

Lessons of the Liverpool docks strike

# "Workers of the world unite!"

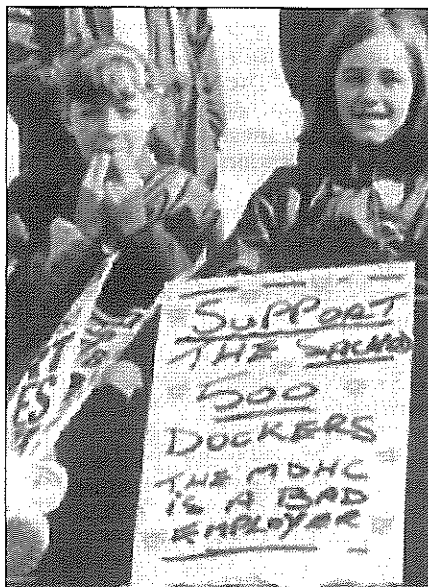
IN THESE modern times of "global capitalism", "global communication" and "global culture" the one thing that's supposed to have disappeared forever is the idea of international working class solidarity.

It might not be fashionable enough for the world-wide Net but it's making a comeback nonetheless. The occasion: the Liverpool dockers strike.

Unable to spread their dispute in this country because of the Tories' viciously restrictive anti-union laws, which rule out all forms of solidarity action, the Liverpool portworkers have had to appeal for solidarity action from dockers world-wide.

The support that they have received has played a major part in sustaining their action for nearly five bitter months.

But more than that. The international solidarity that has poured in has underlined just how up to date and thoroughly modern that old slogan is.



Workers of the world unite! Or, as a US docker's leader put it, "Capital organises internationally. So should labour."

## Stop the return to casual labour

THE Liverpool docks strike is all about stopping the port bosses' drive to return to the bad old days of casual labour, argues Jimmy Nolan from the Port Shop Steward Committee.

The use of casual labour in the port since 1989 has increased dramatically. In September, Torside — an agency working for MDHC — wanted to sack 20 young, full-time dockworkers and replace them with casuals. An official ballot was organised by the TGWU. Torside then threatened to sack the whole workforce of 80 people. Before the deadline for industrial action, they rescinded their decision, and accepted that 80 full-time jobs could still be found in the Port.

Within days, Torside engineered an industrial dispute by instantly dismissing five dockworkers, and the rest of the workforce walked out in solidarity. They began picketing the main docks, although without an official ballot. Dockworkers, many of whom have sons among the pickets, refused to cross picket lines until all 80 Torside workers were reinstated.

The Mersey Docks and Harbour Company then sacked all 500 workers in the Port. The Port of Liverpool has profits of over £38 million. Turnover and tonnages are now the highest ever recorded in its history.

The majority of dockworkers in the Port have, on average, thirty to forty years' continuous service in the industry. They have now all been dismissed. The situation is the culmination of years of bad management, in which the dockworkers have been treated in an appalling manner. They now find themselves without work in a city already beleaguered by unemployment.

● Send messages of support and money to Jim Davies, Dockworkers Strike, c/o TGWU, Transport House, Islington, Liverpool L2.

## A "living-death" offer

Mick Carden from Merseyside Dock Workers' Strike Committee spoke to *Workers' Liberty* about the strike, the international solidarity and the employer's latest "offer".

THE Mersey Dock Company has made an offer to 329 of their former employees.

But the offer also applies to the 80 Torside dockworkers and also 12 workers who were employed by a satellite company, Nelson Stevedoring.

That leaves out a number of other dockworkers who are in dispute. But the company is ignoring them.

The offer is £25,000 to the 329 dockworkers. £1,000 each to Torside dockworkers and Nelson stevedores.

They will offer us 40 jobs in what is known as the general cargo area of the port. In our opinion, that's a living death.

They'll offer Torside — a company which supposedly went into liquidation — 30 jobs. Again, this is derisory.

The contract they had with the company which organises strike-breakers will end. The dock company will take on 150 or 160 of the strike-breakers that were recruited by Drake.

This offer is being dealt with by postal ballot, which the union has agreed to, as it wants to settle with the employer. We are

not happy with the way the ballot is being run — dockers in the different companies are being dealt with separately. Nevertheless, we are confident that there will be a rejection of the jobs offer. There should be a result by Wednesday 7 February.

Pickets are continuing and a demonstration was held in Liverpool on Saturday 3 February.

The international dimension to this dispute has been very important. We've had delegates who have gone to New York, Australia, Canada, Spain, Italy, Holland, Sweden, Israel. We've had practical solidarity. For example the US dock workers in New York put pressure on the bosses at ATL — which is one of the biggest lines which ship out to New York — to use another UK dock if the dispute was not sorted out. There was a 24 hour strike in New York in solidarity. We put up a picket of Liverpool dockers there and the dock workers exercised their constitutional right not to cross it!

In Australia on the major container line, ABC, which uses Liverpool dock, there were various boycotts and delays organised. Of course there has also been substantial financial help from all over the world as well. There's an international conference on 17 February in Liverpool. We want a rank-and-file-international organisation to come out of this.