

# **BULLETIN**

# **May 2013**

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## **UK: March to defend health service**



**May 18 2013:** Thousands marched through the streets of London to oppose hospital closures and defy privatisation of the health service in the capital. Unite the Union Regional Secretary Pete Kavanagh (above top left) addressed the marchers at a Downing St. rally. Meanwhile the annual conference of the Head Teachers' union NAHT gave Education Secretary Michael Gove an extremely frosty reception and condemned his attacks on the education system

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## **Namibia**

The trade union for cabin crew working at Air Namibia (NCCU) issued this rousing statement for May Day 2013 which stands out for its class consciousness and combativity.

# **“Unite our movement and build strong structures ... mobilise our forces”**

From: Reginald Kock

**Viva NCCU VIVA!**

**Viva workers Viva!**

**Viva the spirit of never surrender!**

### ***Comrades,***

Every year on the first of May, since 1889, workers around the world gather to:

- **Celebrate our victories,**
- **Remember those who sacrificed their lives in the struggle,**
- **Rededicate ourselves to the struggle for freedom and socialism,**
- **Demonstrate our international solidarity as workers, and**
- **Unite against our oppressors and exploiters.**

But while we celebrate victory on May Day, we shall not be complacent. The struggle will continue. We will never stop representing the workers and campaigning for policies to address all the problems workers experience, particularly the massive levels of unemployment, the casualisation of labour and the declining quality of jobs.

We need to spend some time assessing our organizational, political and economic challenges.

And on this May Day 2013, and throughout Workers' Month, we are challenged to radically improve our role as the defender of workers' rights in the workplace, while at the same time fighting for the broader transformation of the economy, creation of decent jobs and the elimination of poverty and inequality.

We will not however change anything unless we unite our movement and build strong structures so we can mobilise our forces on the scale necessary to ensure workers are respected and share in the wealth of Namibia.

It has never been more vital to unite as a nation to protect and create employment by buying local and breaking the traditional cycle of exporting raw materials, allowing them to be converted into manufactured goods overseas and then imported back at a huge profit to foreign companies. We must seize the chance to build and strengthen our manufacturing sector.

In line with Tucna's May Day theme, **Decent Work** embraces both the need for more jobs and for better quality jobs. But we know that we will not win the fight for decent work without sustained pressure from the trade union movement.

We will not relax until we have put an end to poverty and the wide inequalities that disfigure our society.

We shall keep battling for honest, accountable government, and the stamping out of corruption and the use of state institutions for self-enrichment.

May Day too is a time to remember the debt we owe to all those who dedicated, and even sacrificed, their lives, so that we could live in peace and democracy. Namibian workers also rededicate themselves to solidarity with our fellow workers under attack in other parts of the world!

The best possible way to honour their memory will be to keep fighting for the kind of Namibia that they fought for, a country where no-one has to live in poverty, where there are jobs for all, and where all Namibians have equal access to health care, education, communication and all other essential services.

We are challenged to protect the day itself. Employers are eroding the significance of all our historic holidays, May Day, Women's Day, Human Rights Day – and even Independence Day – by forcing more and more of us to work. Some bosses do not even pay workers double time for working on a public day or give them a day off. We demand that these days be declared non-tradable public holidays, on which no employers, apart from those providing emergency services, can open their workplaces.

Comrades as president of the Namibia cabin crew union I wish you all a relaxed and memorable 2013 May Day.

**Viva decent work Viva!**

**Viva social dialogue Viva!**

**United we stand forever!**

***Reginald Kock***

President: Namibian Cabin Crew Union

## **UK: Unite the Union**

*The article reproduced here is based on a speech by Jim Kelly, London and Eastern Region Chair, Unite the Union, to a meeting of union activists*

# **Living in the world of Neo-liberalism**

From 1979 onwards successive governments have been dismantling the institutions of the welfare state and replacing them with those of a no-rights, deregulated market economy – what has become known as neo-liberalism.

On any indices – workers' rights, the gulf between rich and poor – we are increasingly living with the consequences of the rise of the neo-liberal state. For example child poverty:

- 3.6 million children live in poverty in the UK .
- Almost two-thirds (62 per cent) of children growing up in poverty live in a household where at least one member works.

Contrast this with the obscene profits and greed epitomised by the bankers. Rather than an aberration, poverty and greed are the foundation stones of the neo-liberals' creed. When the likes of Johnson or Osborne defend bankers' bonuses, they are then defending a principle on which the society they wish to rule is organised. Such people are out to privatise the world and they are winning.

In my opinion we are near the end game; the institutions of neo-liberalism are all but in place. (The papers in this pack on local government and the National Health Service [NHS] consider what these institutions will look like in 2015.) Such an assertion may seem alarmist. However, consider the raft of measures which were enacted on April 1st – welfare reforms, access to legal aid and of course the Health and Social Care bill, the privatising of the NHS. What other litmus test do we need to signal this change? We have arrived at this place due to the bankers' crisis, which facilitated a radical acceleration in the pace of change.

