

MAY DAY 1996

The most important task: Reconstruction of working-class internationalism

BY CLIFF SLAUGHTER
WRP secretary

MAY DAY is our day, the day of the working class in its international unity. It is the day when we celebrate the worldwide struggle for the socialist future.

On this same day we pay homage to the many thousands who have given their lives in that struggle. We send our messages of solidarity to those in dozens of countries who still today are not afraid to face imprisonment, torture

and death at the hands of repressive dictatorships that defend the rule of capital.

On this May Day 1996 we can mark the beginning of the most important task of our time: reconstruction of working-class internationalism.

On this day many who are fighting for socialism will resolve to carry out over many months the hard work which has now begun to achieve that aim.

The living proof of that

reconstruction is before our eyes:

■ In the fight of the Liverpool dockers;

■ In the mass movements last December in France;

■ In the determined struggle over three years to bring workers' aid to Bosnia;

■ In the international support for Nigerian trade unionists and for the Ogoni people in their struggle against international capital, in their battle against the

Shell multinational and the military dictatorship that protects its interests;

■ In the turn of Bangladesh's super-exploited textile workers to international support;

■ In the resistance to the abuse of elementary rights, to immigration controls and deportation by millions of workers who have been forced by poverty and oppression to seek work in the US and Western Europe.

Lessons from Liverpool

THE Liverpool dockers were faced with an employer and a government intent on wiping out any future for their children on top of destroying their security, livelihood and basic rights.

The same ruling class had abolished the rights to strike and picket for solidarity action. But a momentous decision was taken by the dockers, with lessons for the whole movement: They turned resolutely to the **international working class**.

■ **First lesson:** There is a ready response. Within weeks not only did international financial support begin to flood in, with pledges of international solidarity action. It was possible to organise an international dockers' conference with delegates from 15 countries and 17 ports within weeks.

■ **Second lesson:** The enemy is not this or that employer or even this or that government. It is capital. The casualisation of labour, destruction of employment rights and anti-union, anti-strike laws have become the rule everywhere.

Capital's offensive

BEHIND this is the one great fact that drives forward the reconstruction of working-class internationalism. The last 20 years of capitalist offensive — anti-union laws, the clawing back of all past gains — is forcing the same struggles on workers in all countries.

This offensive comes not from capital's strength, but from crisis, from weakness. For many years capital could concede 'reforms' and 'welfare state' benefits to workers in the major capitalist countries on the basis of subjecting the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America to unspeakable conditions and brutal oppression.

Now finance capital can no longer be satisfied with this. Unequaled advances in technique should make for abundance and prosperity for all, but cannot so long as capital rules. Under that rule the only function of these great productive powers is the accumulation of more capital.

Capital operates globally. It searches worldwide for raw materials to plunder and for human labour-power at the cheapest price. Peoples of every nation increasingly

work to pay for the rates of interest and profit demanded by the great banks and monopolies.

Common enemy

RECOGNITION of the common enemy, the common struggle, lies behind the special enthusiasm with which Liverpool mass meetings welcomed delegates from other countries. The same enthusiasm exploded at great mass meetings in France in December, when messages of support from workers in Germany and elsewhere flooded in.

These beginnings of internationalist reconstruction open the way to a real political alternative, a real step forward to building a world party for socialism.

Solidarity

INTERNATIONAL working-class unity and socialist victory are the only alternative. Social democracy and Stalinist 'socialism in one country' have failed the working class.

The disintegration of Stalinist regimes and parties, the social democrat and Labourite open abandonment of any claim to represent workers, are no loss. These collapses provide the political conditions to rapidly break down barriers between workers in different countries.

The solidarity movements already begun are highly political, not just industrial — they are directed against the capitalist class as a class. They have begun to create a network and a vanguard which are the framework of new parties, part of the world party for socialist revolution.

