

## Free Press is in the gutter

### PUBLISH OR BE DAMNED:

I DON'T THINK it would be unfair to say that there has always been a section of the Free Press's faithful readership which has been concerned that the paper displays some of the tendencies of the national gutter press.

For example the last few issues have had a number of sensational headlines, and the paper has always tended to treat occasional serious issues frivolously.

Many of the stories in the paper rely on corruption, on scandals. In other words they rely on the breaking of rules.

Now of course I recognise the value in this, that people who read about Dirty Tricks may come to a general conclusion about things like the distribution of power in society.

But in the end it must be made clear that the rules themselves (even if strictly adhered to) are grossly unfair. And sometimes the Free Press's coverage of almost incomprehensible fiddles seems self-indulgent.

Obviously examples of dark dealings will always go down well with Free Press readers because we can all agree broadly about what is wrong in existing society.

The disagreements start when we talk about how we can change it and which direction(s) we want to go in.

Yonks ago I had discussions with the motley group who pass for editors at the Free Press about the possibility of articles on experiments in self-help, mutual aid, in short: building the community.

It seemed to me that they were wary then of offending and/or boring other sections of the readership. The Free Press after all seems to come out of a socialist tradition and to seek a strong base in the labour movement. The series I was proposing would almost necessarily have had a strong libertarian flavour, and would have been quite unlike anything the paper had carried till then.

However the recent exchange of views on the Lump seems to indicate that the editors are no longer worried about offending readers and provoking discussion. In view of this change of heart, will the Free Press now publish some articles on the difficulties and successes of people and groups working for social change in Liverpool and perhaps elsewhere?

This would, I think, be the first detailed and regular coverage of struggles outside the industrial and housing field that the paper has ever attempted.

Happy New Year. —RICK WALKER, Court 12, Central Criminal Court, Old Bailey, London EC4 (my unofficial residence).

● We'd welcome other readers' comments on this point. In the meantime, following his return from the Old Bailey, Rick has agreed to write a sample article of the kind he has in mind. This should appear in our next issue.

## Lump debate is continued

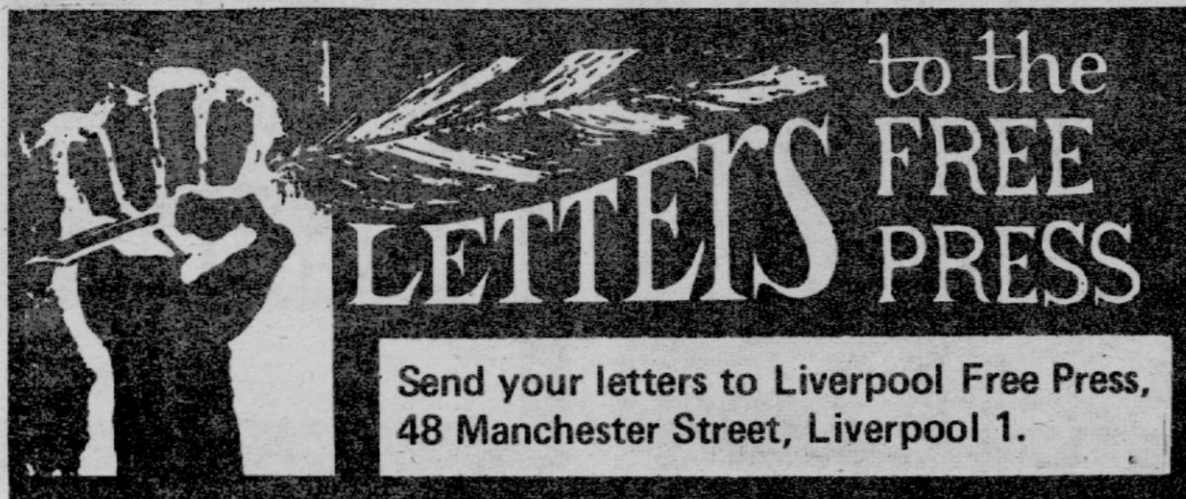
I WAS SADDENED to discover that the article I was invited to write for the Free Press was seen as an equivalent to National Front literature, and that workers had declined to sell the issue containing it.

However, I was pleased to learn that the Free Press supported the Shrewsbury pickets. Unfortunately I never met any of my present critics when I travelled over 200 miles to support the pickets at Mold assizes, since the only other person in the public gallery was my wife.

According to popular opinion and Mr Austrin (Free Press 22) I appear as a right-wing apologist for a system of exploitation. But in the original text I drew attention to certain BAD aspects of the Lump, referring to the way nationalised industries, such as gas, electricity and the GPO have exploited Lumpers to lay cables, mains etc (left out of the article).

