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This is Not a Protest!

Thursday April 21st experienced the largest showing of civil unrest in Bristol for years. For seven hours people from the Stokes Croft and St Pauls areas fought running battles with 160 riot police drafted in from three different forces as police charges were met with volleys of glass, brick and concrete, burning barricades, and the trashing of a much-loathed Tesco recently forced on a community who had battled to stop it opening.

Earlier in the evening police had forcibly removed a small protest from outside the Tesco store on Cheltenham road which had been there since the store opened a week earlier, and set up a cordon around the area. Their reason for this was to enter a squatted building opposite. They claimed to be acting on intelligence that suggested some occupants were planning to petrol bomb Tesco.

The disproportionate number of police in the area, the closing of roads, the news that the squat was threatened and the Tesco protest having been forcibly broken up meant it wasn't long before a crowd of well over 300 had gathered. The increased tension of recent months, which has built up as austerity measures begin to kick in and the community of Stokes Croft and St Pauls feel ever more ignored and marginalised, had found a focal point and personification in the belligerence of the police.

Until the early hours there were clashes between rioters & police on Stokes Croft and the surrounding areas. As people came



out their doors to see police marching through their streets, many joined in defending against them. On Cheltenham Road, Tesco's windows and an abandoned police vehicle were smashed and a police trailer full of equipment was looted. Police used their vans as battering rams and at least one person was caught behind police lines and took a frenzied beating whilst on the floor.

A number of injuries were sustained and nine arrests made. At time of print five of those arrested have been charged, one remains remanded in custody. Police report that eight of their number were hospitalised.

One local resident noted the police had "thrown a quarter century of semi-decent community policing down the drain" another saying "If they [the police] don't calm down, things are getting tense enough on a range of other issues for a new pattern to develop of poor community relations and repeat rioting against a police force which has chosen political sides".

The poor and over the top approach of the police created the situation on the 21st. The mainstream media would like to portray this as merely an anti-supermarket protest. The truth is this was an attack on the police; a strike at the state's legitimacy to act as it likes in this area of Bristol.

As we go to print more news of further clashes in the early hours of 29th April are being reported. 15 arrests made and several injuries on both sides.



Strike a Pose!

The government's needless austerity measures are clearly designed to affect the most vulnerable in society hardest. The fight back against these cuts is now well underway. On Monday 18th April Jobcentre Plus workers walked out to fight not only their own working conditions but also to defend the service they are able to provide to claimants. After a two day strike in January to protest against being forcibly moved from processing local claims to handling enquiries by phone, there were once again picket lines outside Lodge House on Fishponds Rd, after a strike ballot of PCS members received yes vote of 70%.

The grievances are well justified. The draconian nature of the management of these call centres means workers are constantly harassed for spending "too long" on calls, even if it's just a few

seconds over the unrealistic target time. Their calls and even their toilet breaks are timed by a computer monitoring system. The computer leaves no room for human judgement and treats both worker and claimant with utter contempt and disrespect. Those who are calling are often in desperate situations with nowhere else to turn. It's clear to see that a ridiculous pressure to keep call times down can only lead to many vulnerable people being left in unresolved situations, having to ring back again; creating more confusion, distress and costs in the long run.

As in January, the strike and picket have been well supported. PCS reports receiving "massive" public support and we too would like to issue a message of solidarity to them and all others currently taking a stand against this governments axe.

Striking a Blow for Higher Education

The University and College Union recently organised the first national strike against the condemn cuts. Spread over two days, it focused on pensions and wider issues such as the fees increase, education cuts and the privatisation of universities.

Students and supporters joined lecturers on picket lines around Bristol University, UWE and City of Bristol College, and there was a lively march from the Bristol campus followed by some impassioned speeches.

The ideas put forward must have seemed like far fetched dreams to the current generation of students – free education, learning placed ahead of profit, universities committed to lifelong learning in their local areas, and lecturers who actually have time for their students. However many present knew these are real possibilities or even remembered experiencing them and everyone was prepared to fight for these ideas now.

The harder task of turning the ideas into action began at a large open meeting. It was here that the potential really started to shine through. Lecturers have had enough of over paid management, and they're looking to take their universities back!