That is the content of today's conference (27 April), called by the Liverpool dockers, of their supporters. It will be the essence of the international conference on 8 and 9 June called by the International Trade Union Solidarity and the African Liberation Support campaigns.

The Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International and the WRP/Workers Press pledge this May Day to devote all our resources to this fight for a new party, built out of the conscious coming together of all these international struggles.

We send our greetings to workers all over the world engaged in this common fight against capital. Everywhere it begins as a defence of the rights of wage-slaves and passes to the offensive: the fight for world socialism.

Textile workers' victory

BY JACKIE VANCE

LOW-PAID workers in north-east London have been given a tremendous boost by another victory for trade unionism at Euroscene Textiles following on from JJ Fast Food and Jenny Textiles.

Workers at the Euroscene factory, Harringay, have got their boss to apologise to a worker and to recognise union representation and make some improvements in conditions after six days of strike action and picketing (see picture).

They had been on strike from 17 April when the factory boss physically attacked a machinist who was then sacked.

The sacked worker was on piece work — being paid only for each garment produced — and was replacing a machine part to enable him to earn money when the boss threw a chair at him and screamed abuse.



Immediately over half of the 25 employees, who are mainly Kurdish and Turkish and members of the Transport and General Workers' Union, walked out and set up a picket line.

Very few of the other workers who were not union members continued to work and replacement workers whom the boss contacted refused to pass the picket line.

Textile workers from other

factories which the strikers leafleted joined the picket line — as did teachers at an adjacent school, the Vale, who collected £80 with the promise of more after hearing a strike delegation.

Euroscene makes expensive jackets for the Top Man retail chain. As well as demanding the reinstatement of the sacked machinist the strikers drew attention to the rotten wages and

conditions. Those not on piece work were paid £2 to £2.75 an hour.

There was no proper place to eat; no air conditioner, fridge or oven.

The picket line at Vale Road was usually a lively affair with constant chanting and Kurdish folk dancing and music.

The North-East London Textile TGWU branch can be contacted at 72 West Green Road, London N15 5NS.

International Trade Union Solidarity Campaign — African Liberation Support Campaign
Conference address: PO Box 18, Epsom, KT18 7YR, Britain. Tel/Fax: +441372 721 550

AN INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' CONFERENCE

- Trade unions independent of the state and the employers
- Democracy in the trade unions • Workers' internationalism

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

Saturday-Sunday 8-9 June, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Near Holborn. Start 10.30am Saturday, 10am Sunday.

This important conference is convened jointly by the ITUSC and ALISC. It will follow the 'Africa Month' here in Britain. We will be discussing and deciding how to take forward workers' international solidarity in the coming struggles. *Delegates will be travelling from Africa, India, Bangladesh, South America, Russia, Ukraine and eastern Europe.*

Therefore, rather than have a set attendance fee we are asking you to give whatever you can towards the cost of the conference and the fares of those delegates. A draft resolution will be sent to you, and we ask you to keep in touch during the preparation of the conference and let us have any resolutions and/or written material on the issues you wish to discuss.

US dockers refuse to discharge scab cargo

DOZENS of Los Angeles longshore workers walked off a Japanese vessel which was attempting to unload cargo from Liverpool.

A picket line had been established by two striking Liverpool dockers, Bobby Moreton and Tony Nelson, who were on the US West Coast to help build up support for their strike and to raise funds for their families.

Their picket brought all the US dockers off the ship and truck drivers were backed up for over

two miles from the terminal waiting to load and discharge cargo. The entire terminal was shut down.

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) on the West Coast and the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) on the US East Coast have backed the Liverpool men wherever they have put up a picket.

This latest action in Los Angeles will have a direct effect on the Mersey Docks and Harbour Com-

pany (MDHC) who fired the 500 striking dockers for refusing to cross a picket line six months ago in Liverpool and for fighting casualisation in the port.

West Coast dockers have themselves been fighting efforts to open up non-union port operations and the union-busting operations in Mexico.

