters. ILWU Comrades, who I had the pleasure of meeting at the World Bank IMF protests in Prague later, knew of the link made in Liverpool at the first anniversary of the historic Liverpool Dockers Dispute.

It was Chris Knight who had the idea to link with *Reclaim The Streets.* The dockers agreed it, and when RTS were approached, they came on board pretty

readily, with lots of ideas and enthusiasm. I think it's true to say that the dispute would not have lasted into its second year without their input.

In preparation for the anniversary actions, RTS activists went to Liverpool to squat some buildings that we could use as a base. The main one we used was the old Customs House, near the Docks, complete with electricity supply, cells and toilet drugs detector (we were all amused and shocked to see that someone's job must've been to examine people's shit for drugs, which came through a glass topped table thing from a toilet). Anyway the venue was appropriate with lots of floor space, carpets, several levels etc.

The first day's demo was great, a good show of strength, lots of bright costumes, banners draped over many buildings, the dragon puffing smoke (the police were quite worried by this), a huge contingent of Turkish/Kurdish comrades, many in traditional costume, dancing and singing, people dressed as cows, an Ice Queen etc. At the end, speakers included Arthur Scargill, Jimmy Nolan, Banner Theatre, WOWs and more. Some comrades went back to London, others stayed in the squat.

That night there was lots of talking and music. I met a long lost friend from Doncaster who I'd not seen for 15 years. People hotly debated Chris Knight's 'Sex Strike Theory' which seemed to have particular relevance. I got no sleep that night and neither did many people.

The next day (Sunday) we all met in the customs offices in a big workshop, and broke up into smaller groups to finalise things for the Monday. I was interested in how the RTS discussed things, giving respect and empowerment to all. I was shocked – though maybe I shouldn't have been – to discover clear evidence that there was a police intelligence unit in existence especially to infiltrate and get the leaders of RTS. Some people present with us were clearly not into the spirit of it!

That night it was agreed that there would be acoustic music only, so no loud amplifiers were played to allow people to try to sleep. We had a good old singsong.

We were up early the next day. We marched to the docks to be met by a heavy police presence. However some comrades got through the police lines, through the metal fence and onto the roof of the Mersey Dock and Harbour Company. We spent all day at the mass picket, singing, dancing, drumming, juggling, eating fire, etc. There were some frightening moments when police moved in to arrest people.

The film version

Ken Loach was there filming for his documentary, *The Flickering Flame*, and he too was arrested. People climbed up the gantries with dockers and they only agreed to come down when promised they wouldn't be arrested. The Port Police told them: 'We have to take your names, we won't check them' so Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck gave their names! The protest made the national news, local and national papers the next day.

We all felt great as we began our walk back to the squat. We'd achieved our aim, won much needed publicity, had a laugh, our people weren't charged with anything – there hadn't been enough Charging Officers in Liverpool to charge everyone arrested, so they were let go. Liverpool people came out of their houses to greet us, they cheered, banged dustbin lids, gave us food, etc. What a fantastic feeling, until....

Special Political police

The notorious Operational Support Division of the police were now free from the rest of the police forces present on the demo, and they wanted revenge. They're often called the 'Robocops', because they're army trained, they wear body armour, helmets, shields and have no numbers on their uniforms. They must have been dying to get involved on the demo, but they weren't needed. It was always our intention to have a non-violent protest.

I believe the rest of the police don't like the OSD either. The OSD drove past us in their vans slowly, taking photos, and then they stopped. Kevin Robinson, the Dockers Police Liaison Officer, tried to talk to them. They kept stopping and starting, jumping out to grab people. They grabbed an older docker, beat him up then chucked him out of the van onto the road. As they beat him, the van was rocking while unidentified OSD thugs stood outside of it, laughing. This continued till our group agreed to cross the road together, so the OSD were forced to drive off.

We expected them at the squat, and when we arrived, there they were all lined up. We walked past them without saying a word, grabbed our things from inside OUR building, and got our buses back to London, which were waiting around the back.

Again this day was unforgettable, interesting and enjoyable, apart from the OSD and police informers. I needed a week or so to get over this action.

November 30th 1997 – Demo in Liverpool

After the momentous anniversary demo, the dockers called for a 'Full Moon Picket', thus trying to enter into the spirit of Chris Knight's theory about the human revolution. Many people from London and elsewhere came along, as

well as young RTS environmentalists. Unfortunately the weather was bitterly cold and rainy, and we didn't manage to stop the cargo coming off the ships, which had been the idea. So we went to the pub for a warm and a chat.

Chris apparently believed the picket failed because it should have been called during the waxing rather than the waning moon, but he didn't have the heart to tell the dockers this! I think it was also a bit of a tall order to begin with.

When we got back to the bus, we discovered that the OSD had kept our hired driver a prisoner on his bus all day. They had tried three times to get on the bus and to randomly search peoples' bags, which he rightly had objected to. They would not allow him to get off to buy food or drink, and when he told them at 4pm that he was waiting for his passengers, they said 'Just drive off and leave the fuckers behind, we'll take care of them'. Nice people.....

London Christmas Demo

In December 1996, the dockers had been in dispute for 14 months. They had said repeatedly that they would like a demo in London near Xmas time. Kevin Hargreaves fought hard for this idea in the LSG. Kevin has a great ability to think and organise on a big scale. People took some convincing, arguing that we didn't have time to organise it, but Kevin wouldn't let the matter go, as he understood well how much this would lift the dockers' spirits.

By the time the LSG became convinced, there was only one month left to organise the demo. We put an advert for it in *The Guardian* and collected as many as possible MPs, trades unions and famous peoples names for it.

Kevin, Jackie and Chris had the unenviable task of negotiating a route with the police. They argued for Oxford Street, Charing Cross Road etc. Their second choice was Hyde Park to Red Lion Square via Piccadilly Circus and Shaftesbury Avenue. This was the route we took, right through the heart of London; no demonstration had ever taken this route before!

We all worked hard with mailings, fly posting, building the demo, etc. We were very motivated, we wanted to make it a light-hearted occasion, with Xmas spirit; which we successfully did.

This was probably the most enjoyable demo and rally I have ever been on. The Dragon, puffing smoke and dancing in the street; with the dockers' children surrounding it; led the march. I'll not forget seeing amazed tourists' faces as the demo went round corners and Mike Carden's 9-year-old son at the front with a megaphone shouting 'I'd rather be a picket than a scab!'

Hard-line Communists were seen wearing reindeer antlers, Father Christmas and musicians accompanied the marchers. The docker's faces lit up every time we went onto a street they recognised the name of, they shouted and cheered loudly and powerfully. Even the police were in good spirits, in keeping in with the carnival atmosphere. I remember a policewoman asking me 'Will the Dragon be long at the toilet?' as they held up the traffic while people under the Dragon costume stopped for a drink and the loo.

The meeting

The rally was brilliant and I had the privilege of chairing it. There were journalists and photographers everywhere; ad hoc radio interviews were going on all over. I was reluctant to call the meeting to order, but we only had the room till 5 pm. I started by saying 'Comrades, we've had a fantastic day!' and everyone jumped up, cheered and clapped for ages.

These spontaneous outbursts happened many times throughout the rally. All the speakers, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Malkait Bilku from the Hillingdon Strikers, a Magnet striker, Irene Campbell of WOW, Bob Towers of LSG, Jimmy Nolan, et al were great. When I began to introduce John Pilger, journalist and radical, the dockers went bonkers screaming, cheering and shouting with delight for about 15 minutes. John Pilger was visibly moved. He had written a positive article about the dispute, which had been published in *The Guardian*, and this had helped the dockers significantly. He made a plea to journalists in the hall to ignore the media ban on reporting the dispute. The atmosphere right through the rally was so electric, you could've lit and heated the world's cities with it....it was indescribably joyous, loving and warm.

At the end we sang the *Internationale* and went to the pub singing and waving banners. Later the Port Shop Stewards had to drag the lads out of the pub onto the buses home. We in the LSG were satisfied that 500 sacked Liverpool Dockers, WOWs and their families went home feeling very, very happy.

December 15th – Billy Bragg gig

Billy Bragg did a number of gigs in which he supported the dockers, throughout the dispute. At one gig in Barking he allowed us to set up a stall. Two dockers addressed the audience, and a collection was taken afterwards which raised about £3000.

With the gig being the day after the demo, we expected the Sunday papers to have covered it....but no chance. After the previous day, it was apparent that the *D-Notice* (put out by Government to prevent editors allowing reports) was biting. Terry Southers said to the audience poignantly 'The silence is deafening ...'

January to May 1997

The number of pickets and events are too numerous to mention, but here is a selection. A televised fund raising gig at the London Palladium with 42 famous comedians. This was largely due to the work of Lee Hurst who had been a friend of the late Mickie Fenn. There was solidarity work with Magnet and Hillingdon strikers, pickets of Magnet showrooms and Drake International Offices, organising the Dockers Diary in London, that is, getting them to as many workplaces as possible and helping to set up new support groups. Other events were gigs by the group Dodgy, Billy Bragg and Oasis, Robbie Fowler being fined for lifting up his shirt to reveal a DOCKERS shirt, raffles, stalls at festivals and gigs etc. We continued to meet weekly, but the main focus of our work was on organising the first March for Social Justice.

First March for Social Justice, April 12th 1997

This took a great deal of organising, getting unions to sponsor it, booking the route, getting the publicity out, getting people to raise it at their union and political meetings etc.

Because the dockers' fight touched so many people and embraced so many causes, the LSG decided to devise a *Peoples' Charter for Social Justice.* The idea was in the spirit of the original *Chartists*, naming several minimum demands. Much time was spent on this, and the idea was to get groups of homeless people or women or anti racist groups, and suchlike, to write their demands in it. In practice, this did not happen, so it became not much more than a well-meaning idea. When the Crossroads women came to tell of their demands, they were asked to re-write it with less words. I felt they were not happy about this.

I became unpopular by continually reminding the group that though they were talking about rights for disabled people, we were hypocritical by meeting in a place which excluded many disabled people because it was up a steep flight of stairs.

Arguing it through

At one point, we got the message from Liverpool that some of the Women of the Waterfront didn't like the demands "*Abolish the Monarchy*" or "*A United Ireland"*. The LSG decided to carry on regardless. I wasn't happy about the process involved in making these decisions. LSG members often got caught up in the momentum of things, maybe feeling pushed for time, but in practice forgetting about building a strong movement and instead trying to have the correct line always. I feel that the majority of the LSG didn't take WOW

seriously. This may have reflected an ambivalence by the dockers themselves and historical sexism on the left.

Leading?

The left parties stayed away from the graft of organising the march. After a discussion in the LSG, I wrote to the SWP asking them to not take over the front of the march with their placards, which they'd so often done before – much to the annoyance of everyone else. With the exception of one individual, they did comply with my request. The dockers' own banners and placards were, rightly, seen to be leading the march. Everyone was extremely appreciative of this.

The March

The *March for Social Justice* was a great success, with at least 30,000 people on it. We'd made red headbands for people to wear like the South Korean car workers who had recently been on strike. I counted three dragons! There was the Merton Colliery band. There were dockers and WOWs dressed as Chartists leading the march, two dockers in kilts playing bagpipes, a long banner at the front with 'March for Social Justice' on it and all the pendants with the demands as mentioned above. People from all over the world came along.

RTS attended in big numbers. People brought many banners and did stunts here and there, one of them being climbing into an open window of the Foreign Office and chucking out papers! In their usual style, the streets around Whitehall and Trafalgar Square were reclaimed! I saw no violence from RTS, but the police were clearly getting agitated. The press coverage of the demo focused on the few incidents of violence – some stone-throwing at the end when the majority of people had left. This was a shame because for most people, the day was peaceful and enjoyable. Jack Straw made a statement in the press condemning 'the violence'.

Conference Season 1997

The dockers and/or WOWs visited as many union Conferences as they could to spread the word and raise much needed funds. They got varying degrees of solidarity, including £30,000 from the CWU, £10,000 from Unison, and a promised large donation from the GMB, which then had to be chased up for months on end. I'm not sure as to whether it ever fully materialised. There were also many more contributions.

The TGWU Biannual Delegate Conference in Brighton was a moment in history. A whole afternoon was taken up debating the docker's motion for the TGWU leadership to back the dispute more fully, to pressurise Labour into

using its 13% share of MDHC, in order to resolve the dispute. All the speakers supporting the dockers were brilliant. Jimmy Nolan and Bobby Morton set out the case well, with intelligence and passion.

When the vote was taken near the end of the day's business, the chair announced that the motion had "fallen", which was obviously not the case to everyone else – he'd clearly not wanted it to be carried. The conference floor and balcony erupted with howls of 'Card vote' and 'Re-count'. After 10 minutes of uproar, the chair was forced to concede he may have got it wrong and would re-count it, but not until the next day! This caused the dockers, WOWs and families big problems. They had come that day by hired bus and they couldn't afford to hire rooms to stay the night or pay for the bus and driver to stay overnight; so most of them had to go back to Liverpool. The following day the chair agreed the vote was easily passed. However as is often the case with union leaderships, they never acted on it.

Christmas 1997

With the Dockers having to spend their second Christmas on the picket line, a big effort was made to collect money and presents for them. There were benefit gigs and events. I put a big box with Christmas wrapping round it in my workplace, and the leaflet with a photo of a WOW and her son on it. Many people donated presents and money and the box became more than full. I needed help in loading up my car to the brim with all the presents, which included a child's bike.

When I arrived in Liverpool, I took the presents to a room at Transport House. The room was absolutely packed with presents and donations from all over. The following day I was introduced to the docker who got the bike for his grandchild, he was 'made up' as they say in Liverpool!

I met Kim Hendry from the LSG whilst there, and both of us stayed at Mike Carden's. place. We spent a night in the *Lord Walden* pub with some dockers and WOWs, having a laugh and doing the Karaoke. Although we had a laugh as usual, something felt different; there seemed to be an atmosphere between some of the men. My comrade Kevin Hargreaves later told me 'They're preparing for defeat'.

Neptune Jade

While the network of International Dockers' Solidarity was strengthening, the trade union movement in the UK did not mirror this. The *Neptune Jade* was a ship loaded with cargo in MDHC's Thamesport, instead of Liverpool. So dockers in Oakland, USA refused to off-load the cargo twice, as did dockers in Canada and Japan. The ship then sailed to Taiwan to be sold off cheaply and

given a change of name and a coat of paint. As comrades from the ILWU in the States told me, they were ‘set to blow’ and saddened that the dispute ended when it did. I’m recording a song about this event. Contact music@paulineb.co.uk for details.

Union leadership

Kevin sadly had been right. The T&GWU leadership forced a postal ballot of National Dock Labour Scheme men, the older dockers who didn’t cross the Torside Lads’ picket line. An offer of £25,000 was on the table. After two and a half years of living on £13 per week, this was hard to resist; though it hardly covered the debts incurred by most dockers. Still only a third of those balloted voted to accept the offer.

New Labour government

The dockers had hoped for more from the ‘New Labour’ government. They had hoped the government would use their share in MDHC to end the dispute in their favour. However New Labour instead just sold it back to MDHC. I’m sure there were differences of opinion on the Shop Stewards’ Committee, but it seemed that at times they trusted that Bill Morris and the leadership would deliver a victory whilst at other times, some were more critical. However although the dockers inspired the Hillingdon Strikers, Magnet, Critchley Labels Strikers and Aerospace in the Midlands and visa versa; generalised solidarity strikes in Britain did not happen, as they did elsewhere in the world.

End of the Dispute

It is always a difficult decision to end a dispute when the goal hasn’t been achieved. The Port Shop Stewards agonised over it. There were several very difficult meetings with the dockers in Liverpool. In order to preserve solidarity among the men, they agreed to end it and to share the money with the Torside lads who weren’t offered anything in the deal. Five dockers had died in the struggle, Billy Dunn, Joe Best, Kenny Kennedy, Billy Rooney and Jimmy McCumiskey. The role of a support group, unlike a political party, is to support workers as far as they want to go with their dispute, which we did. Many dockers, WOWs and LSG members including myself, found the ending very painful. Meetings at that time were full of tears, laughter and lots of love.

Afterwards

We hosted a one-day conference in March 1998 at Conway Hall, to look at the lessons to be learned, and show our appreciation to the Dockers and WOWs for such a momentous struggle. The Barking Bateria samba band did an exciting drum show and a film of the dispute was shown.