Some members of Unite viewed the crash, foolishly in my opinion, as sounding the death knell of neo-liberalism. Clearly it is a broken form of economics, but the idea the elites which rule us would simply give up on it with the concentration of wealth and power it affords them over working people was mistaken. Underneath the Condem (Conservative-Liberal Democrat) coalition's smokescreen of a "we are all in it together" – austerity Britain – we have seen the embedding of the deregulated market over the state and people.

### **Strikes campaigns and politics**

We are, then, at a tipping point, and the only question is what should we do about it? Our starting

point is necessarily to defend union rights and working people in any way we can – strikes, protests, campaigns, demonstrations all are the tools at our disposal. Unite members are fortunate in that our General Secretary has supported all such forms of activity, and your Region has been in the forefront of fighting back. We are supporting the strike by Hanson brick workers, and campaigning around Lewisham and Whittington Hospitals to give some of our most recent examples.

Unite is then fulfilling the basic principle that to defend our terms and conditions and our basic rights, such as the NHS, we have to struggle against those who wish to take them away – no one will do it for us. This point was summed up by Aneurin Bevan; when asked how long the NHS would last, he replied: "as long as people are ready to defend it".

Of course Unite members are not alone. Across the county many hundreds of thousands of people are standing up to defend their rights. These local groupings come together for demonstrations such as the May demonstration to defend the NHS, or the meeting of the Collation of Resistance.

Through strikes, demonstrations and campaigns across the county we have, then, the beginnings of a movement. However, if this is to go beyond being a protest movement, it can only culminate (outside of a general strike) in a movement to change the law.

We need legislation to get rid of the anti-union laws. We need legislation to end the reign of the loan sharks, legislation to throw out the privateers. So while some legal changes directly impact on the unions, we also need laws which impose wider social controls over the vagaries of the market.

Unite then is driven not just to protest, campaign and undertake strike action to defend and advance workers' rights, we along with the rest of the labour movement need wholesale legislative change which can only come about through a political party enacting such change through Parliament. It was this need which drove unions into politics at the turn of the 20th century and what is driving us now.

### **Labour Party and change**

Trade unions and working people need a party that is electable and is going to act in our interests in the here and now. Within Unite there are many who

are unsure about engaging in any form of political activity. It is incumbent on all of us who understand the pressing need for a political solution to explain to these members why they should actively support our union's policy.

There are also many Unite members – often the activists, - who have given up on Labour. You just need to consider New Labour's role in the march from the welfare state to neo-liberalism to understand this. While New Labour was never its architects, they put their shift in, working overtime to dismantle the post-war state and establish the institutions of neo-liberalism. For example Private Finance Initiative (PFI) or the NHS internal market, New Labour was up to its armpits in shaping the institutions and political consensuses that dominate the second decade of the new century.

Of course those Unite members opposed to working with Labour would say: "what do you expect?" However such policies did not come out of thin air – they came out of a struggle within the Party which Blair won and the left lost. (This morning's workshop run by Campaign for Labour Party Democracy [CLPD] told the story of how Labour Party democracy was won and lost.) There are however a number of problems with this "what did you expect" approach. Firstly it is fatalistic, as if the outcome was pre-ordained; second, it has seen them leave the field; if they were attempting to organise a factory would they give up on the war after losing a battle? To put it clearly, such a stance is not serious. Third, it fails to look reality squarely in the face. Someone needs to tell me what other party is there? So while we must talk and convince Unite members who are unsure that we should be undertaking any form of political activity, we should also ask all those disillusioned with Labour to stop sitting on their hands and get involved and help us in reconnecting with Labour.

In spite of these differences within Unite, our drive to reconnect with the Party has met with a number of initial successes most notably the election of Ed Miliband. It is also extremely welcome that the present Labour leadership have distanced themselves from some of the worst excesses of New Labour, not least with Ed Miliband's statement on the Iraq War.

However, despite the pronouncements by Labour's leaders, the banker's crisis and election defeat it is clear many in the party remain wedded to New Labour

There are many reasons why they cling to the wreckage: timidity, routinism, conservatism, lack of vision all play their part. However, behind the bureaucratic edifice that Blair created are human actors and for them it is a simple matter of self-preservation. The positions and lifestyles of those who put the shift in to build New Labour are absolutely dependent on the

continuation within the party of Blair's neo-liberal agenda. This grouping finds its main organisational expression in the Progress faction, who have rightly been described by our General Secretary as having zombie politics. This conservative faction is already dominant within the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP - Labour fraction in the Westminster parliament). The time, effort, and money they have spent on orchestrating the nomination of 'their' people as Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PSPs) show clearly their intention to try and continue their dominance of the PLP.

I should point out that many Unite members may well be supporters of Progress and of course that is their right. The position taken at this forum is based on union policy.

We are then, as in the 1980s, moving inexorably to a struggle over the direction, shape and function of the Labour Party. However this will not be a simple rerun, there are some very important differences.