Mr Austrin's well-argued defence of the anti-Lump campaign deserves a few comments.

1. Mr Austrin says I "seem to be arguing that... workers should now fight for the establishment of the Lump." Rubbish! Workers should now fight against any attempt to reduce their living standards by any means necessary. I made it perfectly clear



at the outset that I was not defending the Lump or any other form of exploitation. The only form of organisation worth fighting for is the management of the entire industry and society by the rank and file. This is a vision as simple as it is difficult: It entails a rejection of the private sector and the grandiose schemes of nationalisation.

2. When I spoke of the Lump as a "manifestation of something new in British politics" I did not mean that the Lump itself is new. Everyone knows they built the pyramids on the Lump. What is new in British politics is the way that workers in every sphere of industry are resorting to ingenious ways to defeat attempts to limit their standard of living. This means that if union leaders and governments agree on a policy of wage restraint some workers may exploit certain benefits to be found on the Lump, some may take other steps. Perhaps Mr Austrin would deny that union leaders are co-operating in a policy of wage restraint?

3. Of course Mr Austrin is correct when he says that the Lump can be used to divide and rule. But divide and rule is a feature of all industry. There was nothing more divisive in the building trade than the acceptance by union officials of group bonus instead of site bonus in the 1970 pay deal, which set worker against worker giving all the disadvantages later attributed to the Lump. As any worker knows the solution to divide and rule tactics lies in rank and file solidarity. And this brings us to the questions raised by my article: Does a different form of job organisation destroy class solidarity? Or is class solidarity such a fundamental feature of society that it will survive any changes in job organisation? I believe the latter.

Evidence suggests that solidarity can exist on Lump sites. Working class history is full of examples where class cohesion has revealed itself in conditions allegedly unfavourable to such action. I have, for example, marched through the streets with Lumpers (many of them Trade Union members) in support of the Shrewsbury pickets. And before the myths of the '72 strike solidify it must be said that many Lumpers came out, just as many union members scabbed! This only proves that the class struggle is more complex than the black and white picture that Mr Austrin unfairly attributes to me. In any case the Lump v. Trade Union dichotomy is a false one. Many subbies carry union cards and there are many non-union sites that do not employ Lumpers.

Against all the hysteria I must emphasise that my remarks on the Lump only scratch the real issue: That there are many ways of resisting exploitation; that as a form of job organisation the Lump could favour either employers of workers. Where the level of working-class resistance is weak it will benefit employers.

By all means work within the unions, Mr Austrin. But do not assume that pressure on union officials is the only way a transformation of society can be effected. There are instances where the institutional might of the TUC can be used against the interests of the working class, as it was during the Barbican dispute and the present policy of wage restraint.

Finally, it was a pity that my article aroused such blind hostility. It could have sparked off a discussion on alternative ways of resisting attacks on working class living standards. That it did not provides evidence of the sorry plight of the British left which is hamstrung with its own slogans. — DAVE LAMB.

## Arthur Bagot is rather annoyed

I WAS EXCEEDINGLY CROSS when on Sunday afternoon two of your reporters called at my home without an appointment and without permission, proceeded to take several photo-

graphs of me standing in my doorway. I told them I did not wish to be photographed and asked them to leave my premises, but they refused to do so. I made it clear to them if they wished for an appointment they could see me at my office, but they ignored this invitation and refused to leave my premises.

They informed me they were going to write an article in your paper about Castle Metal Products Limited, and inferred that there had been some impropriety in the recent contract which we had been awarded by the Liverpool Corporation.

I wish to make it clear, that if you desire to take photographs of me, or interview me, this should be in my office, and if you wish to make such an appointment to interview me, I will be willing to co-operate.

I strongly resent being disturbed on a Sunday afternoon at my home, and I resent any implications that there has been any impropriety in the contracts for which we tendered and were successful.

I trust you will offer your apology for the intrusion on my privacy, and an explanation as to the rude conduct of your staff. Yours faithfully, —A. BAGOT, Chairman, Castle Metal Products Ltd., Yardley Road, Kirkby Industrial Estate, Liverpool L33 7SX.

## Arthur Bagot is rather worried

ON SUNDAY the 23rd November, 1975, you called at my home informing me that you were going to write an article on myself and Castle Metal Products, I requested that you let me have a copy of the article before publishing which you refused, stating "if there are any untruths printed in the article you have redress by taking a liable action against us."

I wrote to you on the 24th November, 1975, giving you the opportunity of an interview in my office which you did not take up.