Second march for Social Justice – May 10 1998

We held this march with the Liverpool Dockers leading it, to highlight the fact that although the Labour Government was elected on May 1st 1997, they had not repealed the anti-Trade Union Laws and had not tried to justly resolve the dockers' dispute. Also student loans not grants were still in force, pensioners were still suffering from appallingly low pensions, disabled people were still suffering discrimination, the inquiry into the Hillsborough tragedy had been a whitewash which had discriminated against Liverpool football fans, racism fuelled by Fortress Europe was rife and homeless people were still suffering among other grievances. Our demand from Labour was for *Social Justice*.

Legacy

Reflecting the movement we'd all built, many of the banners and contingents were international e.g. from Belgium, France, Australia, Norway, Sweden, Turkey, Japan and Ireland. We held a big rally in Westminster Hall. Because of our reputation, we had been banned from all the usual places like Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square. We talked about doing this march every year. I heard Tony Benn on the radio saying that it should happen every year. We tried to pull a movement together to continue although the dispute had ended.

For a while, we continued meeting as a support group and we looked at the possibility of bringing out a paper called 'Solidarity', based on the movement and principles we'd built up. But without the dockers' leadership, all the old disagreements soon came to the fore and it never really took off.

Other support groups

The RMT began to have disputes – Steve Hedley, an RMT activist, was sacked, and a support group was set up around this, which comrades from the LSG got involved in. The 'Strike Support Group' was a further evolution; it met weekly, collected funds and did some good work. However again, with so few disputes happening and no leadership like the dockers'; it folded up. It was also unnecessarily bureaucratic.

Conclusions

There are so many lessons to be learned from this dispute but only a few can be named now. Above all for me and for many of my friends and comrades who I met and worked with, it was a life-changing experience. I will never forget the many joyous times we had and the solidarity we all shared. It was the only time in my life that the idea of revolution was not only a good one, but it seemed

that it could actually really be achieved, through the world-wide dockers' strikes.

The fact that the British labour movement was the most backward internationally, and the TGWU was THE ONLY union not to back the Liverpool Dockers officially in the International Dockers Alliance, was nothing short of a despicable betrayal. Words fail me to describe how they threw this opportunity away, and so left 500 dockers and all the thousands and millions of people they inspired, to continue to rot away on the scrapheap of capitalism.

Personally

Life goes on of course. It has to. On a personal and political level, I'm a better, stronger trade unionist for having worked with the dockers. Whether it is in Haringey or Prague, I often meet people in struggles who were involved in the Liverpool dispute. We have an organic link of trust and solidarity.

I hope this pamphlet contributes to a wider understanding of what happened. The Tory and Labour Governments, with all their capitalist machinery, did everything they could to prevent ordinary people from hearing about this struggle. The lessons have to be learned. I hope these recollections will facilitate that learning.

In Love and Solidarity
Pauline Bradley, 2002

Enter the Dragon!

by John Davie and Bronwen Handyside
Workers' Press, October 1996

LIVERPOOL'S Pier Head has seen many demonstrations in its time, and many bigger than the 8,000 or so supporters of the dockers and Women of the Waterfront who arrived there last Saturday. But this march and rally on the first anniversary of the dispute was different. The extraordinary range of the campaigns present gave it a buoyancy and an optimism rarely seen before. Something new was happening.

The many union and labour movement organisations represented by their banners included the Hillingdon strikers, Camden UNISON, the Irish Seaman's Union, the electricians' union, EPIU, the rail-workers' unions, RMT and ASLEF, the printworkers' union, GPMU, Haringey and Leeds Trades Councils, British Aerospace and Rolls Royce Shop Stewards' Committee and over 200 Turkish workers from the north-east London Textile branch of the TGWU and the Day-Mer workers' centre. In pride of place was the Women of the Waterfront banner and they had a lorry decorated as a ship, named 'Dignity' – the being the dockers' singing children with multi-coloured balloons. Then came the Merseyside dockers' own banner and behind that the banner of the London Royal Group of docks with the words made famous in the 1972 jailing of striking dockers in Pentonville – 'Arise Ye Workers'. In that delegation were dockers sacked in 1989 for the 'crime' of defending the National Dock Labour Scheme, and among them, Denise Fenn – wife of Mickie, ex-secretary of the unofficial Port Shop Stewards' Committee, who died suddenly on 28 July this year at the age of 58. Never before has an industrial dispute inspired support from so many individuals and groups, not traditionally associated with the organised working class.

Trade unionists and socialist groups were joined by: the McLibel Campaign, ecological groups such as Eco-Trip and Earth First, Workers Aid for Bosnia conveyers, the Animal Liberation Front and hundreds of young people associated with the Job Seekers' Allowance Campaign and Reclaim the Streets. The colourful union banners were rivalled by gaudy and imaginative creations proclaiming the future was going to be won for humanity. 'Scabs Out, Dockers In!' The chants lost any suggestion of ritual tokenism and in the happy, carnival atmosphere became real, achievable aims. When the fifteen-foot dragon breathed smoke over the armour-clad cops guarding the approach to McDonald's the howl of derision that erupted represented the class testing out its strength. From the start the drums and dancers of the Turkish and Kurdish youth had created an unusually flamboyant and noisy atmosphere. When they were joined by the Reclaim the Streets drummers they dictated the mood of the whole march. The drums and dancers swept to the head of the march as it

moved down Castle Street and James Street. The banners of the Haringey Trades Council and Rolls Royce Shop Stewards competed as they bounced up and down to the staccato rhythm.

On Monday there was a mass action at Seaforth dock. The day that Labour Party delegates were allowed into their own conference only after being vetted by Lancashire police (by agreement with Blair), the Merseyside cops set out in full riot gear to intimidate all those who turned up in support of the dockers.

Four docks shop stewards were among the 42 arrested. The police had their complete modern arsenal on display: CS gas, dogs, horses, Darth Vader riot squads. Dockers and their wives, well used to being pushed around by the police over the last year, were taken aback by the violence of the riot squad who were deployed several times when pickets tried to block the road. Armoured robocops punched, kicked and kneed the pickets with real hatred in their eyes.

Maybe the police violence arose from their discovery of a large group of *Reclaim the Streets* activists on the roof of the administration building and on two gantries. The sight of the flag and the Women of the Waterfront banner *'Sack the bosses, not the workers!'* fluttering from the roof of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company building inspired singing and chanting from the dockers and their supporters throughout the morning, but acts of conscious thuggery from the assembled police as the pickets attempted to make their way home.

As the action ended, the dockers negotiated the release of all the *Reclaim the Streets* occupiers, without charges. This clearly nettled the riot police and the atmosphere was very nasty as people dispersed. One young supporter, peeling a pear with a pen knife was arrested for possessing an offensive weapon, put in a transit and then beaten up in full view of some dockers and their wives. A small Asian woman was grabbed by an OSD [police Operational Support Division] vehicle which had moved alongside the dispersing pickets to shout provocative obscenities, and beaten. The police violence was unable to take away a real sense of triumph however. The dockers were disgusted with the police and enthusiastic about the new support.

Despite the local TV news calling new picketers 'professional protestors', Bobby Morton, speaking on behalf of the dockers on Granada TV, said: 'We are fighting for the future, our future, our children's future. We invited *Reclaim the Streets* and *Reclaim the Future* here because we are all fighting for the future.'

[John Davie and Bronwen Handyside continue their account by adding an interview with Alexis Richter, included below]

Alexis Richter is 29, a student of anthropology at the University of East London, and a member of the Radical Anthropology Group (RAG). The most impressive member of the latter organisation is a scarlet thirty-foot fire-breathing dragon. The dragon came into her own when the march ran into a sinister line of police, dressed to kill in riot gear, and snapping pictures of the demonstrators. They were posted in front of the local MacDonalds – to protect the hamburgers and chips.

As older members of the march shouted rude words at the coppers, the dragon sashayed up and smothered them in a huge snort of smoke. The bewildered officers did not know whether or how they should kill it, and all those who saw the incident laughed their socks off. The dragon was St George, and slew the police – the real monster. 'The idea behind the dragon is creating solidarity through dance, and through partying. The dragon itself is a symbol of power, and of female solidarity'. 'If everybody joins the dragon, they become the dragon – but only if we all get together. The ideal would be if everyone joined in, for united solidarity, for the common good, a common front'. 'The difference between a bad party and a good one is when people are really together, they share a bond over and above cliques. It's the same with everything'.

'This is an ideal event for the dragon because people are coming together. It seems like the dockers are the last bastion of trade union solidarity. No wonder the government hates them. My background and culture is right-wing. It's slowly dawning on me what the importance of the dockers and their stand is. My idea of the trade unions was of the big union barons, but now I see all kinds of people coming together, uniting against the multi national corporations.'

[*Editors' note:* Alexis Richter was in fact the creator of the fabulous smoking dragon. He was also the lead person inside it during the incident outside MacDonald's, when the Operational Support Divison were made to ridiculous as they recoiled from the dragon's breath – actually produced by a fire-extinguisher. On the march, before Pauline Bradley reached the incident, a Turkish comrade said to her: 'The police have been on their radio saying *"There's a dragon here. There could be some trouble!"'*].

The Liverpool Dockers and Reclaim the Streets

Interview with Chris Knight and Pauline Bradley on 9th March 2002. Video recording by Peter Woodward and transcription by Heather Stephenson. Edited by Alan Woodward.

Alan: *Chris – you were the main link between the Liverpool Dockers and Reclaim the Streets. My first question is: How did* Reclaim the Streets *first become involved with the dockers and with the London Support Group?*

Chris: Well, first of all I wouldn't quite say I was the main link. Yes, from the point of view of the London Support Group I was the main link, but a friend in *Reclaim the Streets* itself – Ian – was the main link between the dockers and *Reclaim the Streets* . But anyway, how did it happen? OK, let's go back a bit. I'd become involved with *Reclaim the Streets* back in May 1994 – the very first *Kill the Car* action in Camden. I've had a connection with them ever since, partly because my students at the University of East London felt very good about this new movement. Something about their politics just seemed completely fresh, completely different and I really learned a lot from them.

And it was about things which really the left had lost sight of, ever since I knew about the left really. There's just been no music for example. People on the left didn't think that on a demo you had music. They didn't think you danced or enjoyed yourself very much – a lot of chanting maybe, but not much else. And it was clear that this action in Camden was just infectious and brought people in, involved people in just a totally new way. It was completely new to me, obviously. It wasn't new to the people themselves, who'd been at, say, Claremont Road and other anti-roads actions. For them it was a cultural thing which had been happening, but I just wasn't aware of it until it hit me really, especially on this Camden event, and after that I decided to get myself a drum.

I was in Chicago for a conference when I passed a Native American shop. I bought one drum for myself and one for Lionel Sims – big elk-skin drums. We'd only had them a few weeks when the third big London-based *Reclaim the Streets* action took place, on July 13th 1996 – a huge street party across the M41 motorway in west London. As we were assembling, Lionel and I just banged these drums. We weren't much good at it, but we just banged them. Still, as it happened, it was incredibly useful to the organisers because we had to get from Shepherd's Bush along some railway sidings, through a tunnel, moving the whole crowd – evading the police – leading everyone through a hole in the wall, through a hole in the wire, up onto the motorway.

The *Reclaim the Streets* people didn't have any drums at that time because all their music was electronic stuff. So they just grabbed me and Lionel and said

‘We need them drums – bang them’, which we were doing already. They led us through this complicated route, still drumming, with this huge crowd behind us – and as a result we had this very successful occupation of the whole motorway.

We also had a dragon, a big red dragon, on that M41 street party. People in my group, the Radical Anthropological Group, had made it as a symbol of resistance. So, OK that happened. And that was certainly nothing to do with the dockers and not a lot to do with the trade unions actually – except that on the M41 street party one of the biggest banners, stretched right across the motorway, said ‘Victory to the Tube Workers!’ – a tube strike against privatisation was just then beginning to get under way.

So, immediately after that M41 event I just had it in my brain. A definite element of solidarity with the tube workers had been prominent on that action. I thought ‘Well, these anarchists and environmentalists, they’re not just what they’ve been branded by a lot of the left – just middle class environmentalists. They’re obviously part of the movement.’

So I thought ‘Well OK’. I’d already been involved with the dockers for a while. That was basically through my sister Liz, who had got involved via the J.J. Fast Food dispute up in Tottenham near where she worked. I’d been going to that picket every week in the morning and a docker had turned up to that and expressed solidarity. My sister had made very good links between the Turkish and Kurdish Day-Mer community – whose supporters were heavily involved in that dispute – and the dockers. The Day-Mer comrades including J. J. Fast Food strikers would go up to Liverpool for demonstrations and I went up on one particular occasion late in 1995.

And again something struck me really forcefully. The Kurdish contingent had their drums and traditional costumes and they were dancing on the demonstration though Liverpool. So with the dockers you had a really classical class struggle, a courageous demonstration, which previously had been somehow lacking something. This extra thing was what the Kurdish and Turkish comrades provided – an extra real energy from dance and drums.

So that was already there thanks to the Day-Mer comrades. That had already been going on. This was nine months before the M41 street party. So, as I say, I had already been involved with the dockers, largely through my sister. Then after the M41 street party I thought ‘Well, why not find out where *London Reclaim the Streets* are meeting each week? Why not suggest to them maybe they could make a link with the dockers?’

About a week after the M41 action, I found out that the next RTS meeting would be in a big bus garage behind Kings Cross. As I got to the disused

enormous garage, I found a hive of activity. It was all just buzzing. These young people were making costumes and banners for an action in support of the tube workers. One guy prominently inspiring this action was Ian. So we soon made friends.

The Tube workers action planned for 3 weeks time would be relatively small. And so RTS were still thinking about what to do for the next major action. I knew that September 28th would be the anniversary of the dockers' dispute. So I said 'Well, why not make a link with the dockers on that day?' There was support, but also quite a lot of opposition. There were people who thought *Reclaim the Streets* should remain fundamentally an anti-car campaign, fundamentally environmentalist. One argument was 'What are we doing supporting the dockers? I thought they imported cars? What on earth have we got in common?'. I just said 'Well, why don't we invite some dockers down and let them explain?'

Using the Day-Mer community centre's FAX machine, I outlined this plan and checked that the dockers (by now good friends of my sister) would themselves welcome RTS support in Liverpool. They sent back a FAX – 'Chris, go for it!' So at the next meeting in that bus garage, Mick and Nick from Liverpool came down to explain to *Reclaim the Streets* why they should support their year-old dispute.

Meanwhile I'd gone up to Liverpool and talked to Mike Carden, one of the dockers' shop stewards who'd obtained new information about why the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company wanted to smash the union. According to Mike, certain members of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company had interests in a proposed new waste disposal company; they needed a workforce of pliable scabs who'd unload anything for money. The dockers had historically caused trouble by supporting Greenpeace and other environmentalist organisations, acting on their advice and just simply refusing to unload crap. On several occasions, the dockers had been told to unload toxic or radioactive waste and had said, 'No, we don't unload that stuff. We've got information from Greenpeace, we don't do that. We're not scabs, we've got a sense of responsibility. It's a health hazard. You unload it!' And they refused to touch it.

Mike had all his dossiers and papers on this and briefed Mick and Nick with all this information. So when the two dockers came down to *Reclaim the Streets* the following week, they were very convincing. There were still some people in *Reclaim the Streets* who just thought 'This is the wrong way to go'. But my new friend Ian and those organising the tube solidarity action were adamant.

Anyway, the two dockers got a good reception. And shortly afterwards, with *Reclaim the Streets* and the cyclists' movement *Critical Mass*, we occupied the St. James Park headquarters of London Transport. And you can see, can't you,

that from the standpoint of *Reclaim the Streets*, supporting the tube workers was directly logical? Here we had an anti-car movement, a pro-cyclist, public transport movement supporting tube workers. It was logical because RTS naturally wanted to defend public transport. So there had been little disagreement around this tube action, really. It was easy to do.

Occupying London Transport HQ was a courageous, daring action and again this kind of appealed to me. I'd been so fed up with the left where we just go preaching and giving out leaflets saying the leaders must do this and the leaders must do that. *Reclaim the Streets* aren't like that. They don't say the leaders must do this or that. They go and do it. They don't just worry about passing resolutions. If something needs doing, do it yourself! I myself got wrestled to the floor by a security guard, but the rest of us successfully occupied the LT headquarters, reached the top floor and strung this great big banner from the roof – *Don't Squeeze the Tube'*. And I mean these are slender kids in some ways. There were a number of young women who were very courageous in doing that. And it made a big impact.