Firstly the impact of the left losing that struggle in the 1980s not only shaped policy, it also enabled the imposition of a hugely undemocratic structure within the party. (Later this afternoon another CLPD-led workshop will look at how we can democratise the party.) Second, the bankers' crisis has not gone away; we are not as in the 1980s entering a period of prosperity. Third, rather than being at the start of the neo-liberal project, we are now at its conclusion. The need for Labour to act in the interest of working people is now more pressing. And finally, unlike in the 1980s, when the drive for change came from the Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs), and with some notable exceptions, the unions were on the side of the status quo, today the biggest union in the country is leading the demand for change.

### **What sort of change?**

The change we demand is necessarily deep and radical; it is no less than the rolling back of neo-liberalism and the reformation of a welfare state fit for the 21st century. Such whole-hearted reform needs to serve the interests not only of trade unions but also of working people. Indeed it is not possible to do one without the other. Let me give an example

Our General Secretary has said time and again: Labour needs to come up with the goods over ending the anti-union laws. However it would not be possible to have a return to union-friendly laws functioning within a sea of neo-liberalism.

Yet one may legitimately ask: where is such an alternative? One of the great successes of the Condem government has been not just to exclude any discussion of an economic and political alternative from public debate but to assert no such alternative exists. They are liars.

Our situation has parallels with events in the 1930s. Then a political consensus emerged around Keynesian economics which became the basis on which the post-war welfare state was built. In the 30's it was however excluded from power. Today economists, from Nobel laureates to Marxists have re-worked Keynes for the 21st century. However, today even more so than the 1930s, this alternative is excluded from public debate.

None of what we are asking for is difficult. We can all envision the headlines for a renewed welfare state. For example it would

- Enable unions to collectively bargain without the state being lined up against us
- Workers to be paid a decent rate of pay and treated with respect at work
- Universal health service
- Affordable housing
- Progressive taxation
- The gap between rich and poor will be closed
- A rebalanced economy
- A growth economy
- Splitting off of Casino banks setting up a national investment bank

While we could all write the script of a re-worked welfare state, we are faced with the following paradox; we are living in a broken economic system which goes under the heading austerity Britain. An alternative is possible which embeds workers' rights and empowers the poor and dispossessed - but is the Labour Party ready to break from neo-liberalism? In effect be bold enough to remake a new welfare state as they did in 1945? The conservative forces which dominate Labour make this highly unlikely without the intervention of Unite and others willing to fight for change.

## **London and Eastern; Reconnecting with Labour, building our movement**

Unite has made a start on reconnecting with its party. It is clearly a huge task and takes place on many fronts. Our leaders are engaged in a dialogue with the Labour leadership around policy, a dialogue in part based on the work Unite has done with the Institute of Employment Rights on the anti-union laws and the work undertaken by the think tank CLASS. Alongside this they will be meeting and supporting the development of the left wing within the PLP. Kate Osamor spoke this morning on our approach to parliamentary selections.

All of these activities are essential to reconnecting to the Party. However, if history shows us anything it is this; we cannot simply rely on leaders who will inevitably have to give weight to scare tactics and come under pressure from the likes of the Daily Mail. Instead we need to build a platform which holds them to account when the going gets tough.

An essential element in reconnecting with Labour is then an ability to hold the labour leaders to account. This can only be achieved through building a movement for change within the CLPs.

Today's forum begins the process of building this movement within our Region. The morning workshops will provide us with knowledge of how the party works and begins a discussion on how we can be the driving force in turning CLPS into vital and open organisations. The afternoon workshops will consider how we can promote key campaigning issues into the CLPs.

However the acid test for building our campaign will not be what is discussed and debated today rather it is ensuring we take the issues from this forum and make them happen in your CLP.

*Jim Kelly*

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BALAZS NAGY responds to "Living in the world of neo-liberalism"

## **What to do about Labour and how to do it?**

Jim Kelly's article is very intelligent, interesting and important. I think he poses the fundamental problem which is the key question of the hour: What to do about Labour, and how to do it? It is not possible to make any progress without replying to these questions theoretically and practically.

First of all it is necessary to clarify that to re-establish the welfare state and all its provisions is today incompatible with capitalism. The bourgeoisie did not decide to go over to neo-liberalism by accident or just because it wanted to. It got there out of pragmatic recognition that it was forced to abandon Keynesian

policies because it was no longer strong enough to sustain them. On the contrary, the – for them – dramatic reduction in the rate of profit, made worse by the considerable restrictions imposed not only on its super-profits (by the "independence" and growing strength of its former colonies, etc.) but also on the room it needs for expansive accumulations etc., have rendered it not only unable to make even the slightest reform, but forced it to take back the previous ones and to put a radical end to all concessions. The death agony of capitalism-imperialism has entered a new general phase in which any return to Keynesian reforms is ei-

ther an illusion (shared by many centrists, not to mention reformist conjurers) – or they form a useful and much needed reservoir for refreshing a Transitional Programme which prepares the way for revolution.