With US support the Mexican government has privatised ports and locked up union halls in Veracruz and elsewhere.

Shipping companies hope to

break the back of the ILWU by undercutting the unionised ports of California and those in British Columbia in Canada.

This latest picket is sure to inspire further support on top of the 27 April conference in Liverpool and the planned city-wide strike there on 1 May.

The international response to the call from the Liverpool dockers is growing evidence that worldwide dockers are seeing the great need for direct international solidarity.

Scottish TUC supports Liverpool dockers

BY TERRY BROTHERSTONE

THIS strike is 'special': it is unlawful under the trade union legislation of this government', transport union deputy general secretary Jack Adams told the 99th Scottish TUC annual conference, as he urged delegates to back the six-month-old dispute of the Liverpool dockers.

An emergency motion condemning the actions of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company and calling on 'affiliated organisations to offer support to the Family Hardship Fund' was unanimously passed at the conference in Edinburgh last week.

and Tory minister Lord Lindsay. The latter is in charge of something at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

While the rambling, pink-faced aristo said something (but what?) about the MCC (Mad Cow Crisis), Robertson was quite clear. He delivered the pure Blair gospel: Expect no favours from us, colleagues.

Delegates listened with remarkable politeness but much preferred shadow foreign secretary Robin Cook. To adapt a W.S. Gilbert Lyric, he said 'nothing in particular but said it very well.'

Mersey docks dispute motion carried by the Scottish TUC:

That this Congress notes that, following the breakdown in the latest talks between Mersey Docks and Harbour Company and the Transport and General Workers' Union over the Liverpool docks dispute, this dispute has reached new depths of hardship for the sacked workers and their families. We note that:

In seconding the motion, Scottish miners' leader Peter Nielson remarked: 'My mind flashes back to 1984.' He detailed parallels with the miners' strike and called for 'total support' for the dockers in their 'honourable and principled struggle'.

An STUC insider later said privately that he could not recall another occasion in recent times when the congress had so openly backed an unofficial and technically illegal dispute.

There was no discussion of the motion but several speakers referred to the dockers in other debates as a way of signalling opposition to the general tone of the conference which wavered between 'New Labour' and 'wait and see'.

Vying for the 'Low Point of the Week' award were shadow Scottish secretary George Robertson

- The dispute has gone on for over six months;
 - The union side has made every effort to come to an honourable settlement; and,
 - The TGWU's demand for all workers to receive their jobs back is a fair one.
- We call on the Scottish TUC to:
- Write to Mersey Docks and Harbour Company condemning its action;
 - Call on affiliated organisations to offer support to the Family Hardship Fund.

Young Bosnians hope for the future

BY DANIEL ROBERTSON

The horror — and hopes — of war-torn Bosnia were brought home to a Bosnia Solidarity Campaign public meeting in London on 16 April (picture).

Bob Myers, of Workers Aid, said that recently, driving from Zenica to Tuzla, they had picked up a woman walking along the road. In the car she suddenly burst into tears.

The day before, an armed man, a Croat, had stopped her and asked her name. When she gave a Muslim name he shot her two-year-old child. Her husband had been killed in the war, she said, 'the boy is all I have left.'

By contrast, the following day in a cafe in Banovice, young people, some in army uniform, were singing along to a guitar, eating and drinking together.

'This is Bosnia,' a friend said, pointing around the tables — 'Serb, Muslim, Croat, Serb, don't know, doesn't care, . . .' Just then the door opened and a newcomer entered. 'At last, we're complete', laughed the friend. 'He's a Slovene.'

Branka Magas, of the Alliance to Defend Bosnia-Herzegovina, who recently visited Sarajevo and Mostar, described the destruction left by the war. The Dayton agreement appeared to unite the country, but also formalised its divisions. Its effect was to reward Serb aggression and



genocide. IFOR had stood by while Chetniks destroyed areas of Sarajevo.