You now inform me that you wish to see me with a view to publishing a further article and have requested a meeting.

Your first article contained several statements which are not true. I am willing to meet you, if you will write requesting an interview and state the name of your Insurance Company which cover you for any liable action. Yours faithfully, —A. BAGOT, Chairman, Castle Metal Products Ltd., Yardley Road, Kirkby Industrial Estate, Liverpool L33 7SX.

● Mr Bagot's first letter arrived too late for publication last time.

It contains a number of inaccuracies. Most important, our reporters did not infer any impropriety in the way Mr Bagot's firm obtained the central heating maintenance contract from Liverpool City Council.

The subsequent article stated, quite clearly, that Castle Metal Products had been awarded this important contract when they were incapable of doing the work properly. Mr Bagot has not challenged this.

The second letter is similarly inaccurate. None of our scribes speaketh in the manner quoted by Mr Bagot.

More serious, Mr Bagot infers that he has been gravely libelled. He has told us since that we are interested only in "character assassination."

These charges are untrue. The article did not libel Mr Bagot in any way.

But we would like to take this opportunity to explain our attitude to libel.

The English law of libel has correctly been called a "Rogues' Charter". It requires journalists to prove allegations in court, while denying them any right of collecting the necessary information.

It is a law for the rich only. A working man cannot sue a newspaper for libel because the law does not allow him legal aid. A wealthy man who is able to sue and win is rewarded with even more money.

This is, apparently, the only way to clear his "good name". And there is some logic in it when newspapers are published for profit.

But this does not apply to the Free Press. Our aim is neither to make money nor to mislead our readers. Not even "justice" can make us pay money we don't have.

This does not mean we are "irresponsible". But our responsibility is to ourselves and to our readers. So when we make a mistake we'll put the facts straight and apologise. And that will have to be that.



A picket helping the police with their inquiries.

## Peter Lind pickets to appear in court

THE ELEVEN pickets arrested at Cammell Laird's Birkenhead shipyard in August are due to appear at Bromborough magistrates court on January 8.

They face various charges of obstruction and disorderly behaviour, and five are accused of assaulting police.

The picketing of Cammell Laird began after a five-month occupation by men employed by contractors Peter Lind, who were carrying out modernisation at the yard.

Peter Lind were kicked off the site and the men wanted a guarantee that they would continue working under the new contractor, Wimpey.

The occupation was ended by a court order and Wimpey announced they would not take on any of the Peter Lind men.

On August 20, the new contractors were able to get other workers on to the site with massive assistance from the police. Four pickets were arrested that night as the Wimpey buses were leaving.

The following day, the pickets say, the police charged their lines, breaking one worker's wrist in the process. A further seven men were arrested.

The workers say the police deliberately

marked out those who had appeared regularly on the picket line. No less than six of those arrested were on the Action Committee.

All were released on bail. But Bromborough magistrates took the legal attack on picketing a stage further by making it a condition of bail that they take no part in such activities. They even wanted to ban the men from Birkenhead, until it was discovered some of them lived there.

All the men elected to be tried by jury at Liverpool Crown Court. But it is likely that magistrates will only allow those facing the most serious charges to go to the Crown Court.

The two unions involved — UCATT and the TGWU — have refused to supply legal representation because, they say, the dispute was between two groups of workers.

A defence committee has been raising support and collecting funds to meet legal expenses. And the committee would welcome support at Bromborough magistrates court at 9.30 a.m. on Thursday, January 8.

● Offers of help or financial support to: Tony Abbott, Secretary, Defence Group, c/o 6/533 Branch, Transport and General Workers' Union, Islington, Liverpool 3.

## 'LIBERTY HALL' OPENING

IF YOU'VE become a little tired of canned disco music, "nudes-in-the-snow" type of films and if you're interested in political discussion but don't wish to belong to a political party, then you ought to have been to a series of meetings over the last few months with a group of people who feel the same way.

The result of these meetings is the opening of 'Liberty Hall' in February with the programme below.

The club will be held every Sunday from February 1 at 8.30 in the upstairs bar of Cindy's Club, 75 Victoria Street, Liverpool 1 and is licensed till midnight.

Membership of £1 for six months or £2 supportive membership should be sent to T. Devany, c/o 48 Manchester Street, Liverpool 1. Entrance

will be 25p for members and 35p for non-members. Any profits will be put back into the club funds.

For further details phone 227 2514.

### PROGRAMME FOR FEBRUARY

Feb 1. Speaker: David Widgery — The Left in Britain Since 1956.

Feb 8. Film: Gumshoe.

Feb 15. Discussion — George Davis group.

Feb 22. Music — Pete McGovern.

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