Indeed, the objective situation is not only ripe for the destruction of capitalism, but we have got to the point where any defence of previous reforms (never mind new ones) imperiously requires it to be overthrown. In this sense, demands to restore and rescue the welfare state and all its provisions cannot but form a significant part of a renewed Transitional Programme. The fact that the masses are more and more urgently demanding that it should be rescued and restored can only make the opposition between these masses and the bourgeoisie ever sharper and more explosive, and lead the former to recognise the necessity of a revolution. I hope I have been able to lay these problems out sufficiently clearly, although they need to be looked at more deeply and in greater detail.

Getting back to the concrete situation, I think we should thoroughly support this struggle whose necessity Unite has fortunately recognised. We should not just support them but also get involved ourselves, and we should discuss among ourselves how we do that. In any case, we should also have a look at how far we can already get into a discussion (with Kelly and others) about the objective limits to these demands in present-day society, but we must be clear between ourselves, and even make explicit to others, the nature of our support (which is not an illusion, but a recognition of the transitory role of these demands). In that sense, our commitment to them is total.

It is also important to see if there are other unions (e.g. perhaps the FBU) who could join in with Unite in this struggle? Moreover, it may be possible to get your Assembly on 22 June to adopt such a development (enrichment) of the transitional programme (a cut-and-dried programme for the others, but a transitional programme for the Marxists).

Of course there remains the question: How far can you push forward such a left in the Labour Party; can you even take the leadership? The lessons of the past are that, from the efforts of Marx and Engels to oppose the labour aristocracy in the British unions to what the Bevanite left attempted – a victory seems to me to be out of the question. Especially since, besides the changes Kelly lists, which weigh the balance in favour of a success, you have to say also that the neo-liberal practice of preventing reforms and even taking back earlier ones also threatens and affects the incomes and advantages of the this labour aristocracy as well, at least in part. But independently of the outcome of the struggle, it has to be taken on. Moreover, I do not think it will be possible to take over the leadership.

In any case, the political-trade union unity of the left outside of the Labour Party and its organisational expression in the form of Left Front remains necessary, even if a struggle does develop inside Labour. They cannot but mutually complete each other.

**Balazs Nagy**

May 2013

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Liverpool dockworkers describe how dockers all over the world overcame divisions to build the International Dockworkers' Council (IDC) in this Unite the Union Briefing Paper

## **How we built the IDC**

The IDC was founded out of the Liverpool Dockworkers struggle 1995 to 1998. Its roots stem from the unofficial international network of port and dockworkers that came together during that time to provide international solidarity and much needed finance to support the Liverpool Dockworkers and their families through the 28 month dispute.

Its motto is that 'You Will Never Walk Alone Again' which refers specifically to the Liverpool Dockworkers struggle with a pledge that we can never allow another Liverpool Situation to develop again and that Dockworkers should never be left in isolation again.

Prior to our dispute many of the non-International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) ports belonged to the World Federation of Trade Unions and organised through them when it came to international

solidarity. The unions in these ports were mainly communist or socialist in their political philosophy and had a deep mistrust of the ITF who they considered were bureaucratic and strongly influenced by western governments and ship owners. They consisted of the Confederation Générale du Travail (CGT) in France, Coordinadora in Spain, the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL) in Italy and the individual dockworkers unions in Sweden, Denmark, Portugal, Greece and Cyprus.

When the Soviet Union broke up these ports tended to operate on a loose affiliation or friendship basis without having an overriding international body to organise or campaign through.

When it came to launching the Liverpool dockers' campaign for international solidarity actions we

found that many of the ports that had trading links with the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company did not come under the umbrella of the ITF so, as we mapped out a plan of action, it became necessary to make contacts directly with individual ports and dockworker unions and once that contact had been made we formed a bond of friendship and solidarity with them. The ITF helped when it came to making contact with the two American Longshore Unions, the ILA and the ILWU, and the MUA in Australia. But they had little influence when it came to the big European ports in France, Spain, Portugal, Greece or in Canada, where large amounts of container traffic was shipped between Montreal and Seaforth (a terminal on Merseyside – Ed).

During our dispute we organised three international conferences and three days of international solidarity action that for the first time brought ITF and non ITF ports and unions together with the one common goal of supporting the Liverpool dockworkers.

That strength of unity also came together during the MUA Patricks dispute and the Charleston 5 dispute and they have worked together in recent years in opposing and defeating the European Union's port reform packages.

