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The End of the Liverpool Dockers Strike

Anarchist Communist Federation

1998

After 2 years 300 sacked Liverpool dockers agreed at a mass meeting by a majority of 4-1 to accept payoffs of £28,000 from the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, their employer. 80 dockers employed by Torside company, whose sacking had set off the strike will receive no payment. These pay-offs will mean that the strikers will receive no Jobseekers Allowance until each claimants savings fall below £8,000. Many are in debt after 2 years of strike, and will have to pay off mortgages etc.

When the strike first started, the dockers expected a massive show of solidarity from other workers. Recently the TGWU union in which the dockers are members, with Bill Morris at its head, sabotaged all solidarity action. Any motions for positive action from TGWU branches were ruled out of order by the union's president. In the New Year it was revealed that the dispute appeal fund was almost out of money, and that international solidarity actions had not escalated. 60 dockers had already accepted the offer, and since the last ballot in December, 20 more had accepted. Unfortunately, this is another defeat in a long line of defeats for the working class.

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This defeat was actively connived at by both the TGWU and by Labour. Indeed, the Mersey Docks Company expressed admiration for the union and for Bill Morris. The TGWU bureaucrats threatened the dockers that if they did not go along with the bosses' demands they would be sacked.

The dockers fought long and hard for two years. Local carworkers at Ford and Vauxhall failed to back the dockers. The police viciously attacked the mass pickets on several occasions. Above all, the dockers had to take on the union as well as the employers and the State. Now that the dockers have accepted the deal the T&G is being invited back into the docks. This is a sign of gratitude from the employers, and shows that they are confident that the union will police the workforce.

The T&G leadership actively sabotaged solidarity on an international level by sending letters abroad saying that the strike was not official and that any action would threaten the T&G. Because they realised that they were not getting support from the unions, the dockers began to seek the support of social movements outside of traditional labourist politics. For example they gained the support of Reclaim the Streets and other ecological groups. This was an important step in breaking with the old ways of carrying on a strike, both paralysing and ineffective. Such tactics can lead on to globalisation of struggle-that is a realisation that all struggles are connected and that there is a common enemy-capitalism and the State.