Bob Myers spoke of the partisans' struggle and how their aims had been betrayed, but lived on in Bosnia's fight for a multi-ethnic life.

Relating the war and nationalism to capitalism, Bob said before the war British Steel had been brought in to advise on the future of the Zenica steel works, and recommended that 70 per cent of the workforce be sacked.

It was the same in Belgrade. Without

splitting the workers it couldn't be done. But optimism survived in Bosnia. Those wishing to divide the country had a difficult job. The question posed in Bosnia — 'Is there a future for multi-ethnicity?' — concerned our future too, he reminded us.

A lively discussion finished on a positive upbeat note when two young Bosnian women spoke, one citing a friend's recent return to Tuzla, where young people were still mixing and singing each others' songs. Both women confidently asserted their belief in a multi-ethnic future.

Cheques and postal orders for the Liverpool dockers should be made out to: Merseyside Dockers Shop Stewards' Committee. They should be sent to J. Davies, Secretary/Treasurer, 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool L6 4AS.

The Liverpool portworkers' paper, the 'Dockers Charter' costs 50p (20p unwaged) and is available from the same address (add money for postage). Bulk orders by arrangement, phone 0151-207 3388.

South east unions say: 'No blank cheque for Labour'

BY MARY IDE

SPEAKER after speaker went to the rostrum of the South East Region TUC (SERTUC) AGM last weekend to demand Labour and the TUC commit themselves to repeal all anti-union laws.

At the end of the debate on TUC general secretary John Monks's very dull speech, Mick Martin, AEEU engineering union district secretary for west London and SERTUC chair, said:

'Yes, we all want to see the defeat of the Tories, we all want to see a Labour victory — but we must make it quite clear that they

will have no blank cheque from the trade unions.'

The SERTUC pensioners' committee chair declared that it was possible to use pensioners in industrial disputes. Pensioners can't be sued, nor can any union be taken to court because pensioners carry out picketing at the site of the strike, or as secondary pickets. 'Why not ask us for help?', he suggested.

Also discussed was the length of time people are forced to work so as to be able to earn a living. The SERTUC transport committee urged all trade unions to make excessive hours a Health and Safety issue in all industries.

East End anger at death in custody

BY BOB ARCHER

MPs, supporters and friends of the family of Ibrahim Sey gathered in East Ham last Thursday for memorial prayers before his body was flown to The Gambia for burial.

Ibrahim was killed in police custody at Ilford police station on 16 March this year. He had been brought to the ground, handcuffed and sprayed with CS gas.

He had earlier submitted peacefully to arrest at his home in Romford Road, Manor Park, and had been taken to the police station in the company of a friend.

Over 100 people, many of them drawn from the black community in Newham, crowded into the event, which quite spontaneously took on the appearance

of a protest meeting. Relatives and family friends spoke simply but very powerfully of their grief and bewilderment at the death of a peaceful and religious man who was well respected.

Ibrahim was a well known soccer player in The Gambia and had been selected to play for the national team.

Aliou Sey, his brother, pledged that he would continue the campaign to get to the truth about Ibrahim's death when the family returned from the funeral.

'His death will not be in vain', he affirmed.

Muslim and Christian religious leaders spoke out passionately against inhumanity, repression and discrimination.

Labour MPs Stephen Timms and Bernie Grant were strongly applauded when they pledged that deaths in custody would not

be allowed to go unquestioned and that the future of tests with CS gas sprays should be reconsidered.

But it was local anti-racist campaigners with a long and honourable record of fighting against discrimination in east London who really expressed the strength of feeling at the event.

Existence

Cilius Victor of the Shiji Lapite Memorial Committee recalled how he had only heard of Shiji's existence after his death in police custody:

'This is not a nice way to learn about the existence of another human being', he said angrily. Now the same thing had happened with Ibrahim Sey.

Assad Rehman recalled how many times he had come to

mourn a black victim of violent death at the hands either of the police or of white racists. 'Every time I think, I hope: "no more! This will be the last!" He called for unity of the whole black community in Newham.