The IDC was officially constituted as a new international movement of dockworkers, organised by dockworkers, for the benefit of dockworkers in June 2000 in the Port of Tenerife. The position of the first INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT was given to the sacked Liverpool Dockworkers through their working company, the Initiative Factory, but the workload was far too much for us to handle and it was agreed to incorporate this role with that of the GENERAL CO-ORDINATOR/ TREASURER at the IDC Headquarters based at Calle del Mar number 97, Barcelona. Tel/Fax: 00 34 965 13 09 23. E-mail: [coordination@idcdockworkers.org](mailto:coordination@idcdockworkers.org)  
The Present Day IDC consists of the following:-

#### 1. Membership Figure

- Total worldwide: 85.000
- European zone: 18.000
- US and Canada: 28.000
- Latin American Zone: 16.500
- African Zone: 22.000

#### 2. Name and number of countries where there is an IDC Influence

**Europe:** Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Denmark, Sweden, Portugal, Malta and Greece. Also, through the affiliates there are contacts with other countries that are not affiliated into the IDC - i.e. close relationship between Le Havre and Antwerp, or Norway and Finland through Sweden and Denmark. Also, although affiliations are hard to obtain in Europe, contacts have developed a great deal in the last few years, since rank and file dockworkers are finding other means of communication

through the social networks - for instance, Finnish dockworkers attended the Lisbon demonstration because they first learnt about it through the IDC Facebook post and not through the ETF call.

Hopefully the Unite the Union ports in the UK will be another important area of influence, which has now started with the symbolic affiliations of Tilbury and Felixstowe.

**US and Canada:** US East Coast (ILA), US West Coast (ILWU) and Canada: ILA East Coast and Montreal CUPE.

**Latin American Zone:** Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Costa Rica and Dominican Republic.

Currently working on developing contacts in Panama and Mexico.

**Africa:** Mauritania, Senegal, Togo, Benin, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Gambia and Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, Angola and Cameroun. Also contacts in Morocco (particularly through Algeciras) and Tunisia.

#### 3. Names and number of the ports affiliated to IDC

Denmark - Aarhus, Cyprus - Limassol, Larnaca, Spain – all ports (Algeciras, Las Palmas, Barcelona, Valencia, Bilbao, ...), France - all ports (Le Havre, Marseille/Fos, Nantes/St.Nazaire,... except for Dunkirk), Portugal - Lisbon, Aveiro, Leixoes, Azores,... and other small ports, Italy - Civitavecchia, Savona, Genoa, Malta – Valetta, Malta Freeport, Greece – Piraeus, Thessaloniki, Sweden – all ports, UK – Tilbury and Felixstowe (local branch, 100 Dockers)

US – All ports in the East Coast and West Coast, Canada – all ports in the East Coast (ILA) and Montreal (CUPE). Argentina – Buenos Aires, Mar de Plata, Ushuaia and other small ports, Uruguay – all ports, Chile – Northern Ports and Biobio department, Paraguay – all ports, Brazil – all ports (Santos, Itajaí, Rio de Janeiro, Vitoria, Natal, Paranaguá...), Colombia – all ports (Buenaventura, Cartagena, Barranquilla), Ecuador – Puerto Bolivar, La Libertad, Guatemala - Santo Tomas de Castilla, Honduras – all ports (Puerto Cortés,...) , El Salvador - Acajutla, Nicaragua - Corinto.

Currently working on Panama and Mexico.

Senegal – Dakar, Benin – Cotonou, Togo – Lomé, Mauritania – Nouakchott, Ivory Coast – Abidjan, Ghana – Tema and Tacoradi and Gambia – Banjul.

#### 4. Affiliation fees

At the European Zone the fee is 9€/worker/year. The IDC financing exclusively comes from the fees collected from the dockworker unions.

#### 5. Disputes and issues supported by IDC:

##### *Central and Southern America*

From the outset, much work has been put into the formation of this Zone which proved difficult due to the multitude of unions and federations that exist in some of these countries and even within the individual ports.

Despite this, great progress has been made in building solidarity between the various unions and ports. IDC has been able to render help in many ways in union struggles against attempts by GTO's and Governments (often working together hand in hand) to undermine port workers basic rights in this zone. Paramount is the defence of jobs and creating decent working conditions.

The affiliation of the major Brazilian Dockers' unions has resulted in the very successful creation of the Brazilian Zone of IDC.

Support against deregulation attempts has been offered and coordinated in various countries: Brazil (against the private terminals built next to the public ones, like in Itajaí and efforts are being coordinated at the future port reform in Brazil at the moment), Ecuador, Paraguay and many others.

If required, UNITE can gain additional info from the respective Zone Coordinators, Mauricio Zarzuelo, SUTAP (Argentina)

portuariosdeargentina@yahoo.com.ar

#### *West African Zone*

Global capitalism and neo colonial powers are doing their utmost to exploit the natural resources of this area for their own ends with little or no regard to the wellbeing of the workers. In the port sector, dockers have had to face not only redundancies due to containerisation, but also corruption and intimidation and their plight is in many cases dire indeed. Despite this, unions are still strong in many individual ports but there remains a lack of coordination between ports and union and funding is often inadequate. The IDC has therefore decided to give the African port workers organisations all the help and support possible so that they can face the Terminal Operators with one strong voice. The Canary Island Dockers Union has put an enormous effort into this work.