A couple of days later we got a letter from the London Region RMT, signed by Bob Crow. It was an official letter of thanks. It said: '*Reclaim the Streets* achieved for the tube workers in one day more than the TUC has done in a decade '. We framed that. It was a beautiful letter of acknowledgement of what *Reclaim the Streets* is all about.

I might as well tell you the whole story while it's in my mind because that day was very, very significant. During the action on that same day, someone came up to me with bad news. 'Chris, there's a real problem about going up to Liverpool on September 28th'. The anti-Criminal Justice Act contingent, which at that time was a huge part of *Reclaim the Streets* – all the floats, all the music, all the people that provide the extra stuff – were planning a demonstration in London on exactly the same day.

So my heart was sinking. I thought 'Oh my God, how can we get *Reclaim the Streets* up to Liverpool when they're all going to be down in London on the same day, going from Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square?' Then the same person remembered something: 'Chris, if you just go down to the Oval this evening there's a meeting happening where you may find out something which would help'.

I raced down there to the Oval. It was all very conspiratorial and really quite exciting. As they say, just because you're paranoid it doesn't mean the police aren't watching and listening. So during the meeting we kept moving from place to place. Eventually we got to a pub garden. Then the meeting of this group – *Justice* as they were called – at last started. They'd just received a letter from Westminster Council and the police, saying they wouldn't give

permission to use Hyde Park or Trafalgar Square on September 28th. Everyone was so dejected and depressed. And I was thinking 'Whoopee, wow'.

I said 'Well, how about going up to Liverpool? It's the anniversary of the dockers' dispute. It would give us all a completely different image – signalling that we're not just London-based, we're not just middle-class. We'd be branching out into a big industrial dispute up in the North East which has lasted almost a year. We would get a lift, adding a completely different dimension to *Reclaim the Streets.*'

There wasn't a murmur against it. Everyone just thought 'Absolutely'. I remember thinking: 'Thank God I knew about this crucial meeting!' As agreement was reached, it felt like such a big achievement. And I remember coming home that night and confiding: 'Something really big has happened today. Now I've got *Reclaim the Streets* and *Justice* and the whole wonderful bandwagon to go up to Liverpool on the 28th.'

Ian, who'd been very strong in supporting the Tube workers, was very excited and we all met regularly all through the summer. And it was just so impressive to me, the way they organise. It was anti-organisation. But somehow it seemed to work a lot better than the organisation I'd been familiar with. It just seemed to work in such a quiet way.

You almost never had decisions made. It was like you'd sit in some dreadful disused cinema, some squat somewhere, all afternoon. Everyone sitting in a circle. No one hogs the floor, everyone's really quiet. It takes a long, long time. As the hours pass, you feel a kind of decision apparently emerging and when it emerged you knew it was solid, you knew it wasn't just by a vote. There weren't going to be people unhappy with it. There weren't going to be subsequent arguments or recriminations about it. That decision was really going to stick. And we got these little fliers out, lots and lots and lots of them – tens of thousand of these very small fliers inviting people up to Liverpool for the 28th. And that was how the link was made.

Alan: *You've mentioned* Reclaim the Streets *but I saw lots of banners for* Reclaim The Future. *Presumably that was the same thing?*

Chris: What happened was we spent the summer planning the occupation of the quayside on the anniversary of the dispute. There were lots of discussions about what to do. *Reclaim the Streets*, to be honest, actually wanted quite a bit more really. Their dream was to have a big street party in the centre of Liverpool – a big cultural festival and celebration of the dispute.

But from early on there were big, big disputes within the dockers' shop stewards committee over this whole thing. Someone had told Jimmy Nolan –

the Chair of the Port Shop Stewards' Committee – that anarchists were going to come and dig up the roads in the centre of Liverpool. And he said 'No way am I going to let those kids dig up our roads! We'd lose all support!' But luckily Jimmy Davis Junior – that's the son of the Treasurer of the Shop Stewards Committee – was himself well into the rave scene. And he really got the idea. He really understood the whole plan and so did Billy Jenks as well. And these two played a crucial role.

So we had a big meeting with the Shop Stewards up in Liverpool about six weeks before the anniversary, and the proposal was formally put. By this stage Jimmy Davis junior, Billy Jenks and others had got together with Ian, in particular, from *Reclaim the Streets* and had talked it through. The dockers by now were just absolutely brilliant. Jimmy Nolan was persuaded it would be a great idea, although of course the decision which eventually emerged was a bit of a compromise compared with what RTS had originally had in mind.

In the end, then, the plan belonged just as much to the dockers as to *Reclaim the Streets*. It wasn't to have a big street party in a big busy street in the middle of Liverpool. It was to have a demonstration through Liverpool and then to have the cultural festival on the quayside. So this is what happened, and thanks to Pauline we've got some brilliant pictures of that demonstration winding its way through Liverpool with the fire-breathing dragon.

It was an absolutely fantastic thing. This was in many ways my dream – the dream those Kurdish dancers had given me on that picket line in North London, celebrating with their costumes and music. By the anniversary there was a really vibrant, wonderful atmosphere to the whole thing. Our dragon was actually breathing smoke. We were passing a MacDonald's shop in Liverpool and there were rows and rows of armed riot cops, and this carnival dragon – the guy inside the dragon got carried away – he was nosing right up to these coppers with this smoke billowing out and they all looked worried and it was really very, very funny. Afterwards, the dockers would endlessly repeat that particular story.

And what was absolutely magic was what followed. After the quayside celebrations we occupied this Customs House at about 2.00 a.m. There must have been about six or seven hundred of us. The next day it was workshops of all kinds – including the Liverpool School of Samba – as we prepared for our big action planned with some secrecy for the Monday morning. Then on the Monday, long before dawn, our trucks drove out very quietly and groups of us got through the wire. By the time *Women of the Waterfront* arrived for their morning picket, at 5.30, they thought – 'This is funny . . . . '

It was dark, but they could hear these whistling sounds coming from the top of the nearest gantry and from the top of what the dockers called 'the rat house' –

the *Mersey Docks and Harbour Company* offices. Clearly, the occupation had succeeded! Later that morning, I was told by one of the women 'Oh God, that was magic!' It was a fantastic feeling and it just absolutely transformed the dispute.

We didn't stop everything from crossing the picket line, but we certainly stopped a hell of a lot on that particular day and it made a huge difference to everyone's morale. In fact the dockers mostly said, didn't they, that without that big action on the anniversary they're not sure the dispute could have carried on? But following the action there was no question it was going to carry on. Also there was no way now that the media could simply ignore it.

And it went right across the planet, right across the world that this action had happened. It just looked so good. When you have labour disputes, the word 'sexy' doesn't occur to you normally. But that action was like that. It really was a brilliant, vibrant show of imagination, courage and solidarity – connecting environmentalists and trades unionists in a kind of unheard-of way.

As I was saying, many people in *Reclaim the Streets* had previously thought their movement was an anti-car thing. Some tended to be a bit maybe middle-class about keeping cars out of our neighbourhood and not having too much fumes and stuff. This trade union and class stuff was a bit new.

It also has to be said, though, that on the side of the dockers there were also some reservations. 'Who are these people? We're trying to defend our jobs – these kids don't even want jobs! Never worked in their lives!' But when the two sides met up there was this terrific bonding. The dockers began saying 'Well actually, since being out on strike, we've never worked so hard in our lives!' All this networking and celebrating – a different kind of work – was actually the same kind that *Reclaim the Streets* were good at. Running a strike was 'work' on a different level. So on that basis the old divisions melted and a real bond was formed.

But after all that, I forget: What was your question?

Alan: *Many of the reports, like John Pilger's, don't mention* Reclaim the Streets. *They just mention* Reclaim The Future.

Chris: Sorry, yes. OK, I'll tell you what that was about. As I was saying, I went along to the Oval to meet with *Justice* and they were thinking of a name for their 28th September demonstration against the Criminal Justice Bill. They were going to call it *Reclaim The Future*. When the Liverpool action was decided instead, that name might well have been abandoned. But I thought to myself 'Well actually what's wrong with it? It could well be taken to mean a

future without casualisation, without capitalism. A future which the dockers could look forward to. So why not keep that name?'

When I put this to the London Dockers Support Group, everyone agreed. One benefit was that the umbrella itself now had its own name. We weren't exactly *Reclaim the Streets* but something more, and we weren't exactly the Liverpool dockers but something more. We were *Reclaim The Future* and this was something all of us could be part of.

Pauline: There was also a newspaper that the dockers put out – *'Reclaim The Future'*.

Alan: *OK, so that was the first anniversary in . . .*

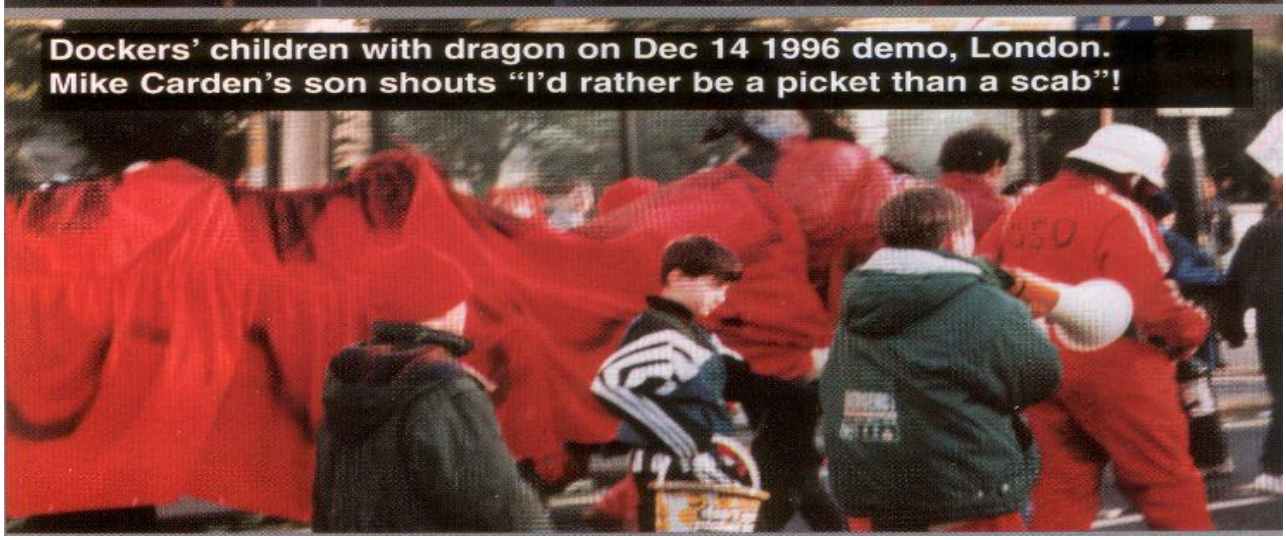
Chris: That was 28th September 1996. And, as I say, our action projected the dispute onto a new plane. It had already been internationalised, so I don't want to exaggerate. The dockers had made their dispute international right from the word go, from the very beginning of their dispute. They had gone out on the streets of Liverpool with plastic buckets and collected money in these to buy air tickets to fly out to Seattle and other U.S. ports, establishing picket lines and inspiring solidarity action. So we already had that. But there'd been a huge media blockade on it, so almost nothing had got out about the dockers. September 28th just blasted that to smithereens. It was just gone from then on. There was no way the media could pretend that there wasn't that dispute going on. So it helped overlay the dockers' internationalism with this new level of connectedness and publicity.

And of course it meant that right across the world, wherever there were dockers in support of Liverpool – especially in Seattle and Los Angeles, and right along the west coast of America – environmentalists took their cue from what happened in Liverpool. The U.S. environmentalists woke up to the fact that here was a dispute on their doorstep which was worth supporting. So in a way that was what the whole action became – a bit of a move to *Reclaim The Future* across the world.

Alan: *A precursor to Seattle?*

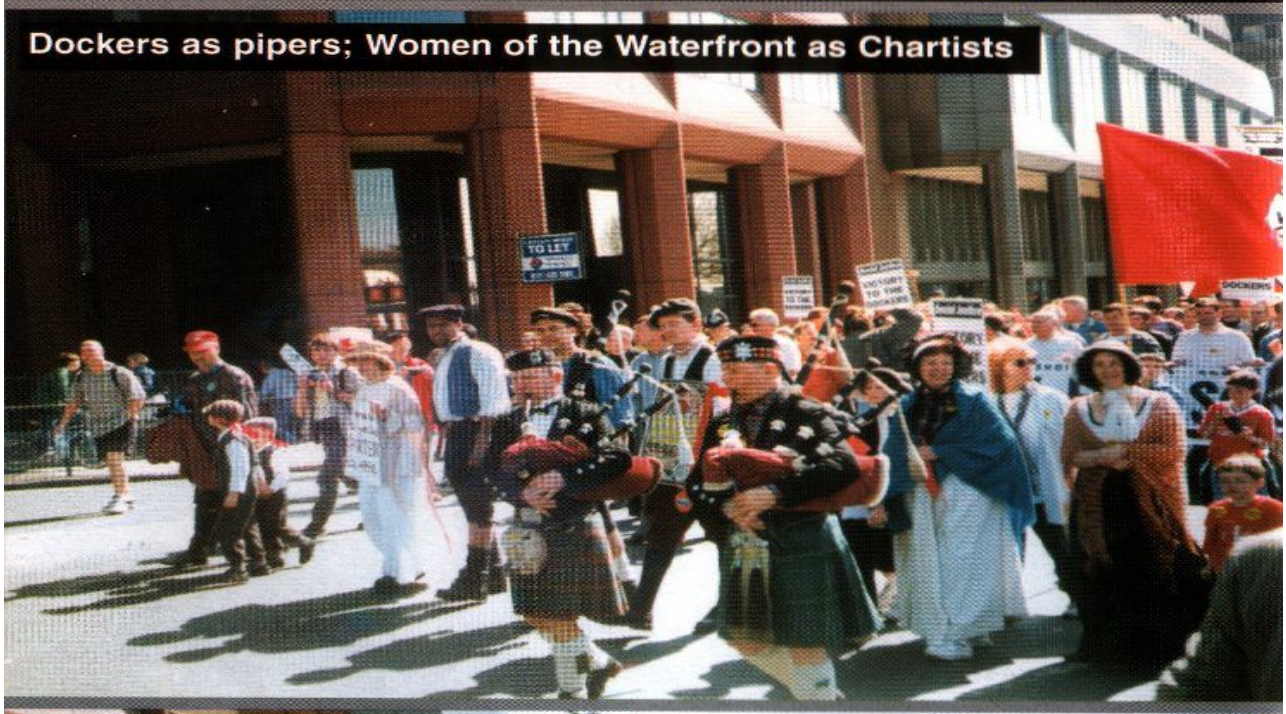
Chris: Oh, there is no question that it was a precursor of Seattle. I don't want to be a sectarian, but I mean there are still comrades on the left, you know, who have never acknowledged this. Obviously a very valuable and important part of the left is the Socialist Worker Party. Many good comrades of mine are members and they're doing great work. But their official line regarding Seattle is that it didn't come out of the dockers' dispute. The dockers are never mentioned in anything they write about Seattle. Well, that is just inaccurate. Maybe certain comrades weren't involved with the dockers very much, but

Banner especially made for 14 Dec demo, London

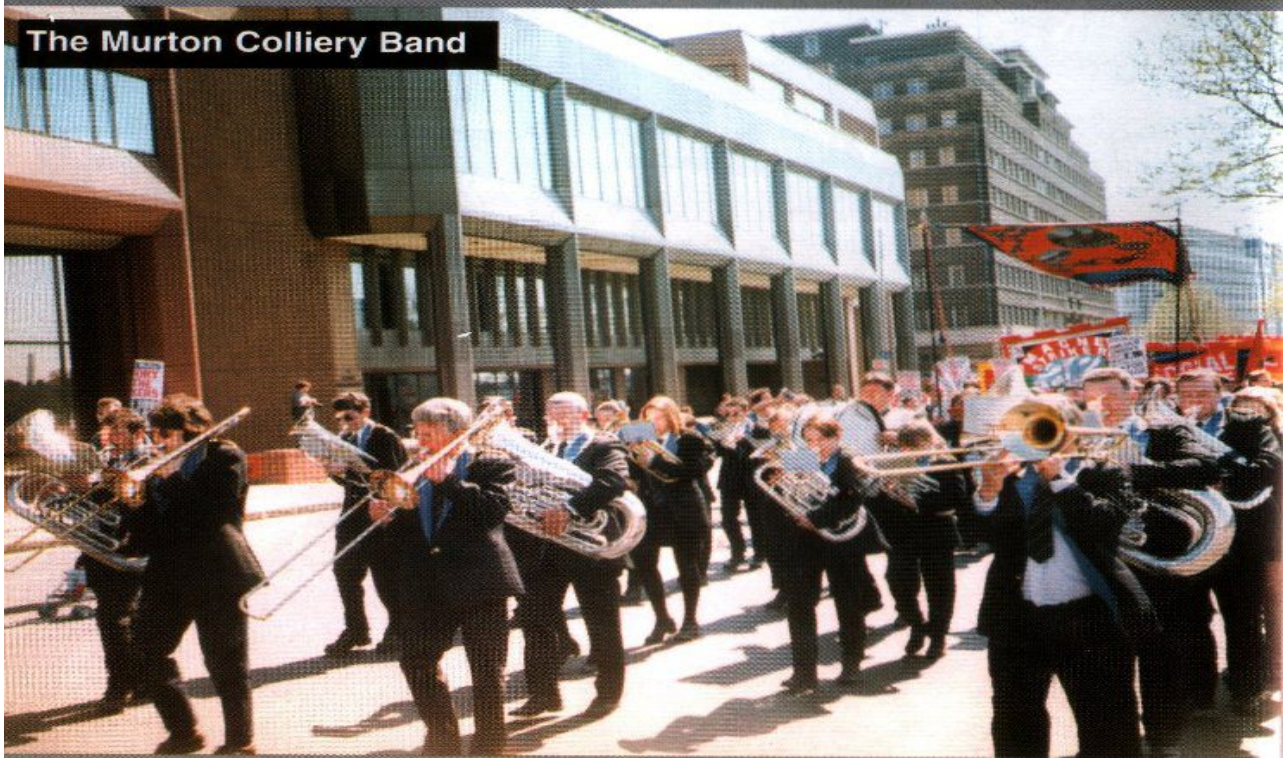


Dockers' children with dragon on Dec 14 1996 demo, London.
Mike Carden's son shouts "I'd rather be a picket than a scab"!