The Ibrahim Sey Memorial Campaign has the following demands:

- CS spray trials to be halted immediately.
- The officers responsible for Ibrahim's killing to be suspended immediately until an independent public inquiry into his death takes place.

The Memorial Campaign is circulating a petition to the home secretary and seeking affiliations. The address is: Ibrahim Sey Memorial Campaign, PO Box 273, Forest Gate, London E7.

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British section of the Workers International (to Rebuild the Fourth International)

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Marx and these leaders in many ways constituted the axis of the work of the International and, once more, there are important lessons to be drawn from this experience for today's tasks.

If Marx was at the heart of the First International, then his life-long friend and collaborator, Frederick Engels, was at the centre of the preparations for the founding of the Second International in 1889. So was Marx's daughter, Eleanor, a tireless and courageous worker in London's East End.

She became an organiser for the new Gasworkers' Union and taught Will Thorne, one of the prominent leaders of the New Unionism, to read and write.

The struggles in the East End of London had a decisive part to play in the formation of the new International, as did the emergence of mass trade unionism among dockers and other groups of workers.

The outburst of mass trade unionism was inspired by the struggle of the most exploited sections of the working class, women in particular. It was thanks largely to Engels that the significance of these events was understood and acted on.

These developments clearly have much contemporary relevance, given the long struggle of the Liverpool dockers and the awakening of trade unionism among some of the lowest paid workers in parts of London today.

We cordially invite you to our May Day lectures. Anybody interested in the past and future of the movement is warmly invited to participate in the discussion.



Victorious dockers greeting the end of the 1889 strike, one of the most significant in the history of British trades unionism

International Trade Union Solidarity Campaign

On this May Day — the workers' day, 1996 — we send our warm comradely greetings to workers and their families throughout the world.

We send a message of solidarity and support to workers in struggle.

We particularly convey our special respects and pledge of solidarity to the following labour activists:

Frank Kokori — General Secretary of Nigerian Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers, detained since 4 July 1994 following the strike against the military dictatorship in Nigeria.

Milton Dabibi — General Secretary of the Nigerian Oil and Natural Gas Workers, arrested in February 1996 and detained without charge.

12 Trade unionists in Mexico City — alleged leadership of Mexican bus drivers union — SATAUR-100, imprisoned for claiming independent unionism.

Jorge Garcia Ramirez and Ruben Ventura Galvn — Human rights lawyers on indefinite hunger strike in support of the SATAUR-100 detainees.

Bongani Mkhungo — ITUSC comrade, in hiding with his family in South Africa following a violent physical attack whilst leaf-letting the COSATU anniversary rally in Durban in support of striking Transkei nurses and calling for COSATU to end its political alliance with the Government of National Unity.

We salute you all!

We in the ITUSC commit ourselves to work unceasingly for the establishment of an international and internationalist association of organised workers and communities of resistance.

United with our fellow workers worldwide we say on May Day 1996 — the class struggle is as alive as ever it was, and together we have a world to win — for socialism!!

On international workers' day:
Workers of the World Unite!

CROYDON
TRADE UNION COUNCIL

FOUNDED IN 1890

representing 20,000 trade unionists in Croydon

Kashmir International Front

May Day greetings to Workers Press readers!

May Day is even more important than 20 years ago because it is now understood that workers should, as Marx said, be united from North, South, East and West. The natural historical growth which will ultimately create one world will only be achieved through the class struggle.

Kashmiri workers also struggle along the same lines in alliance with the working class of India and Pakistan against narrow-minded nationalism, fascism and fundamentalism, which are tools in the hands of the ruling class to divide the workers. The workers of the Indian sub-continent have come to realise that India was divided to avoid questions of class and nationalities, and that is why we have faced crisis for the last 47 years. The confrontation between states is actually against the working class and poor classes.

May Day greetings to all Workers Press readers from

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