If required, UNITE can gain additional info from the respective Zone Coordinators. Maguette Niang, Dakar, Senegal, niangmaguette182@yahoo.fr

#### *European Zone*

##### *Political action:*

- Early in 2001, shortly after the formation of the IDC, the EU-Commission presented plans to deregulate the port industry, the first of the two so-called Ports Packages (PPs). IDC's European Zone recognised immediately the gravity of these plans and called several meetings on the subject. A special committee was set up to work out a common policy and delegations were sent to Brussels to discuss the directive with politicians and officials and to liaise with ETF.

- The fights against PP1 and PP2 and a determination to obtain a political platform in European Port Policy Making were the preoccupations of IDCE until the final defeat of PP2 in January 2006. Following this

defeat, the Commission embarked on a series of consultations with Industry Stakeholders to form a European Ports Policy. By this time IDC had gained the official status of "Industry Stakeholder" and was thus invited to participate. At the conclusion of this process we were also designated the status of "Social Partner".

- Since the defeat of the Directives, we have seen individual European Member States embarking on plans to implement "Ports Package-style" legislation on a national level. IDC has naturally been deeply involved in the trade union fights against proposals designed to deregulate the Port Industries in France, Greece, Portugal and Spain. IDC's task here has been to coordinate solidarity actions (industrial sympathy actions and demonstrations), to spread information and to lobby national and European governing bodies. This is an ongoing battle which however, up till now, has had some degree of success. The problems in Piraeus with COSCO PCT have been aggravated by the Greek financial crisis and are still unresolved. The IDC has also been recently involved in organising actions against the Portuguese port reform in support of their demands - one-hour stoppage in European ports, cooperation in organising the big demonstration in Lisbon on the 29th of November, political lobby, ...

##### IDC has also been directly involved in union fights against employers including:

- Auckland, New Zealand. Having heard reports of MUNZ Auckland branch strike and remembering the acts of solidarity shown by the Maritime Union of New Zealand during the Liverpool Dockers' strike, the IDC General Assembly in Rio de Janeiro 2012 passed unanimously a motion in support of the Auckland Warfies. A letter was promptly sent to the union expressing solidarity and pledging help in any way possible. Following news that the Employer was using scab labour, a second letter was sent explaining that IDC was prepared to take boycott actions against any named vessel or shipping company that had broken the strike. Our letters were received with gratitude but no request for direct action was made. Although the Warfies eventually returned to work, it seems that the dispute is still not fully resolved and IDC's offer is of course still standing.

- Swedish Dockworkers Union in Gothenburg in a long-running dispute 2009 –2010 with the Port of Gothenburg over privatisation, contract issues casualisation etc.

- Dublin, Ireland where Port-workers at the Maritime Terminal were on strike against the Employer (Peel Ports) between July 3 and October 22 2009. This was an official industrial action backed by the Union (SIPTU) and IDC decided at an assembly to back the strikers with all means at hand and drew up contingency plans accordingly. Letters were sent to SIPTU pledging sympathy actions if and when they were



called for and a letter was written to Peel advising the Company to seek a negotiated settlement and refrain from using scabs. The offer of help was received with thanks but the call for action from IDC was not made and eventually a negotiated settlement of some sort was reached between Peel and SIPTU.

- Rotterdam, Holland. Workers in the APM Terminal, union members of the FNV Bondgenoten engaged in a series of industrial actions in February 2012 over job security, pay and conditions and health and safety issues. Responding to a request for help from the Union, IDC decided to give the dispute its backing and made preparations for a course of action. The European Zone Coordinator wrote to APM in Rotterdam explaining the gravity of the situation and urging the company to reopen negotiations. Failing to do this would almost certainly result in an escalation of the conflict to pan-European proportions. At the same time, IDC Affiliates in Denmark, France, Spain and Sweden contacted the APM terminals in their countries giving similar advice. Happily, this advice was heeded and APM reopened negotiations resulting in a very satisfactory solution to the problems.

- Tilbury UK. Background information is of course not necessary; suffice it to say that we hope that IDC's intervention helped in some small way to a successful result for the union.

- For further information: Anthony Tetard, Fédération des ports et docks CGT, France contact@portsetdocks.org

- USA Pacific Rim Zone:

- The ILWU, founding members of IDC were locked out by their employer, the Pacific Maritime Association in 2002. IDC General Coordinator, Julian Garcia, travelled to San Francisco with a delegation to speak at a union rally and pledge full support to the ILWU in their fight. After two weeks of lockout and government intervention in revoking the "TAFT HARTLEY ACT", the dispute was resolved and a six-year contract obtained.