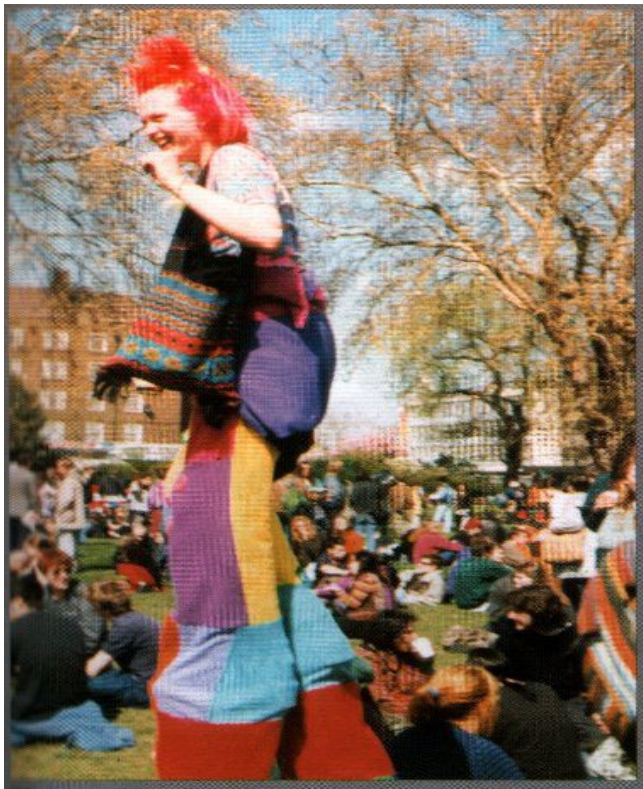
SOCIAL JUSTICE MARCH, LONDON, APRIL 12 1997

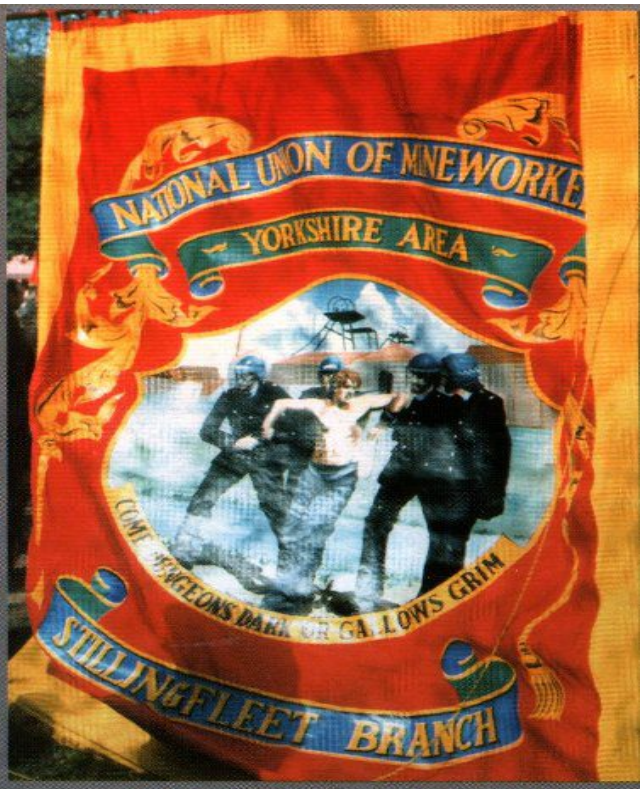


Dockers as pipers; Women of the Waterfront as Chartists



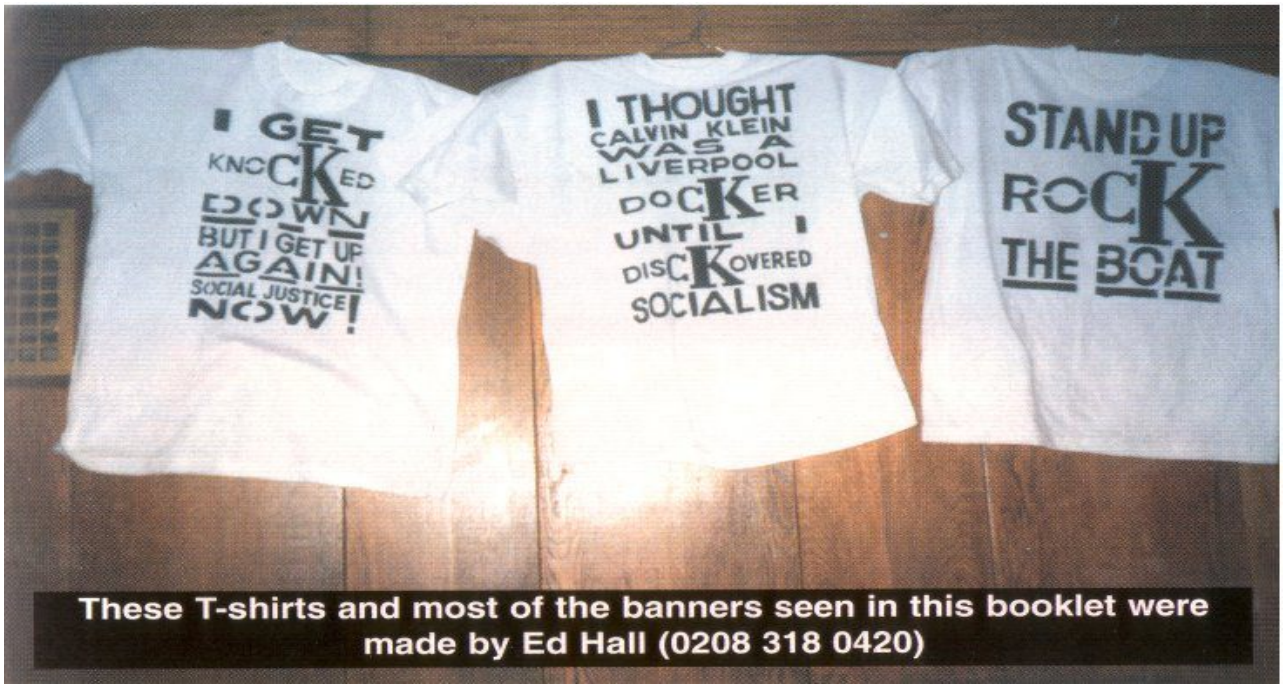
The Murton Colliery Band



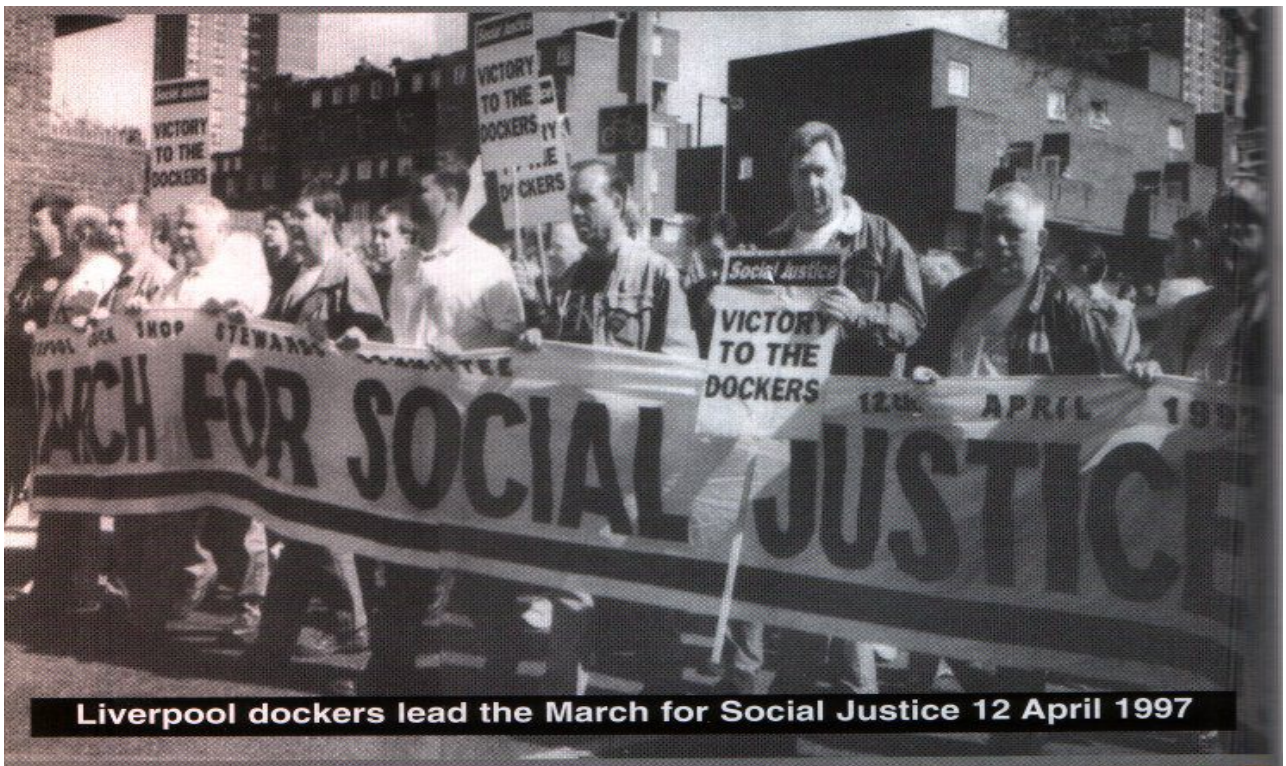

NATIONAL UNION OF MINEWORKE
YORKSHIRE AREA
STILLINGFLEET BRANCH

Disability Action Network with Euromarch banner

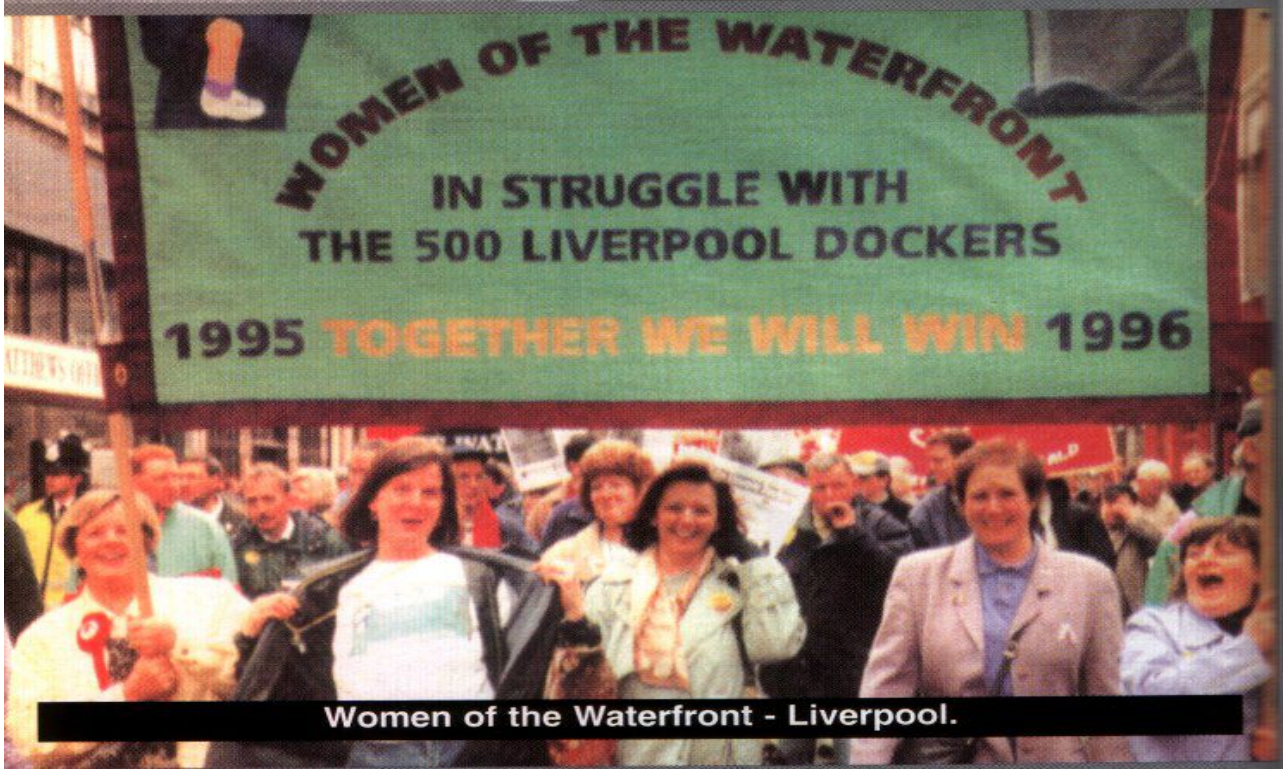
Japanese dockers' banner followed by WOW



These T-shirts and most of the banners seen in this booklet were made by Ed Hall (0208 318 0420)



Liverpool dockers lead the March for Social Justice 12 April 1997



Women of the Waterfront - Liverpool.

even so they should know – everyone should know, actually – what really happened.

The truth is that the groundwork for Seattle 1999 was done by the Liverpool dockers back in 1996. I mean, we've got the fact that on our International Day of Action on January 20th 1997, we already had the whole west coast of America out on strike in solidarity with Liverpool. Now these actions brought together environmentalists and trade unionists long before Seattle on November 30th 1999 – you know, nearly three years before. So Seattle didn't come out of nowhere. The ground was prepared by the Liverpool dockers.

Alan: *I'd like to return to that topic later, but for now can we just look at the way in which the Reclaim the Streets influenced the strike. People traditionally think of Reclaim the Streets in terms of big demonstrations etc – we'll go on to the second, the London demonstration in a moment – but did Reclaim the Streets do any more than just participate, lead, give vibrancy to the big demonstrations ?*

Chris: Oh, a huge amount more. I wouldn't say *Reclaim the Streets* are about big demonstrations. They don't really like demonstrations and they also don't like protest – they don't really have protests. They don't think in that way at all. They think of it more like D.I.Y. – if you want something done, do it yourself. Action comes first.