Whilst they recognised the strength of their union, they also discussed the need to organise beyond it and establish work place committees. Plans were laid for continuing the fight and with only a little prompting from the students the meeting was run via consensus with no one rushing to take over. There are even plans to start a very unauthorised Bristol University bulletin.

This week the National Union of Teachers announced it will ballot for strike action, and several unions have expressed a desire to launch coordinated action against education cuts. With this level of radicalism all the way from work places to the national unions it looks like this country's education system might just be saved from the coalition cuts.

We're Not Fucking Around

We decided to dedicate this news sheet to the Bristol riots of 1831. A long period of unrest culminated in three days of rioting in Queen Square after the House of Lords rejected the second Reform Bill, aimed at introducing wider voting rights to the working classes. The riots however were about much more than just electoral reform.

By 1831 out of a city population of 104,000, only about 6,000 were eligible to vote. Most of these were part of the establishment or property and business owners. The artist who has painted a mural of the riot on a wall on Bath Road said it was a "*sad reflection*" that "*no matter where it may be in the world, we seldom seem able to overcome oppression without innocent blood being spilled on a massive scale*".

During the riots the palace of the Bishop of Bristol, the Mansion House in Queen Square, and homes and property of Bristol's elite were looted and destroyed, along with the demolition of much of the new gaol and the prisoners freed. Across the city the rioters picked their targets with care burning down every building associated with privilege, oppression and the

Mayday, Mayday!

"If you think that by hanging us you can stamp out the labour movement... the movement from which the downtrodden millions, the millions who toil in misery and want, expect salvation – if this is your opinion, then hang us! Hear you will tread on a spark, but there and there, behind you – and in front of you, and everywhere, flames blaze up. It is a subterranean fire. You cannot put it out"

These were the last words spoken by August Spies to the criminal court of Cooke County after they sentenced him and six others, to death for no other reason than being 'leaders' in the workers movement in Chicago in 1886. Albert Parsons, George Engel, Adolph Fischer, Louis Lingg, Michael Schwab and Samuel Feilden were all sentenced with Spies while Oscar Neebe was given 15 years in prison. The trial came about after at a peaceful meeting of protesters in Haymarket Square. A police column of 180 approached the crowd of only 200 and ordered its dispersal. This was greeted with a bomb thrown from the crowd killing one policeman. Instantly the police reacted, killing and wounding many with pistol fire. Exactly how many is unknown. Only 3 of the 8 defendants of the trial were present at the meeting but all were active members of the movement.

This event was the accumulation of months of strike action for the eight hour working day, that peaked three days before on the 1st May 1886, when a strike of workers brought the industry of the city to a standstill.

To this day May 1st has been synonymous with labour struggles for fair pay, better working conditions or simply to have enough hours in the day after working to do something that benefits themselves. The government is talking of scrapping the Mayday bank holiday. To forget the sacrifice made by people like Spies and the other Haymarket martyrs would not only be a loss of a hard fought holiday recognising workers rather than royalty or religion but it would be the loss of our celebration of the battles we have yet to win and must keep struggling towards.

state that they came across.

The light Dragoons charged through the mob in Queen Square and many were killed. Their Lieutenant however was later court-martialed for leniency because he had refused to open fire. Four men were hanged for their role in the riots despite a petition of 10,000 Bristolian signatures being given to King William IV.

The 1831 Bristol riots through to more recent ones in the 1980s show that Bristol has a long history of resistance to the establishment. 1831 was just one of many examples that direct action gets the goods as the second reform act was passed soon after.

1831 was just one of many examples throughout history where the working people of this country have fought back against the established system and many have died for the things we take for granted: The 40 hour week, votes for women, civil rights and safer working conditions to name but a few. Let us never forget that people fought hard for these things and we have a lot further to go until we achieve true equality and freedom.

About Bristol Anarchist Federation

Bristol Anarchist Federation is a branch of the Anarchist Federation. It is an organisation of class struggle anarchists which aims to abolish Capitalism and all oppression to create a free and equal society. For more information, to join, come to our meetings or if you would like to write an article, visit our website bristolaf.wordpress.com or contact us bristol@afed.org.uk