- The EGT grain terminal dispute in Longview, Columbia in September 2011. The employer had broken his contract with ILWU Local 21 and was instead employing workers with a sub-standard contract from the General Construction and Operating Engineers Local. IDC pledged full support and offered to blacklist named vessels that had been loaded by non-ILWU workers

- USA East Coast:

- Charleston, SC USA. In 2000, Longshoreworkers from ILA Local 1422, while peacefully picketing a ship belonging to the Danish Nordana line which had decided to no longer use the services of union members, were savagely attacked by police and the National Guard. Local 1422 President, Kenneth Riley was

clubbed to the ground and many longshoremen were injured, arrested and placed in custody. Subsequently, five members were brought to trial on accusations of rioting.

- These, blatantly racist and anti-union, actions on the part of the State Government sparked indignation in the labour movement worldwide. It also coincided with the formation of IDC and was the first major dispute in which we were involved. All IDC ports in Europe were shut down on the day of the trial and successful boycott action was taken against the Nordana line in Denmark and Spain. The sympathy actions taken by the IDC Dockers in Barcelona and Valencia proved to be decisive in solving the original dispute between Local 1422 and Nordana.

- Philadelphia/Del Monte dispute. In 2010, New Jersey Longshoreworkers (IDC Affiliates) lost 300 jobs that supported union families for 22 years in Philadelphia when Fresh Del Monte Produce stopped using ILA union workers at a New Jersey port. Del Monte decided to go with a Teamsters local paying non-ILA sub-standard wages with few social benefits. IDC helped rally support and tried to instigate boycott actions, unfortunately however to little avail.

#### Issues Fought Jointly by the IDC and ITF that Benefit Dockworkers

Ports packages 1 and 2 could never have been won if they had not been fought jointly by IDC and ETF.

At the start of the campaign, IDC was regarded as something of an upstart and definitely as a competitor by the ETF and IDC's progress in political lobbying was frowned upon. There existed an atmosphere of mistrust between both organisations and several mistakes were made. The work of the Antwerp and Le Havre Dockers in forming the "North Range Alliance" forced both IDC and ETF to commence a cooperation which grew successively into what is now a firm and united front against employers and neo-liberal European politicians. A landmark in this cooperation was the agreement signed at a meeting in Hamburg in September on the formation of a joint ETF/IDC Workers Delegation for the proposed Social Dialogue Committee for the Port Sector.

The will to cooperate has grown even more following the meetings in Antwerp and Barcelona last year where common policies and strategies were drawn up. The Barcelona meeting decided also on joint pan-European strike actions and demonstrations through the creation of an ETF-IDCE Liaison Committee.

Recently with the Portuguese conflict, the IDCE and the ETF have also had an attempt to coordinate joint actions. Although the main force in opposing the reform came from the IDCE affiliates (Lisbon and

Aveiro) and this the initiative in organising the mobilisations came from the IDCE, both unions joined efforts to oppose the reform.

#### Other Relevant Information

Although IDC and ITF enjoy extremely good relationships nowadays and an atmosphere of mutual trust has developed, IDC still plays a crucial role in protecting good working conditions, health and safety and stability of employment in the Port Industry.

Changing, and evermore rational, cargo handling methods together with new technology place the Port-worker in an increasingly important position as a vital link in the cargo chain. To quote former ILWU President James Spinosa “we sit on the artery of world trade”. This of course means an advantageous bargaining position for well union-organised Dockers.

There is as always a downside and sadly the actual numbers of Port Workers has diminished due to the technological advances and this makes us vulnerable. It is fair to say that in many parts of the world; perhaps particularly in Europe and USA, ports are rapidly becoming the last bastions of union strength, fair wages and good working conditions. This naturally makes them a prime target for neo-liberal elements which, in turn, highlights even more the need for an organisation whose aim is specifically for the protection of Port-workers’ hard won collective bargaining agreements.

In many countries, national labour legislation has been introduced to hamper trade unions from taking effective industrial action and to protect the em-

ployers. This means that solidarity towards those organisations in need of help, and who are restricted by such legislation, is of the utmost importance. When IDC offers solidarity, this is never just lip service but is always a concrete promise of all and any possible tangible actions.

It is of course with this in mind that the ILA, under the now very progressive leadership of President Harold Daggett, decided last year to affiliate the whole organisation to IDC. ILA will still, as always, be playing an important role in ITF but recognises the importance of a parallel independent Port-workers alliance.

IDC here in Europe has won a great deal of respect from employers, shippers, ship-owners and politicians and this respect, and the strength that follows, is increasing. Unfortunately, the threats against Dockers are also increasing and IDC needs to grow in numbers and further strengthen its organisational capacity to mobilise.

We feel sure that the affiliation of UNITE Port-workers would be a great step in that direction and surely be to the mutual advantage of all Port-workers around the world.

IDC is by definition a militant rank and file organisation for Port-workers. It is a council rather than a union and is run by lay officers with the minimum help of dedicated office staff. IDC is responsible to its membership only and seeks to affiliate all bona fide port worker unions without interfering in any way with their exclusive union structures and traditions.