And the truth is that many of the dockers – maybe especially the younger ones, but not exclusively those – thought that wasn't such a bad idea. Occupations of gantries and of outfits that provided scabs to the employers – occupations of their offices and so forth – were conducted jointly between the dockers and these young activists.

People in *Reclaim the Streets*, including myself, we planned some of these actions. People were very courageous and before long, the dockers just ran with it. They did far more than just stand on that picket line. They did far more than just demonstrate. There were a lot of serious direct actions conducted by the dockers themselves and it was a very important part of their struggle. I'm not saying that they learnt it exactly from *Reclaim the Streets*, but what happened on September 28th was certainly a model. And of course the key point is, it wasn't just *Reclaim the Streets* that occupied the gantries and got on the roof of the offices on that anniversary celebration – the dockers themselves did that.

They insisted on getting there. I remember Jimmy Davis Junior. Come hell or high water, he was going to get up on to that roof. And it was quite funny because, in order to do that, we had to get the drums out before dawn and place them around a particular area of the fence, to create a commotion while hacksaws and cutters were making a big hole. Some quite thick metal railings

had to be cut. So, while all the drumming and music was going on, the sawing and rasping took place to the same rhythm so the police wouldn't hear the difference. While I was drumming, the dockers were going ching, ching, ching, ching, ching, ching – cutting through that fence. I remember particularly because Jimmy Davis just had to get up on that roof, and the dockers just had to climb up the gantries, to show solidarity with the *Reclaim the Streets* activists who had already made that climb. They weren't going to be outdone by a few anarchists or environmentalists. As soon as this was going on they thought 'We can do it'. There was absolute equality. So, once that precedent had been set – it was part of what the dockers were very much into.

Alan: *Can you give us any other examples of direct action taken later by the dockers or by* Reclaim the Streets?

Pauline: I can tell you of one beforehand because, as Chris says, the dockers insisted on climbing up the gantries and all that. I also thought they felt quite protective of *Reclaim the Streets* as well. Obviously the dockers know the ins and outs of the docks, the safety hazards and that kind of thing.

And I do know that before this action, in Canada, two of the dockers, Terry Southers and Tony Gardener, climbed up the gantry dressed in the clothes of the Canadian dockers and that was like they were setting up a picket line. Because they were up there at their picket, on top of the gantry with their mobile phone, the Canadian dockers wouldn't cross that picket line. So the Canadian dockers were then on strike in support of the Liverpool dockers.

Alan: *Right.*

Pauline: Those kinds of actions took place quite a lot all around the world. In the call for international solidarity the dockers around the world, people in other countries would say to Liverpool: 'Well, we just need one or two of you to come here to say here's the picket line'. And then nobody else went across it. That's what they did in lots of places.

Alan: *OK. Well, of course the other big event that people associate with* Reclaim the Streets *is the demonstration a year later, the big London one – was that a year later?*

Chris: Yes, the March for Social Justice.

Alan: *How central were* Reclaim the Streets *in that ?*

Chris: Well, I would say that by 12 April 12th 1997, by that stage, there was this big network which involved the Dockers Support Groups – maybe particularly London, but across the country – and people in *Reclaim the Streets*

that had now become really committed to the cause of the dockers. The dockers – those who were most active – were equally central to this same network. Again, obviously, there was a little bit of tension, we always had to discuss things. As for the event on 12th April – it was designed to be a bit more than a demonstration from Kennington Park to Trafalgar Square. Part of the plan was to stage an occupation of a very large building.

Just beyond Westminster Bridge, before you get to the House of Commons – on the North other side of the river – there were these huge big offices of the Department of the Environment. And the idea was to occupy that building. Well, I can't go into details, but basically the dockers – some of them – were a little bit worried about that. They weren't quite sure it would work and some of them were more keen on the idea than others. But essentially that was the plan and the fact that it didn't happen meant that plan B had to be implemented, which was to have the big action in Trafalgar Square.

Here it was *Reclaim the Streets* activists who shinned right up Nelson's Column and some of the buildings surrounding Trafalgar Square with big, big banners reading, *'Victory to the Dockers!* It was more than the usual kind of thing – people arriving there and then speeches. Obviously we did have speeches, but it was quite a bit more than that. That was an enormously powerful celebratory action. It was a hugely successful coming together of environmentalists and trade unionists and activists. It was a very, very powerful thing I would say.

And again, that just wouldn't have happened without the link having been made on the anniversary of the dispute. It was all part of the same thing. It was really growing, getting bigger and bigger. In the weeks immediately following, it all actually started to unravel – I think we would agree on that. Jimmy Nolan and others switched to a very different policy of distancing from RTS and engaging with the prospects of a Labour election victory; I would say it began to go downhill from then on, really.

Alan: *But the 12th April demonstration itself, presumably the bulk of the mobilisation was done by the London Support Group?*

Chris: I would say it was a sort of twin track thing. We probably did half of it, but *Reclaim the Streets* – they had their own way of organising and they had some brilliant posters everywhere and they pulled their people out, there's no question. I wouldn't want to be competitive. It was really a very good partnership I would say. What would you say, Pauline, on that?

Pauline: Yes. I would say that the London Support Group organised the structural bit of the March. Anybody who's organised a demonstration will know that one of the jobs is you have to talk to the police and there is always a

committee of three or four people. And they have big arguments about where the March should go and we wanted a Central London March. So the London Support Group organised the structure of the March and where it should go and we organised getting trade unionists on board and getting sympathetic people and so on.

Chris: That's right.

Pauline: And then *Reclaim the Streets* had their separate meetings and occasionally some *Reclaim the Streets* people would come to the meetings of the London Support Group so we could share information. But on the whole they organised separately until a few days before the March actually.

Chris: Yeah, I was very much on both sides. I was Chief Steward for the March and negotiating with the police along with Kevin Hargreaves and others. I was also very much involved with *Reclaim the Streets* at the same time. Pauline's right, there was obviously a tension between having something where you'd negotiate with the police and it's all set in stone beforehand, and then doing the kind of thing that *Reclaim the Streets* want to do. They never negotiate with the police. They just don't want to know.

And of course they've got a strong case – if you talk to the police and anything goes wrong, you're held under some kind of moral pressure to do as you're told. And they're just not into that, so it was quite tricky – as Pauline's hinting – to keep the whole show on the road. But we did and the thing was very, very powerful.

What actually happened? As we were coming up Whitehall there were mounted police charging up and down. I don't know, some of the older dockers might have been a bit worried about what was happening, thinking 'If we go along with this it will be anarchy!'. It was beginning to transcend those boundaries a bit, but still we had to make sure that the whole movement stayed together. We had disputes within the London Support Group – never bad disputes, by the way, they were never sectarian disputes, they were always comradely. But there were genuine difficulties in keeping the whole thing together really, as there were bound to be. After the September 28th action, Jimmy Nolan had introduced *Reclaim the Streets* activists to the 500 dockers, to a prolonged standing ovation. The T&G officials had been denouncing RTS as 'anarchists', so Jimmy invoked the Spanish civil war and said 'I am proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with these anarchists!' But now at the end of the Social Justice March I imagine the pressure on Jimmy was becoming a lot stronger.

Alan: *So essentially what we are saying then is that there was a difference between* Reclaim the Streets *and the dockers and their supporters in terms of*

political ideas, forms of organisation and the methods of doing things, but they were resolved in discussion ?

Chris: I wouldn't say there was a difference between the dockers as a whole and *Reclaim the Streets* as a whole. It's not quite as simple as that because *Reclaim the Streets* had their differences and the dockers had their differences. I would say, from where I was, there were the dockers I worked most closely with – Billy Jenks, Jimmy Davis Junior and so on – and also the *Reclaim the Streets* people I was working most closely with – for example Ian – and thirdly Pauline and my sister and others. These groups weren't always in total agreement. But we didn't have serious disagreements. I think we were very much together.

On the *Reclaim the Streets* side, there were people who were saying 'What were we doing, why are we talking to the police at all, why do we have a march from A to B and all that?' Among the dockers, there were also concerns and worries. But in the end I have to say the plans were agreed collectively as to what we did on that day, as Pauline said. So Pauline was right to say that it wasn't until last minute really that things gelled together and we went for it.

Pauline: I think I arrived late to this meeting, but I do understand that there was a dispute about something that *Reclaim the Streets* were going to do and the dockers were saying that 'If you do this, we're just pulling out straight, we're just not going to have anything to do with you' and that conflict happened a day or two before the March.

Chris: Yes, but it was some of the dockers and not all. Billy Jenks and Jimmy Davis Junior were with *Reclaim the Streets* right the way through, all the time, right up to late in the night. And they were phoning up Liverpool to explain the plan and to secure agreement. And then – the night before the march, in the Cock Tavern near Kings Cross – we had a meeting, didn't we, by the end of which we agreed? But Pauline's right. There were still concerns and nobody could tell what was going to happen.

You can't have a direct action, which is illegal – and remain legal. The *Reclaim the Streets* idea, which was to take over the Department of the Environment building, had to be on a need-to-know basis. So some of the dockers knew the details and others didn't, which is always difficult for a democratic movement, but what do you do? I'm sure Lenin had the same problems. There's moments when you're not sure.

Alan: *I'm sure that Lenin had lots of problems. But in a sense, what we're saying is that the political views of the dockers tended towards keeping to the law and . . .*

Chris: I don't want to say that.

Pauline: I just want to say as well that a lot of people came down from Liverpool to that March including a lot of women and their children. Obviously one of their concerns that they wanted to make sure that the March was safe.

Alan: *So it was non-violent ?*

Pauline: Yes, they were worried about violence. And of course the media was playing up the fact that there would be violence and so that does attract violent elements. So there's always this threat that there might be violence and we didn't want it.

Alan: *Reclaim the Streets?*

Chris: *Reclaim the Streets* are not either violent or non-violent. They're certainly not violent, but like all of us on the left – all revolutionaries – we don't think we're in favour of violence at all. But on the other hand to go round saying we're not violent when the police are beating you over the head is ridiculous. So *Reclaim the Streets* do try very hard, in all my experience, to get dance and music and rhythm and other forms of energy to make violence not necessary – to be infectious and to have large numbers and to find other ways than violence. Maybe some people relish violence, but *Reclaim the Streets* are certainly not that kind of people, they're just not. But on the other hand obviously there were fears, worries. We were all concerned because there would be women and children there and we weren't sure how violent the police would be. We just didn't know.

Alan: *Well, organisations like* Earth First!, *out of which* Reclaim the Streets *grew, were traditionally being linked to things like non-violent direct action, and that's always been their line from pretty early on.*

Chris: Well, *Earth First!* is one strand. The term 'non-violent' isn't used within *Reclaim the Streets*. They don't say that and I think they're right. The whole idea of being non-violent is just missing the point.

We're not the source of violence – the state is and the police are. So we find that debate isn't very helpful. In practice *Reclaim the Streets* have found much more effective ways of organising. All the costumes and dance and music and stuff and the symbolism and the appeal is central to that. It doesn't mean that on occasions people from outside haven't just come along and wanted to chuck bottles and stuff, which they have, but that's never been thought of as particularly intelligent.

Alan: *So the* Reclaim the Streets *forms of activity were things like occupations, things like demonstrations with music?*

Chris: It came out of Claremont Road. This was a formative experience for the *Reclaim the Streets* people in London. It would be ridiculous to say that Claremont Road was violent. It wasn't.

Alan: *So essentially then we're saying in terms of political ideas the main emphasis of* Reclaim the Streets *was the emphasis on reclaiming the streets, meaning anti-car, etc.?*

Chris: It had been the emphasis before the Tube workers' action and the link-up with the dockers. Once the dockers' thing had got off the ground, the signal that *Reclaim the Streets* was putting out was different. It was no longer just anti-car, it was obviously a proletarian thing in many ways.

It was linked up with the big international day of action in Seattle and across the west coast of America and elsewhere across the world. So it wasn't too long before we had June 18th in London, where we became labelled for the first time 'the anticapitalists' by the media. All of us in *Reclaim the Streets* accepted that. But it would have been impossible again without the dockers, without the link with the dockers.

Of course, *Reclaim the Streets* was already anti-capitalist, against the system – it's difficult to be a consistent environmentalist without being. But it wasn't explicit at all. It was the dockers, it was the link with the dockers that made it clear that this was an anti-capitalist, class-struggle movement.

Alan: *So what you're saying is that in the same way as the dockers were influenced by* Reclaim the Streets *in terms of direct action and things like that, the reverse process took place as well?*

Chris: Absolutely.

Alan: *Whereby* Reclaim the Streets *were politicised ?*

Chris: I would say so, yes.

Alan: *By the actions that they undertook?*

Chris: Enormously. They learnt from the dockers. They learnt first-hand the meaning of class struggle, class solidarity and the symbolism of the picket line. For many in *Reclaim the Streets* that was a foreign country. They were not familiar with it at all. But in Liverpool, they had been living with the dockers, bonding with them, becoming friends. The key people that were involved on

this anniversary action became very, very close to the dockers. Terrific friendships were formed up in Liverpool.

Alan: *Coming now to the point about the development of the anti-capitalist movement. You've said that certain political points of view tend to emphasise that Seattle happened out of the blue, and that there was nothing really that went before it, so it was a dramatic and sudden change. But your perspective is that the dockers influenced* Reclaim the Streets *and so influenced a wider audience, particularly in America, that paved the way for the events that happened in Seattle?*

Chris: Yes, I'd say that June 18th 1999, the great anti-capitalist carnival in central London, which stopped the City for a day – that wasn't to us a surprise. Among those of us who'd been linked with the dockers, we'd been aware and involved. But I know that for many comrades in the SWP – the leadership especially – it was a complete surprise.

'Where the hell did that come from?', they asked. Anti-capitalists suddenly stop the city for a day. I mean, an incredibly big thing. Of course, the SWP don't just say anti-capitalism in this new global form came out of the blue. They have been able to construct a story. The trouble is that the story misses out the dockers. You will not find in their version any mention of what the dockers and their International succeeded in doing across the planet, especially on that stupendous day when you could say that the whole planet skipped a heartbeat – January 20th 1997.

Let's remind ourselves of that. The West coast of America was brought to a halt. That included Seattle and Los Angeles. It had been an incredible coalition between environmentalists and all kinds of other political activists with trade unionists. We'd already done that. So when Seattle erupted on November 30th 1999, it was a development from that, two years later.

You cannot write an honest account of the development of today's anti-capitalist movement without seeing that the dockers launched it, together with *Reclaim the Streets*. There's no question that's what happened. But that story is completely missing. You'll read anything about anti-capitalism by, say, 'Globalise Resistance' and all their publications. They'll make a kind of story about how it happened, but it misses out the key thing.

Obviously huge things have happened in Argentina. Huge things have happened through People's Global Action in India, all around the world. Enormous important things are happening. But one thing which specifically happened in the City of London back in June 1999 was that the media woke up and started labelling us the anti-capitalist movement, and that hadn't happened before. That development began in this corner of the world, and it was through

the dockers that it happened. And it just made it much easier to organise and sense that we're part of a global movement.

And nowadays it's a different situation. We can think globally. We're using the internet, using these new media in a way which transcends that old idea of the International. I remember when I got into politics, 'internationalism' meant writing to a contact in Ceylon or somewhere and having comrades trying to form a thing called the 'Something- or-other Committee for the Fourth International'. Nowadays, things are *immediately* international. We're a *global* movement against capitalism which the ruling powers are really quite scared of.

And, I would say, the dockers have a right to be proud of it. If you had to give credit, I would say more credit to the dockers than anybody. The dockers built an International. In a way they eventually 'lost'. They 'lost' that dispute. But the planet has changed as a result. By winning over a whole swathe of other political activists to their cause, they added a whole new dimension of struggle. And I'm obviously annoyed, unhappy that for what seem to me internal sectarian reasons the dockers have been written out of that story by some who've written those histories.

Alan: *I'm sure it's more of a political perspective rather than anything of that nature, but it may well have happened.*

Chris: Yes, it comes from a political perspective. But the political perspective, as Pauline was saying, was 'Why on earth should the dockers mix with environmentalists? What's all this about? What do you want to dance in the streets for?'

There was a real contempt and dismissal of *Reclaim the Streets* by sections of the traditional hard left. I speak as one of the founder members of *Labour Briefing* and I won't excuse them for it either. They, too, suffer from it. The whole of the hard left, all of the left, have suffered from that blindness with respect to this new generation of activists. They just didn't see what they had to offer.

Alan: *To a certain extent, though, it may well be that the split in the labour movement occurred in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, with the rise of Stalinism and the defeat of what was termed the 'ultra left', etc.*

Chris: That's right, yes.

Alan: *And is still being felt today and is only slowly being overcome.*

Chris: Yes, I think that's true. I think there are some parallels between Stalinism and some of these lethargic attitudes towards new developments in the class struggle. And I think that that's really quite an important parallel. And I think that it's partly a failure to listen and to learn from each new generation. Because each new generation brings up new methods of struggle and all of us have to adapt. And the dockers have adapted so quickly, so incredibly quickly.

Pauline: I think it's a lack of will. It's a lack of will to win and it's a lack of will to look outwards and to grasp what's there is out there, what forces are out there to bring in to win the struggle. People get stuck in old habits when they get into a group. They've got their friends, they've got their comrades. They give up to a degree and the group becomes an end in itself rather than the struggle, rather than the big picture. And I think every group on the left has to watch out for that.

Alan: *Coming back to another aspect of the situation. In this country it's fairly clear that the dockers themselves were powerfully behind their stewards and there was certainly support from Magnet strikers and even hospital strikers. Trades Union Councils and a fairly wide range of the rank and file were in support of the dockers, whereas it seemed it seems equally clear that the leadership of the T&G had to be pushed every inch of the way towards support. And certainly many people have alleged that the T&G did very, very little to assist. Some have portrayed people like Bill Morris as traitors, etc.*

Chris: Well, I mean, it's not just that Bill Morris was 'not doing a lot to assist'. He was definitely trying to defeat the strike. Definitely, no question. He was trying to undermine it and stop it. That was the perception of all the dockers. And that was what was going on. And that's their own union. The dockers were just about able to use the T&G offices in Liverpool. They were able to use that as a base from which to organise. But it wasn't just they 'didn't get a lot of support from the national officers'. The national officers were doing everything they could to get the whole thing called off. Especially Bill Morris. He played a disgraceful role, to be honest, a shameful role.

Alan: *Yes, I think great play was made of his speech and his total failure to implement it .*

Chris: When he first turned up, he said 'I want to hold my head high to my grandchildren, telling them that when it mattered, I supported the dockers!'. Well, he cannot hold his head high, that man – he can't.

Alan: *Let's turn, now, to the wider picture. The support that was gained in America and around the world – did that come primarily from what we might describe as rank and file dockers, or was there any support from the equivalents of Bill Morris in these countries? So essentially was it rank and file support that was engendered or was it wider than that?*

Chris: Well, the thing is that in many countries, like for example in Sweden, the whole dockers' union supported the Liverpool dockers.

Pauline: Jack Hayman on the American West coast was extremely supportive. Then there was the International Transport Federation.

Chris: The ITF was on the brink of giving official support. In fact they did give official support, but

Pauline: . . . they were waiting for the Transport and General Workers Union.

Chris: The only thing which stopped the ITF giving official support and calling out dockers world-wide was Bill Morris. Bill Morris actively said 'Don't do this, we don't want your support' and put a spanner in the works.

Alan: *So, coming back to our central point, the development of the anti-capitalist movement. The support that's been gathered in America was primarily from the rank and file that had been involved in the dispute, but also extended to the lower levels of the official trade union movement.*

Chris: Yes. In Australia, it was both lower and higher levels. In the west coast of America it was right up to the top. And, as Pauline said, in many other countries it was almost unanimous support from dockers right across the world. The least support probably was from the dockers' own union in this country.

Pauline: It was a reflection of the anti-union laws in this country. It was due to those eighteen years under the Tories when they brought in all these anti-union laws, whose effect was demonstrated in practice. Everywhere else in the world, trade unionists were able to pull out the dockers. You had the whole of Australia on strike in support of Liverpool. You had the whole of the west coast of America, Greece, Cyprus, Canada.

Chris: Cape Town.

Pauline: These huge countries. All the dockers on strike.

Chris: Every port in Japan came out. I think forty ports in Japan came out on that day.

Pauline: In support of this faraway port in England, you know, Liverpool. And yet you couldn't get the dockers in this country, their own country, out on strike. And that really just brought home to everybody just how backward things have become for the labour movement in this country and how damaging the anti-union laws are.

Alan: *Well, carrying on with this theme, another dimension to the anti-capitalist movement is it's internationalism. The fact is that there is activity around the world wherever the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank, etc, attempt to meet. To what extent can this international activity be traced back, again, to the support for the Liverpool dockers?*

Chris: Yes. The first of these actions actually happened in Birmingham some months after the end of the dockers' dispute. On that day, the dockers turned up, quite a lot of the dockers with their banner, so they very much wanted to be part of that.

Alan: *Yes, Cancel the Debt.*

Chris: That was the first to be regarded by the media as one of those events in that series. It was the first of them. And it was born out of the dockers' dispute and the dockers were very much part of it. They weren't part of the organising of it, but they wanted to be there and they were there.

Alan: *Right, did you want to add anything, Pauline, about the international element from the dock strike leading indirectly to the anti-global capitalist movement?*

Pauline: I was in Prague and there were a couple of American dockers there, who'd been involved in Seattle, and one of them, Robert Irminger, had been very supportive of the Liverpool dockers and, in fact, was threatened with prison in America for getting workers out on strike to support Liverpool. And when we were in Prague they were telling the story about Seattle because they had all been involved in Seattle.

And it was apparent to me that because they were dockers and knew about the activities around the Liverpool docks, they were well prepared. When Seattle happened and the police were trying to get the labour movement and the environmental movement to split, the American dockers or longshoremen – longshore workers they call themselves now – in a sense did a revolutionary thing. They broke through the police lines.

One of them had a megaphone and was shouting 'Over here, come over here, come and join us, come and join us'. And all the environmentalists came and joined them. In fact they broke with their own leadership and got the environmentalists to come over to their side, then they got sprayed with tear gas. But they were all together and they all had to help each other out because they were being attacked by the police.

Chris: If you think of some of the names of places which have been a focus of joint environmentalist and trade union activity and you take Montreal, Sydney, Genoa, Seattle, Gothenburg – these are all places where dockers had earlier taken in solidarity with Liverpool. They are all places which, since then, have come to prominence as centres where there's been this fusion, this ferment of activity and linkage between direct action, including environmental direct action, and classical trade union action.

And all of that was inspired in all those different places around the world in 1997 on 20th January. It isn't a coincidence that those same places have more recently come to notice, have recently hit the headlines. It isn't coincidence – the dockers did it.

Alan: *So what you're saying is there's a direct link between the support for the dockers and the actual anti world-capitalism movement in practice?*

Chris: It's the same thing. It's the same thing a few years later. It's exactly the same thing, it's not a different thing.

Pauline: It's planting the seeds and this is the result.

Chris: That's it, exactly.

Pauline: Plants growing.

Alan: *Yes. So we've heard that the rank and file were directly involved in the Seattle dispute, but again it's sort of typical of the activities in this country, which reflects the emphasis being on the rank and file. So this consciousness, then, that's been developed of the movement, has blossomed out and we're now in a different situation, as you've identified. It would be interesting just to trace the subsequent history of* Reclaim the Streets, *which I know was targeted heavily in this subsequent period. I mean, what is the situation with* Reclaim the Streets *now?*

Chris:*Reclaim the Streets* were kind of upset and annoyed about the way in which people would turn up on an action looking for a fight, without any idea of sending out a signal which people would understand. It gave the impression that they were kind of lager louts or something. They got really annoyed about that. As I say, it's not about being non-violent as an absolute rule. It's just about needing to get a message across, whereas, of course, the media don't want that at all.

So, there has been a lot of thinking about what exactly to do. Let's take, for example, 11th September 2001. Obviously quite an important date. Myself and many others connected with *Reclaim the Streets* had for months been planning

to close down the Arms Fair which was being opened on that day in Docklands. It was a working class area, Canning Town, and the last thing we needed down in that housing estate was to attract a lot of violence. So the leaflets didn't use the word *Reclaim the Streets*. On that day we had our samba band, we had this pink and silver idea, which came from Prague. It had been the pink and silver block, the samba block, that got closest in among the delegates in the conference centre in Prague, and this 'pink and silver' flag was carried over into the Arms Fair action.

So there we were, all wearing pink ribbons and pigtails. Everything was pink and silver and looking as fluffy as it could possibly look, although, of course, the aim was to get into that Arms Fair and close it down. But as a result of soft-pedalling on the *Reclaim the Streets* identity, I think we unintentionally reduced the scale of the action. We were taking such measures to avoid a huge ruck that the signal hardly got sent out. We weren't that many there, something like 1000 on that day. It was good, but there is now a lot of thinking going on as to how to get it right really.

My feeling is, although we've been doing very well with May Day – I mean May Day last year and May Day the year previously with the guerrilla gardening – the press again just treated us as hoodlums because MacDonalds got trashed. Still, it was an important event. But last year, when Ken Livingstone's police tried to completely ban May Day and prevent us from having any kind of celebration, we did very well, we turned it round. We certainly won the publicity war and from now on May Day it will be a contest and I'm sure there'll be some good actions on May Day this year.

Just to finish, I think my own feeling is that when there is in this country another big industrial dispute anything like the scale of the dockers dispute, *Reclaim the Streets* will come into its own again. It will seize the chance with both hands and champion that. We're kind of waiting for something big to happen. It could be the tube workers, it could be postal workers, could be who knows what. There is a need for something to celebrate, some real struggle to focus around. Then we can act. In a way, it's been a bit hard to find one in the last couple of years.

Alan: *Of course the forces of the state are always very heavily oppressive towards organisations like* Reclaim the Streets, *the IWW for example. And they've traditionally taken a sort of hard line in terms of harassment. Has this had a serious effect on* Reclaim the Streets *do you think?*

Chris: No, I don't think so. I wouldn't say it's had no effect, but we're still around. I mean, just yesterday was International Women's Day. We marched all through London. We had a 'No Sweat' action through Oxford Street. We stopped Gap – we closed the whole shop down. We stopped Next, we stopped

Nike, we stopped Walt Disney. In some ways, dispersed in different campaigns, there are more of us active than ever.

It’s true that some very brave people have been locked up and it’s obviously been difficult. But I don’t think that’s dented anyone’s morale or stopped us from campaigning one bit really. If there’s been some decline in RTS activity recently, it’s not because of state harassment. My explanation would be that there’s been a slight loss of direction since we haven’t had that dockers dispute, with its international dimensions, to focus around. And I think we’re confident there’ll be another such eruption of the real class struggle to get behind.

Dockers Span the Globe!

Labour Left Briefing, March 1997

Chris Knight *(London Support Group for the Liverpool Dockers) reports on the Dockers' International Week of Action.*

IT WAS as if the planet skipped a heartbeat. Workers in 105 ports across the world have become involved in action in solidarity with the 500 sacked Liverpool dockers. Backed by the International Transport Federation, the action directly hit shipping in at least 13 countries in the week beginning January 20th. Scanning the record-books, it may have been the mightiest example of international action in direct support of an industrial dispute this century. Yet – remarkably even by recent standards of media manipulation and control – the British public still don't know anything happened.

The transfer of the national press to Fortress Wapping was planned for contingencies like this.

Let's turn to the foreign press for enlightenment. Here is the Los Angeles Times, one of the leading United States dailies, reporting (January 21st, 1997) on how the action hit the West Coast of America:

> *"Pacific Rim trade sputtered to a halt and dozens of mammoth cargo ships sat idle in their ports as union dockworkers from Los Angeles to Seattle stayed off the job in a one- day show of support for striking longshoremen in Liverpool, England... At the Los Angeles-Long Beach harbour complex, the nation's busiest, 33 ships were either stranded in berths with no one to handle their cargo or were anchored in the San Pedro Bay with nowhere to go...".*

Or take the *Tribune Business News* (January 21st, 1997):

> *'"The industry is again a mess,' said captain Karsten Lemke, chairman of the Steamship Association of Southern California and a vice-president with Zim-Arnerican Israeli Shipping Co. Inc. in Los Angeles. 'This is going to cost us millions of dollars in delays... Half a billion dollars in commerce is shot... down the drain', said Wilmington trucking executive Mike Johnson, President of the Port Intermodal Operators Association."*

As the action started, all Oregon ports including Portland were shut for 24 hours. Los Angeles, Long Beach, San Francisco, Oakland, Tacoma, Seattle and Dutch Harbour (Alaska) were shut for eight hours. In Los Angeles alone, over 100 cranes were stopped, with 32 ships in harbour and another 16 due that day. Shipping lines affected included Maersk, American President Line, Evergreen, Hapag Lloyd, NYK *Dockers Span the Globe!*

and OOCL. In addition to newspaper coverage, viewers across the United States watched dramatic CNN television coverage of the action as it happened, augmented with videotape footage of the international picket of Seaforth Dock, Liverpool, in February last year.

Comparable stories and local coverage reached audiences in several countries, while lesser actions, financial contributions and expressions of solidarity, not directly affecting shipping, came from many others.

Given the scale of the international action, and the media attempts to conceal it, it seems important to place on record the details. Below is a survey based on information gleaned by the Liverpool stewards from foreign press cuttings and well over 220 faxes sent in from supporters worldwide. Where no date is given, read January 20th – start of the week of action.

Some of the stoppages lasted only a few hours: remember, though, that a modern container vessel is vast, and that even a short delay usually means missing a tide, with massive knock-on effects and costs to the owners. One reason for the varying times and places is that the action was targeted to coincide, where possible, with the arrival of a container ship doing trade with the scab port of Liverpool. Note, though, that many portworkers worldwide struck anyway, just to make a point.

The full picture is more impressive than this brief and sketchy survey can convey.

VIDEO NEWS should be contacted for a chance to see their marvelous video coverage of the international day of action, which includes magnificent CNN footage. We will probably never know precisely what happened during that extraordinary week in January when the dream of a workers' international – by the workers, for the workers, of the workers – came closer to realisation than for half a century. Even supporters in countries with no ports did what they could – in the Swiss case by occupying the Rhine Shipping Company in Basel and by gluing all door locks at the British Consulate in Zurich!

Messages of support, donations and reports of actions have been flooding in from as far afield as Kaliningrad, Mombassa, Mexico City and Mauritania. With such messages come internet addresses and permanent links, which are then reinforced and integrated into the dockers' international alliance which the dispute has inspired. In a subsequent message, Liverpool Port Shop Stewards Secretary Jimmy Nolan said it all:

> *"The Week of Action was a magnificent achievement for the international dockworkers' movement and for workers worldwide. We thank you all. We would ask that the supportive actions are maintained right up to the moment when the*

Liverpool Dock Workers march proudly back to their jobs within the Port of Liverpool."

That day now looks within reach. Make no mistake: the dockers are winning this one. As we prepare to celebrate a change of government, don't be part of the problem. Join your local dockers' support group, march with the dockers on the *EuroMarch* and *Carnival for Social Justice* in London on April 12th – and be part of the victory.

Solidarity Around the World (in addition to U.S.):

Canada: the ILA-organised port of Saint John, New Brunswick, was completely shut down for the whole day, from 8 am to 7 pm, despite legal threats to the Union. CAST and CanMar offices on Quebec were occupied on the day, following a meeting in which, for the first time ever, 500 longshoremen got together with checkers and railway workers in the port of Montreal. The Cast Elk and CanMar Spirit were delayed as the Syndicat des Debardeurs discovered equipment in urgent need of maintenance at the three container terminals.

Japan: Action in solidarity with Liverpool hit 50 ports, backed by the 40,000 strong National Council of Dockworkers Unions (Zenkoku Kowan); workers downed tools while meetings were held under the slogan "Stand Against Deregulation: Strengthen International Solidarity". Shipping lines affected included OOCL, Evergreen, NYK and P&O. The union has written to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company threatening more unless the Liverpool dockers are reinstated.

Sweden: all ACL and CAST container vessels in the ports of Gothenburg, Malmo, Helsingborg and Stockholm were immobilised on Monday January 21st in a 24-hour solidarity stoppage organised by the Hamnarbetaforbundet and by rank-and-file members of the Swedish Transport Workers Union.