*Terry Teague, Tony Nelson*

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## **France**

# **Time to break with sectarianism!**

*(From “Lutte des Classes” no. 6, journal of the French supporters of WIRFI)*

According to the AFP news agency, the leaders of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), Olivier Besancenot, mentioned Jean-Luc Melançon in the course of an interview shown on Canal+ on 31 March. You would have thought Comrade Besancenot could have given up his sectarian opposition to unity and along with his party at long last joined Melançon’s Left Front coalition (“Front de Gauche”). After all, every worker knows that this coalition offers an opportunity for working people to come together politically to oppose the European bourgeoisie’s policy of a Europe-wide offensive, embodied in France by Hollande and his government.

But sadly comrade Besancenot said nothing about joining this coalition, even in future. He did not even say if he was for it or against it. On the contrary,

to go by what we are told, he more or less said that Melançon ought to “get to the left of the government, be a political opposition”.

You really have to rub your eyes when you see this! Comrade Besancenot seems completely unaware that he is knocking at an open door! Or is he seriously taking Melançon to task for failing to beat his breast and repeat like a parrot “I oppose the government”? That is an awfully childish and inadequate attempt to cover the refusal on the part of Besancenot and his party to join and strengthen this coalition.

If he thinks such an infantile comment excuses his party’s absence from this political grouping, it only goes to show the low regard he has for working people’s political sense.

**Balazs Nagy**

# **Workers' Associations**

*(From "Lutte des Classes" no 6)*

In 2009, there were literally dozens of fights against redundancies around the struggles at Continental tyres and their unchallenged leader Xavier Mathieu, mainly in subcontracting firms to the car industry. They were not successful. Two thousand industrial jobs were lost. Here and there, better redundancy terms or redeployment were won, but the working class as a whole took some serious blows and they left painful scars. Bitterness bordering on despair seized whole industries and regions. The Mittal steelworks at Florange, the Peugeot works at PSA Aulney – we all know the long list.

As they did then, workers now are everywhere demanding "unite the struggles", but this convergence is proving difficult. As Marx explained to British trade unionists a century and a half ago, when the anarchy of capitalism in crisis leads to overproduction which the market cannot absorb, which is what is happening now in the car industry but also in other industries (with the exception of luxury goods) trade unions are only able to win crumbs here and there. They cannot even save jobs. The only way out is the political struggle to put social production – which is standing on its head – back on its feet on a rational and useful basis; put high finance, which has subordinated the real economy to the search for speculative profit, into the hands of those who produce wealth. This is the programme of socialism, of the march towards "the free society of associated producers".

Today, this aspiration and this political struggle are in various countries passing through a coalition of the left which opposes liberalism in both its right-wing and its social democratic form. But if the unions are powerless in the face of legislation over private ownership of the means of production and increasingly reactionary employment legislation, political coalitions for change are subjected to the electoral rules of capitalist democracy, with its periodic recourse to the ballot box. There is an enormous gulf between present social decline and political hopes in the distant future. Today the socialists (in France – Ed.) have all the power they could want or dream of, but all that working people can see – and they are right – is more of what they got under Sarkozy, and above all hypocrisy.

The Front de Gauche (French Left Front) calls for a combination of the ballot box and demonstrations in the street. This is correct, but it is only the half of it.

The working class cannot be get what it wants with just these two methods, which are necessarily

temporary or come into use from time to time. It needs to frame its life and struggles in its own permanent, durable way where it can get together, discuss, educate itself and rediscover mutual closeness and confidence. It needs open and democratic class frameworks where working people who still have a job can meet with those who have lost theirs; where immigrant working people can sit alongside their French comrades in a common home; where the various political components of the workers' movement can exchange their views; where "old hands" can pass their experiences on to the young; where trade unionists can explain why the figure of 8% union membership in France is a joke, and that something drastic needs to be done about it, a massive campaign to sign up members like there was in 1936; where you can see a Ken Loach film or a documentary about the struggle at Peugeot or Continental; where you can swap books, and comrades who do not know each other can have a beer together; where you can take your partner and children for a picnic or a party.

The vast majority of workers belong neither to a union nor a political party. Capitalism in decay has reduced them to individual motes of dust condemned to vegetate in front of the TV. To change society, you need a large-scale social connection. It will of necessity have a political colouration, but it will not be the tool of a particular party or trade union. It might even be necessary to go back to some old – even 19th century – forms of working class organisation to add value to collective life, illuminate it and render it fruitful. We need to rescue the human capital of the hundreds of thousands of redundant workers. If we want to set the Left Front up successfully against the National Front, (of Le Pen), then we cannot leave a single unemployed or sacked worker to their fate.

The left (and I don't mean the Socialist Party, a shell which has been emptied of workers and of socialist ideas) might be able to win an election, but that means nothing without mobilising working people, rallying them, welding them together and enlightening them for good. Neither the street nor the ballot box are enough. The torn fabric of the class has to knit together. Working people must be readied for coming big struggles, because Warren Buffet and other mouth-pieces of finance capital are promising us class war. Let's start with Workers' Associations!

**RP**

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