Denmark: mass meetings to discuss Liverpool were held on January 20th in the ports of Arhus and Copenhagen; each meeting led to a 24-hour solidarity stoppage.

Holland: in the giant European Container Terminal at Rotterdam, the Morline/Baltic Line Mor Europe was delayed by a work-to-rule on the night shift of Monday 20th; two gangs then refused to service the vessel the next morning.

Germany: the ACL Atlantic Conveyor was held up for two hours in Bremerhaven as the OTV (the main dockers' union) called all dockers to the canteen to discuss Liverpool.

Le Havre, France: an OOCL vessel was delayed on the evening of January 19th; dockers from the port also attended a rally in Paris of 1,500 supporters of the Liverpool dockers and Women of the Waterfront.

Greece: a three-day seamen's strike from January 20th and a general strike on January 23rd involved dockers in holding up the Gracechurch line, which trades with Liverpool.

Australia: the Zim Australia was diverted from Sydney Harbour, and the Zim Sydney faced disruption in Sydney and Melbourne. The Israeli-owned Zim Line trades with Liverpool.

New Zealand: the day of action began with a seafarers' picket of the three major container terminals in Auckland, Wellington and Lyttelton at the commencement of the morning shift. Members of the Waterfront Workers and Harbour Workers' unions honoured these pickets, as did truck drivers in Wellington. Vessels were held up in Auckland and Lyttelton; there were meetings between seafarers and crew members aboard the P&O Mairangi Bay while this ship was held up. The P&O operates in the Port of Liverpool.

Liverpool: on Monday 20th, the port was successfully occupied by a combined team of dockers and environmentalists who tricked security by pretending to be scabs and driving into the port — to occupy three wind-blasted cranes for 27 hours on the coldest night of the year. The effect was to hold up the Lake Eyrie for the duration, while a noisy and high-spirited 1,000-strong picket was mounted at the gates of Seaforth Container Terminal.

The Liverpool Dockers and the Campaign for Human Rights in Turkey

Liz Knight

Almost immediately after the outbreak of the Liverpool dockers strike, another strike occurred in Tottenham at the JJ Fast Foods. Here 45 mainly Kurdish and Turkish workers were sacked for defending the basic right to join a union. The JJ Fast Food workers and the dockers soon connected struggles, through the London Support Group, and the close link with Turkey was made.

Throughout the 28 months of the Liverpool struggles, docker delegations went around the world to campaign against the scourge of casualisation. In Turkey, dockers' delegations met with Turkish dockers and other trade unionists, and were present at the launching of the Emek Labour Party of Turkey in March 1996. In July a delegation went to Istanbul to witness the court hearing in the case of Metin Goktepe, the journalist murdered by police in 1995, and to Gazi Antep to show solidarity with 20,000 textile workers striking for union rights.

During this visit the delegation witnessed the brutality of the Turkish police and security forces as they savagely beat not only striking workers but also women and children demonstrating for the 'disappeared'. At the same time, 2,000 political prisoners were then on hunger strike over prison conditions. With many approaching death, their lawyers appealed to the dockers for support.

On returning to Liverpool the docker's delegation, together with the LSG, the T&GWU NE London Textile workers branch, and the Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish Community Solidarity Centre launched the Campaign for Human Rights in Turkey. The campaign's immediate priority was to try to help save the lives of the political prisoners. The Shop Stewards' report was used as part of the evidence presented by Labour and Socialist group MEPs to the European Parliament. The momentum of protest in Europe and in Turkey forced the Turkish Government to back down at the eleventh hour, after 12 hunger strikers had, however, already died.

In September 1996, Jimmy Nolan, Chair of the Liverpool Port Shop Stewards, hosted a special conference in Liverpool on Human Rights at which the following was agreed:

- to call on the European Parliament to suspend its co-operation agreement with Turkey until human rights violations cease
- to campaign in defence of the right to independent trade union organisation and political expression in Turkey and worldwide
- to campaign against the war on the Kurdish people and the violent oppression of other ethnic minorities

- to call on British workers not to take holidays in Turkey
- to demand the banning of all arms sales and military aid to Turkey

Since then the Campaign has initiated and supported various significant campaigns: on political prisoners, on the case of the murdered journalist Metin Goktepe, on the 10 year old struggle of the Bergama people against the Eurogold Mining company, and on the trial of Abdullah Ocalan, among other issues.

The campaign today

The campaign now has contacts and supporters across the widest spectrum of human rights organisations, the trade union and labour movement [including dockers' unions in 14 countries], educational, legal and political organisations and the media. We see ourselves as part of the network of all other genuine human right organisations, and are concerned to provide the widest possible exchange of information and support.

Our regular activities include –

- A monthly bulletin which collate news on human rights violations as they occur
- Press releases and emergency call to action
- Sending delegations to Turkey to observe trials, gather information, develop links and participate in human rights conferences
- Organising meetings, conferences, demonstrations and other events in Britain
- Initiating and supporting campaigns on human rights issues in Turkey and internationally

Repression remains the order of the day in Turkey. Extra judicial killings and torture by State security forces occur daily. In the South East, 4,000 Kurdish villages have been destroyed and more than 2 million Kurds displaced by the Turkish Army. Turkish and Kurdish workers and trade unionists are attacked and imprisoned for exercising their constitutional right to organise and strike. There are continual attempts to terrorise and ban all genuine dissent. Peaceful demonstrations are attacked. Dissenting newspapers and political parties are subject to arbitrary bans. Since 1990, State security forces have murdered 30 journalists. Other dissenters, including writers, musicians and artists are imprisoned.

Liverpool Dockers on Delegation Work in London

Dave Renton interviewed Micky Tighe and Nick Silvano, on 27th July 2000.

Dave Renton: *Can you give examples of the delegation work you were involved in?*

Micky Tighe: We were on delegation work from day one. Staying on floors and in squats. One time we stayed in the oldest squat in London, in Brixton. The kids were tremendous, they had no money but they really made us feel welcome.

Nick Silvano: One time we stayed with Tony Santamera, the Secretary of the Seamen's Union, the RMT. The RMT were very supportive, they gave us our own office in their buildings in Kings Cross, in return for 1966 when we supported the seamen's strike. We also stayed with Bob Towers in Eltham.

Micky Tighe: We used to go to meetings North and South of the river, backwards and forwards, often on the same night. I used to joke to Nick, why couldn't they organise the meetings so we just went to one big one?

Dave Renton: *Can you describe some of the successful meetings?*

Micky Tighe: It's hard to remember them all now. We went to more meetings than Lester Piggott! One that comes to mind was Tony O'Brien [Secretary of the Construction Safety Campaign] from UCATT [the building workers' union], in Old Kent Road. We stood up, stated our case. At the end, they voted to give us a donation of £1,000. A voice came from the back, 'Higher'.

Nicky Silvano: It was like The Price is Right. 'Higher', 'Lower'. By the end, they voted to give us £5000, the maximum they could.

DR: *Did you appear at any of the benefit gigs?*

NS: One time we opened a big club in London, by Earl's Court. The band Oasis was there, though I don't think they gave us a penny, we were allowed to sell shirts.

MT: The most successful benefit was one organised by the comedians in the London Palladium. There were two meetings, really, the first one, we met up with was Mark Steel and a group of comedians, and they decided that something had to be done. The second time, we were invited in. Mark Steel went with us to the Comedy Store and he said 'I don't know how this is going to be, you've got to remember that most of the people here work nights'. There were over thirty people in the room, Jo Brand, Sean Hughes, Harry Hill, and

Linda Thomas, all the famous faces off the television. Lee Hurst was chairing the meeting. So they came to a decision, and they put a show on at the London *Palladium*. You can imagine how it felt. I remember when I was a kid, and when the shows used to come on the telly, from the *Palladium*. We always had to have quiet in the house for that.

NS: The show raised over £30,000. The place was absolutely full. It was absolutely unbelievable.

MT: Also Lee Hurst and Mark Steel came down twice, to address our meetings on the Fridays. One of the best places for us was *Up the Creek* in Greenwich. We attended three benefits there, Squeeze played, and the compère was Arthur Smith. Jools Holland came, Lee Jones and Rob Newman too. The RMT in Tottenham gave £1000 every 3 months. Hammersmith UNISON were excellent, they kept on asking us back.

DR: *What about the T&GWU's Biennial Delegate Conference*?

MT: Yes, that was in Brighton. The vote was cooked up. All mayhem went loose and it was the last vote of the day. It all went our way. But the chair announced that we'd lost! So Bill Morris and all his lot got out of their chairs and walked out. They wanted to say that we'd lost and the day was over. But the National Executive wouldn't get up. They knew we'd won the vote. The next day, the first announcement came from the chair. 'First business will be the docks' dispute'. There'd been a card vote and we had won.

DR: *What about the TUC?*

MT: We had the right to expect more. There was one Congress we showed up. We were told to put away our banners and we'd get a substantial donation. But we refused that – they always say that if they want to shut people up. So Scargill spoke, and called for a one-day stoppage.

In the evening many trade union leaders – especially from the RMT – came up and said they'd walk out and sabotage the event to bring publicity for us. I thought we should have done that. But the protest was called off. We were allowed to speak – but only on the Friday, after most of the delegates had gone home. They threw us a bit of sugar to quieten us down. There were a lot of good people though who wanted to come out.

DR: *What was your involvement in the London Support Group?*

MT: We set up a Dockers Solidarity Group who helped to organise actions, marches, rallies, meetings, leaflets, networking etc. On May 10th 1998, after the dispute had ended, there was a second *Social Justice* March and rally. Kevin

Hargreaves and others had to negotiate with Scotland Yard on the route for the marches. We took the same route as the Chartists in the 1840s. The police were terrible … they must have thought something else was going on.

NS: Our first march through London was in December 1996. We walked from Marble Arch to Red Lion Square. Then we had the Social Justice March with *Reclaim the Streets*.

MT: We also took a couple of busloads to Palace Street [Head Office of the T&GWU]. There was a meeting of the T&G executive to decide whether they were going to continue their support. But only one man came out to speak to us, Jimmy Adams, the Assistant General Secretary.

Another time, we occupied Drakes [Drake International, a scab-hiring agency]. They got the police onto us in no time. But our men did no damage. All we did was put stickers on the underside of the teacups. So that when they lifted them up to drink, they'd have to look and see what was on underneath. It was my idea, our stickers fitted perfectly. There weren't any arrests that day. Most of our demos were peaceful.

DR: *Do you remember any activities in North London?*

MT: It's hard to remember now; there were so many meetings. I remember Upper Street library, by Islington and Highbury. And I remember one comrade, a blind guy; I think he was called Rob[1].

NS: Pauline Bradley set up all sorts of meetings. We went to Haringey Labour three times, Tottenham once.

MT: Bob Towers was treasurer for the support group. He regularly sent cheques. We would be there three times a week.

DR: *Do you remember any of the local activities, like street collections?*

MT: Wherever we stayed people would do street collections. They would have them outside tube stations, selling the *Dockers' Charter*. We didn't do that many collections – we were there as speakers.

DR: *How about Women of the Waterfront?*

MT: WOW sometimes came with us. We'd often meet with Doreen McNally. One time my wife Sylvia was in London, I thought I'd go along and listen. Afterwards I asked her, 'How did the meeting go?' We learned that WOW had been nominated for the Colonel Gadaffy peace prize. Jimmy Nolan was

[1] Probably Rob Murthwaite, one time secretary of Islington Unison

worried about how this would affect the dispute, and how it would look to people. Then we found out that Nelson Mandela had won the same prize, and so had the Bosnian children. So the committee felt we were in good company. Doreen went out with Sue Mitchell to collect the prize. But then the *Liverpool Echo* found out, and ran all sorts of damaging stories. They never mentioned that Mandela had also won the prize.

DR: *What were you most looking for in the delegation work, financial support or other forms of support?*

MT: We had to get through the media blackout. The rank and file needed to know what was going on.

DR: *Was it harder in your own union, the T&GWU?*

MT: People wouldn't hear a word spoken against Bill Morris [General Secretary of the T&GWU, now in the House of Lords]. That became clear on numerous occasions. Jack Dempsey [T&GWU full-time officer] was a bloody disgrace. Without him, the dispute wouldn't have happened. They're not going to do it, the people at the top. It would jeopardise their nice cars. We used to talk about reclaiming our union. Some of us have left, but most of us are still part of the union. It's our union. The dockers founded the T&G.

DR: *How did you report back when you came back from London?*

MT: We used to have a mass meeting every Friday in Transport House in Islington, Liverpool. Everyone who went on delegation work used to go there and report back. They were open meetings and very democratic. People were welcome to come along and give their advice. Then, at the end of it, dockers voted.

NS: 90 per cent of our meetings were open, but some were closed, particularly for ballots. Then we could explain why we were arguing for a vote to go one way. Also we didn't like to discuss cash in front of journalists. People died during the dispute. Their families didn't want the press sniffing around. We gave the press our trust and they abused it, so after that we stopped them attending.

DR: *What do you remember most about carrying out the solidarity work in London?*

NS: You think you'd go to London and get 'thieving Scousers'. But we didn't hear any of that. People put us up in their homes, fed us meals. We had such a good time; we half wanted the dispute to go on!

Women of the Waterfront

Interview with Sue Mitchell, Secretary of Women of the Waterfront, at Women Against Pit Closures 20th Anniversary Celebration, Sheffield, October 3 2004

[WOW page 2]

A Docker's View of Reclaim the Streets

Interview with Tony Nelson on 18th September 2004. Conducted at the sacked Liverpool Dockers' Club, the CASA. Transcription by Pauline Bradley. Before being sacked, Tony worked as the "Imports and Exports Clerk" in the office at Liverpool docks. Also present was Mickey Tighe, sacked docker and London link during the dispute.

Pauline Bradley: *Where and when did you first hear about Reclaim the Streets?*

Tony Nelson: From Mickey Tighe and the London Support Group. Mickey had
been in London, he came back to Liverpool and told us about them, so we got in contact with them.

PB: *What did you understand RTS to be?*

TN: I don't know. They were honest, good people. If they said they'd do something, they would do it; I loved them for that. I hate sitting in meetings and talking, but they were more interested in action. They always delivered.

PB: *How did you think RTS could help you with your dispute?*

TN: I didn't really know. Through direct action I guess.

PB: *How did you find working with them given that they didn't have much idea about Trades Unionism before hand?*

TN: A pleasure, they were a breath of fresh air. It wasn't easy at first though, they objected to working with Trades Unionists. I pointed out how you can change things by having industrial muscle. I told them about in 1988 when an Atlantic Conveyor came into port from Scandinavia. It said on the paperwork that it was from Sweden, it was carrying Hexa Fluoride B uranium and it was going to Canada. I knew you couldn't get uranium from the ground in Sweden! Ships carrying uranium usually have a Police escort. I thought something funny was going on and that it had come from Namibia. My conscience told me that this was wrong and I refused to sign the legal paperwork, which was a C88 document.

In the Liverpool docks we worked in such a way that if you had a problem, the lads would back you up. Because I refused to sign the C88, I got a visit from two heavy, plain clothed men. They may have been Special Branch, Police or something; but they came and got aggressive with me, they were swearing and ordering me to sign the forms. They were saying "Who are you, sign the fucking form" I replied "I'm from the Liverpool docks, we built this city, who

are you?" I told them that I would just have to make one phone call and the port would come to a standstill. I said to them "Just fuck off back to where you came from." In the end they did, the ship was sent back and we traced its journey.

I told this story to RTS when we first met them, and they began to understand that we were all on the same side.

PB: *What help did RTS give you that the T&GWU couldn't?*

TN: Honesty and deliverance.

PB: *RTS were involved in the 1st anniversary protests in September 1996, can you say what happened?*

Mickey Tighe: We attended a meeting in Euston in the sheds. I mentioned the environment and the Columbian coal, which since we'd been sacked, was coming into the Liverpool docks. This coal is mined by eight year old children with their bare hands; we would never touch this coal when we were employed on the docks. I also mentioned that a leading Mersey Dock and Harbour Company executive owned a nuclear waste plant and wanted more of this horrible stuff to come into the port.

I explained that because of the anti trade union laws, there is no representative democracy any more. Because the T&GWU were obeying the anti union laws, they were unable to give us the full support which we needed.

While we were talking they were making banners and things for a protest they were about to do [editors' note: this was an action in support of the tube workers]. RTS decided to support us and they did a tremendous job. They came to Liverpool and occupied the docks on the anniversary of the dispute. This helped to boost us and give the dispute the publicity, which it needed and had lacked because of the media ban. The OSD [police Operational Support Group] were very hard on the RTS though, we had to help find them somewhere to stay. They really did a tremendous job for us.

PB: *Were there any political differences between you and how were they resolved?*

TN: "Politics" is never discussed at RTS meetings. They always discussed practice, like "how are you going to do the job?". To them, "politics" was a waste of time; I loved them for that.

PB: *Do you think the links you made with RTS were what has been termed as a "Precursor to Seattle?". That you had a direct influence?*

TN: Well, I told the west coast of the ILWU in the USA about the RTS and other similar groups. I said that they are good people and good to work with. The RTS were unique, they always did what they said they would do; they were lovely, lovely people.

[Editors' note: The International Longshore Workers Union is the dockers' sister union in the U.S.A. On the Dockers' Global Day of Action, January 20th 1997, in Seattle and in other ports along the U.S. West Coast, they shut down the port, uniting with environmentalists in solidarity with the Liverpool dockers].

Conclusion

Nearly three years later, the ILWU did it again – this time on an even grander scale. The ILWU were integrally involved in the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organisation on November 30th 1999. On that day, having shut down all the ports along the West Coast, they broke away from the main Trades Union march to join the environmentalists, just as the Liverpool dockers had done. When all of them were attacked and sprayed with tear gas by the police, longshore workers and environmentalists were all forced to help each other out. Jeff Engles of the ILWU described this tear gas as "love gas" .

Globalisation has changed the lives of everybody on the planet. This has been matched by a movement of resistance every bit as international. We have not reached the end of the story. Another world is possible.

Appendix A

The London Support Group and the Greater London Association of Trades Councils

RELATIONS between the London Support Group and the Greater London Association of Trades Councils were always delicate, due probably to some of the leadership of the latter rather than the delegates to that body. On 13 September 1997, GLATC secretary Bob Tennant was challenged by Kevin Hargreaves. Mr Tennant had claimed that the London Support Group was about to be wound up. He was obliged to concede that there had been a misunderstanding on his part and that this was not true. It was agreed that GLATC would send a mail out to branches for a funding appeal and for them to affiliate to the London Dockers' Support Group. Further, that Pauline Bradley would co-ordinate the campaign through her union role.

Within two days Bob Tennant sent both Pauline and Kevin a letter which suggested that unions would respond to our appeals only if they came directly from a union and not from the London Support Group. The LSG should therefore accept that it worked under the GLATC aegis. He said that his own Regional Committee of the T&GWU was one example in point.

This departure from policy created three replies. Kevin Hargreaves wrote on 20 September to restate the position as agreed and point out that the LSG was a body responsible to and authorised by the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards' Committee. He wanted the issue raised at the next meeting. As delegate from Haringey Trades Union Council, Pauline Bradley wrote two days later with the same points and giving details of the weekly meeting. Finally Bobby Morton wrote from the Liverpool Port Shop stewards' Committee, again putting the official position and stressing the need for unity in support work.

The end result of the crisis was a letter from Pete Turner, President of GLATC. He wrote to all trades council secretaries and delegates distributing direct debit mandates for the Dockers Quid fund, an appeal for donations and details of the sale of the T-shirts. He suggested that a direct contact could be made and that a speaker's tour would be arranged.

Appendix B: The historical background – by Alan Woodward

In Britain, generalised trades union organisation in the docks began in 1889 with the New Unionism expansion of that year. Prior to this date, only the skilled stevedores who loaded ships had been strongly organised. For the next thirty years, many unions of 'unskilled' dockers existed, largely on a regional basis, expanding during the 'Great Unrest' years (which included the transport strike of 1911) just before World War One. In 1922, nearly all of these unions joined together to form the new Transport & General Workers Union.

At that time, only the 'craft' workers remained outside the T&GWU. But their ranks were soon augmented by a mass desertion as thousands of T&GWU members rejected a pay cut negotiated by their new General Secretary, Ernest Bevin. The story of the unofficial strike, strongest in London and Hull, was made complicated by the Communist Party rank and file leadership [2]. The new members formed a powerful Dockers' Section of the National Amalgamated Stevedores, Lightermen, Watermen and Dockers, based mainly in London, and usually referred to as the NASD.

Old Labour

The next significant period was the unofficial strike movement that characterised the years of Labour government from 1945 to 1951. During this period, over 14 million days of strike action were recorded in all industries, nearly 3 million of them in the docks. Five disputes accounted for about seventy percent of this total. Like the overwhelming majority of strikes at this time, they were unofficial; indeed there was not one single official national strike in Britain from 1933 to 1953, despite the decline of unemployment after 1940. During the Attlee Government, the close relationship between union leaders and labour politicians was clearly a major factor in industrial relations – members' wishes were relegated to second priority

Of the five strikes mentioned above, four resulted less from relations with employers than from antagonistic relationships between T&GWU full-time officials and the members. These disputes were in London, at least one involving solidarity action in a dispute between Canadian seamen and ship-owners. Perhaps the best known concerned the government's decision to prosecute seven unofficial strike leaders, including three from Liverpool. This unsuccessful venture resulted in the belated end of the wartime anti-strike legislation, the notorious Order 1305. This refusal to lift repressive anti-union legislation was to be repeated in 1997. At this time the Attlee administration

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[2] See *The Unofficial National Docks Strike of 1923* by Tony Topham in *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* no 2, University of Keele, p. 27

used troops against a wide range of strikers, usually with TUC support, dockers being especially targeted. The typical strike would start in one port and spread to others, like the successful Canadian dispute that began in Avonmouth and Liverpool before going to London [3].

National Dock Labour

A big change came with the introduction of the National Dock Labour Scheme in 1947, when around 78,000 dockers in 86 ports became 'regulated' employees. The employers unchallenged right to hire and fire was replaced by joint union-management labour boards. Men were given daily work or fallback pay, but the principle of casual labour as such was retained and there was a high strike rate over issues such as health and safety, overtime, working conditions, pay itself and, most importantly, over what was often seen as the incorporation of union full time officers into management boards. As opposed to direct workplace representatives, only full-time officials were recognised. The perceived close relationship of these officials with the bosses – particularly over disciplinary issues – caused ill-feeling, mainly towards the T&GWU.

The NASD attitude to a joint disciplinary function of the Dock Labour Board was much more sympathetic to the members. Its structure was more democratic, with officials elected instead of being appointed. The rank and file membership's control over the union was much greater. The NASD was expelled from the National Dock Labour Board in 1949, over its support for Canadian workers.

The rank and file flexes its muscles

In 1954 and 1955, there occurred two major strikes, with the 'white' union card T&GWU losing some 10,000 members – one sixth of its dock membership. The first strike arose out of the DLB imposition of compulsory overtime and was called by the mainly 'blue' carded NASD, which largely meant London. Because many groups of dockers had members of both white and blue unions, the dispute involved all dockers. Moreover many members of the Transport union in London supported the strike. But more significantly so did the majority of its members in the Northern Ports – Hull, Liverpool, Birkenhead, Garston, and Manchester [4]. NASD membership had only been 7,000 in 1954.

Feeling against the Transport Union was very high in Hull and Liverpool, especially over lack of union approval in previous strikes. Thousands of these

[3] The best source for these strikes in undoubtedly the Solidarity pamphlet 19, *The Labour Government vs. the Dockers 1945 -51* by Maurice Brinton. This is a 1966 reprint of an earlier article and looks at others workers as well.

[4] See Bill Hunter, *They Knew Why They Fought*, for an extensive and political account of the NASD/T&GWU situation, and the autobiographical *Lifelong Apprenticeship – the life and times of a revolutionary*, volume 1, 1920 -1959

men joined the NASD, despite the TUC 1939 Bridlington ruling on union membership. Though these disputes have been termed an 'inter-union' dispute, they can more correctly be characterised as another stage in the rank and file revolt against the authoritarian and right wing T&GWU leadership which had used the TUC procedures for inter union disputes.[5]

Another round

A second strike the following year occurred when the Dockers' section of the NASD, after recruiting T&GWU members in the Northern ports, struck for recognition. This time many rank and file members in the majority union opposed the minority unions' action and even the General Secretary of that union, Dickie Barrett, dissociated him from the action – under TUC pressure, it must be said. The unofficial Liverpool Port Workers Committee called on T&GWU members to resist the action, which it said would damage the Labour Party at the coming general election.

Communists and Trotskyists

The situation was made more complex by the political affiliations of the unions' leaderships. Originally many unofficial leaders in the T&GWU had been Communists but the CPGB had backed the T&GWU right wing line on various issues and this had lead to expulsions from the union and the Communist Party. Important rank and file T&GWU leaders like Ted Dickens and C H Saunders had been expelled, as had the Trotskyist Harry Constable. The CP men joined the NASD, which had Barrett and Albert Timothy in the CP, but also had a strong contingent of Trotskyists. Among these were equally influential leaders like Bert Aylward in the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party and, after its 1947 dissolution, *The Club* of Gerry Healy.

Aylward had been expelled from the CP in 1945 and had been the key man in the Liverpool recruitment, where Peter Kerrigan and Bill Johnson were strike leaders and Trotskyists. Bill Hunter was a local Trotskyist organiser with a substantial following; he subsequently wrote on the dispute[6]. There was a powerful current of anti-communism in the Northern Ports. Hence a political dimension was also present, with the CP, in spite of union persecution, supporting the T&GWU. But the key issue was to be effective union representation.

These disputes had some unfortunate consequences. In 1959, the NASD were expelled from TUC. The union also lost its general secretary – one of few

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[5] See *Inter-union Conflict in the Docks 1954-55* by Jim Phillips, in HSIR no 1, University of Keele, p. 107, for the conventional view. This article is a generally useful chronicle of the disputes.

[6] See Hunter above

union leaders who had strongly supported the rank and file on several occasions and had reportedly attended the unofficial London committee [7]. The bitterness about the Transport Union blocking of NASD plus the challenge to compulsory union membership had led to about one third of dockers in Liverpool, Birkenhead and Hull not being in any union by 1963, according to the later Devlin Report [8]. A certain estrangement between the NASD leadership on the Mersey and the Transport Union membership in London existed among the rank and file for many years afterwards. Antipathy toward the Transport Union officials was of course much stronger.

On becoming Assistant General Secretary of the Transport Union, Jack Jones attempted to re-build the unity between the official and unofficial leadership in the North by dismissing a number of full time officers [9], but the rank and file fought hard for its rights. The membership of the NASD on the Mersey was notorious for the expression of its independence, according to one writer [10].

The Devlin Report and casual labour

Meanwhile, the growing power of the unofficial shop stewards and the capacity to take industrial action against appalling conditions caused a good deal of concern in government circles. The Devlin Report resulted in a phased modernisation programme starting with the long awaited end of casual labour in all registered ports. A second phase was to bring in negotiated Agreements in ports that would end the defensive practices, but also introduce productivity arrangements and tighten up work discipline. There was to be no nationalisation, and the growing number of unregistered ports would not be included. The defects in the plan, with the regular annual decreases in dockers' numbers, are all too obvious in retrospect. The exclusion of private ports was to be crucial in 1989.

This was not exactly what the dockers had demanded and there was a six week long successful strike in Liverpool. This paved the way for a strengthening of union organisation. Shop stewards were now recognised and the dockers' optimistic assessment is recorded in accounts of the following period [11].

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[7] See Philips, HSIR, p122

[8] See *Final Report of the Committee of Inquiry under the Rt. Hon. Lord Devlin into Certain Matters Concerning to the Port Transport Industry*, p. 38. Devlin looks at the 'British problem' of unofficial strikes and workplace organisation and predictably blames the liaison committees and agitation, rather than the real problem of compliant union officials and poor conditions of work.

[9] See Jack Jones, *Union Man*, p.s 163 and 182

[10] See D F Wilson, Dockers*: the impact of industrial change*, p. 129

[11] Perhaps the most explicit account is in *Solidarity on the Waterfront – the Liverpool lock-out of 1995/96* by Michael Lavalette and Jane Kennedy, a revolutionary socialist analysis of the opening year of the dispute.

The Pentonville Five

The celebrated strike in the docks in 1972, one of five disputes that contributed to the major industrial crisis of that year, was over the challenge to jobs presented by containerisation. The dispute originated in St Helens, with the action of an employer, Heaton Transport, taking legal action against dockers. Solidarity action at the East London depot at Chobham Farm resulted in the imprisonment of the Pentonville Five – members of the two unions – and spontaneous strike action that approached general strike proportions. The subsequent victory of the dockers and the humiliation of the Tory Government and their legislation the Industrial relations Act are well known, marking a high point of dockers' solidarity and confidence[12].

Roots of the 1995 dispute

The roots of the 1995-1998 dispute can be found in the offensive against organised labour launched by the Thatcher governments. The intention was to break the power of shop floor organisation, especially the shop stewards. The tactic was to create mass unemployment, separate out each group of workers – miners, printers, car workers, etc – and to use the repressive anti-union laws as part of a three-pronged attack. Throughout the 1980s, the Tories worked to the Ridley Plan and secured a series of victories, as the prevailing reformism of the trade unions reeled before this determined onslaught. The miners' defeat in 1985 was the most spectacular and hard fought of these contests.

In the docks, the crisis came in 1989, with the abolition of the Dock Labour scheme. The Liverpool dockers had used the two decades since Devlin to build up official union representation as strongly as its unofficial predecessor. In the crisis, the union leadership of the T&GWU hesitated and prevaricated before the legislative change. But the dockworkers themselves walked out nationwide. With private enterprise greedy for the profitable extension of their empire, and the ever helpful police enforcers, the dockers were finally defeated. Almost everywhere, workplace organisation was destroyed, union representatives de-recognised, mass redundancies forced through and the National Port Shop Stewards Committee effectively dissolved.

The crunch delayed in Liverpool

Only in Liverpool was there a temporary compromise. The new employers, the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, were forced to keep the union, despite a big loss of jobs from 1,100 to 500. But ultimately, the employers would be satisfied with nothing less than the destruction of trade union organisation. With this in mind, they began a long process of a steady reduction in working

[12] See Dave Lyddon and Ralph Darlington, *Glorious Summer*.

conditions, harassment of dockers and persecution of their representatives. The T&GWU itself broke its own rules in order to comply with management.

The 1994 Agreement, imposed by management, ended the pattern of regular shifts, and imposed wage cuts averaging £6,000 a year. This was accompanied by the establishment of privately owned contract companies. The dockers remained resilient in face of the vicious machinations of the MDHC – yet the scene was set for the final confrontation that everyone knew was coming.

Further reading

An excellent account of the 1995-1998 dispute is by the award-winning journalist John Pilger:

> John Pilger, 1998. 'The Dockers'. *Hidden Agendas.* London: Vintage Books, pp. 334-358.

Another historical account is:

> Les Levidow and Anne Costello, 2001. 'UK Flexploitation Strategies: Lessons from Europe'. www.commoner.org.uk/Flex3.pdf This article can also be found in *Soundings*, Autumn 2001.

The dispute is placed in a wider context in:

> Anne Gray, 2004. *Unsocial Europe. Social Protection or Flexploitaiton?* London: Pluto Press.

For an account written during the dispute, see:

> Michael Lavalette and Jane Kennedy, 1996. *Solidarity on the Waterfront. The Liverpool lock out of 1995/96.* Wirral: Liver Press.

Many issues of the *Workers' Press* (which ceased publication during the dispute) featured invaluable reports of events as they unfolded, as did *The Weekly Worker* and (brilliantly but less frequently) *Earth First!* An important source is *The Dockers' Charter*, published by the dockers throughout the dispute.

See also John Pilger's articles in *The Guardian* during the dispute, and Ken Loach's television documentary, *The Flickering Flame.*

Many songs were composed during the dockers' dispute. See:

> Pauline Bradley and Tommy Willows, in press. *Songs from the Liverpool Dockers' Dispute – 1995-1998.* London: Survivors' Poetry.

For the 'human revolution', see:
Chris Knight, 1995. *Blood Relations: Menstruation and the origins of culture.* London and New Haven: Yale University Press.

LONDON SUPPORT GROUP
FOR THE
LIVERPOOL
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RECLAIM OUR PORT - VICTORY TO THE DOCKS